

# Interpersonal Relationship and Communication between Husband and Wife: A case Study in Batu City

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**Abstract.** Family is an important institution in human's lives, and the relationship between husband and wife is essential as it shapes the quality of the individual development. In this case, interpersonal communications also significantly influence the quality of the relationship between husband and wife. This study uses a qualitative approach in the form of a case study. It involves six informants consisting of 3 couple who have been married for at least 25 years. The study seeks to understand how informants build interpersonal communication with their spouses. The data is collected through intensive interviews and analyzed using a descriptive method.

**Keywords:** *interpersonal relationship, communication.*

## INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, marriage is understood not only as a part of a natural phenomenon but also a cultural construction. Therefore, the development of marital relationship among humans can be different from one community to another, since it is connected to cultural context. Even the marital relationship that develops from one spouse can be different from another since it is closely related to the development of the cultural context of each individual.

Marriage cannot be seen merely as biological needs or reproduction—ability to reproduce offspring—to keep the continuity of human species on earth, but also act as a social activity. When marriage is viewed from the social context, it will interact with social and religious values that exist within a particular society. Thus, it will be a part of the culture among a group of people (in a broader context) and especially be a part of the culture within a family (as a smaller social unit).

It is believed that there is interdependency between the quality of family and the quality of society where the family belongs. The better the quality of a particular society, the better the families will be generated. In addition, the better the quality of families, then the better the development of the society will be. In this case, a marriage institution involves not only a relationship between two individuals who agree to marry but also the relationship among other married couples and the society where the marriage institution belongs. Giddens [1] stated that the family is the basic social unit of civil society. As an essential part of society, the social

resilience of a society is also determined by the social resilience of families within the group. In other words, when there are more marital breakdowns, then the society where the families live will be more vulnerable.

A marital breakdown can happen not only to families with financial pressure but also to those who are financially stable or prosperous. The number of divorces significantly increased during the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in most western countries. Giddens [1] suspected that the number is even higher outside those countries. He specifically stated that the proportion of single-parent families and children who were born from unmarried parents gradually increased. In 1994, 32 percent of birth happened outside marriage in England, 35 percent in France, 47 percent in Denmark, and 50 percent in Sweden [1]. Fukuyama [2] added that 30 percent of White People in The United States of America were single-parent around the same year.

As society is exposed by news (and issues that develop within the communities) about marital breakdowns (even divorces) among spouses, either young or old, a study on this area is worth conducting to help people maintain their marriage. The results of this study are expected to reveal the truth behind the success of a marriage as well as ways to develop and maintain the relationship and resolve conflicts within the marriage. Furthermore, the study can be used to unveil how relationship and communication between husband and wife can bring comfort to the children, and contribute to creating and developing healthy society, which has a positive impact on individual well beings.

Indeed, marital problems are not limited to the high number of divorces in most parts of Indonesia, including Batu City, but include qualitative aspects inside the marriage, which affect spouse's happiness and children's development. Such aspects require deep understanding and good communication between husband and wife. Thus, this study aims to examine this matter and try to figure out communication models suitable for the cases.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Communication that includes two individuals which lead to interpersonal communication can be studied using several theories. The researcher begins with the Social Penetration Theory, as stated by Altman and Taylor. The theory divides interpersonal communication into three different stages of relationships; Orientation Stage in

which individuals engage in small and simple talks (Colleague), Exploratory Affective Stage which individuals start to reveal the inner self bit by bit (Friend), and Affective Stage in which individuals feel more comfortable talking about personal matters (Best Friend) [3]. The three stages of relationships mark the breadth and the depth of communication that can be seen from the communication topics. The breadth of communication involves the range and variety of topics, while the depth is related to whether or not the topics include private or personal matters [3]. The beginning of the relationship is often marked by the narrowness and the shallowness of the topics. If the relationship develops into a more intimate one, then the breadth and the depth of the topic will increase [3].

On the Orientation Stage where individuals become "Colleague," the topics will only cover public information and not a personal one, such as general profile. Also, the materials of the discussion do not vary. As the relationship moves to a deeper stage as "Friend," the communication material will include one's preference on food, clothes, music, even aspiration, and ambition. Besides, the discussion topics in this stage will be more varied compared to the previous one. As it goes deeper to the next stage of becoming "Best Friend," the communication materials will include private matters, such as self-concept, religious belief, emotional situation, and so forth. This kind of relationship involves more variety of discussions compared to the others [4].

Therefore, it is crucial to understand that the stages of "Colleague," "Friend," and "Best Friend" are actually interwoven. Altman and Taylor stated that the relationships are not always getting better; sometimes, it is decreasing and even ended [5]. In the marital communication context, it is possible for either husband or wife to treat his/her partner as "friend" or "best friend." Another theory is the Social Exchange Theory from Thiboult and Kelley. It states that interpersonal communication happens since there is hope in each individual to obtain advantage from communicating with others. Griffin [4] stated that the initial background of an individual to communicate is similar to utilitarianism philosophy, which views human acts based on utility. Each individual realizes that communication requires cost, yet it is expected that the result will gain more than the cost. The fundamental value of this theory is the gain-loss principle, which resembles the trading principle.

When a person assumes that his/her communication does not gain anything, then he/she will slowly decrease the intensity of communication and eventually stop. On the other hand, the person will continue the communication if he/she still hopes to gain profit [3]. As Fitzpatrick [6] is interested in individuals' point of view on each partner on marriage, Eric Berne focuses on personalities shown by a person to his/her partner. This theory – also called game theory – divides human personality into three categories, namely "Parent State," "Adult State," and "Child State" [7]. The Parent State is marked by a tendency of "lecturing," "thinking of being more understanding than others," "protecting,"

"spoiling," and so forth. The "Adult State" shows the tendency of "being rational," "being firm," and "being disciplined. The "Child State" is more on "being emotional," "wanting to be spoiled," "being dependent," etc.

Furthermore, individuals usually play a specific role in communicating with their partners. In some cases, a wife plays a role as "child" and the husband as "parents. This communication completes each other since they divide the roles. Additionally, the relationship pattern tends to be in harmony because they need each other.

This is qualitative-descriptive research in the form of a case study involving three couples. It examines the relationship and interpersonal communication that develop among couples. The subject of the research was three married couple (six people) who had been married for at least 25 years. They were selected using quota sampling. The 25 years of marriage or more is considered adequate to be used as a study material.

Data were collected through in-depth interview and free-talk, especially interpersonal interview with each person without the involvement of the partner. The in-depth interview was a discussion where the researcher took control of the material or topic, while the free-talk was further discussion between the researcher and the research subject. During the free talk, both parties (the researcher and the research subjects) had an equal chance to choose issues to be discussed.

The data analysis was performed since the beginning of data collections and continued as the researcher wrote the report. Generally, the data were analyzed descriptively to depict the relationship and interpersonal communication between husband and wife.

## RESULT

As previously mentioned, the research involved three different marriage cases. The three cases and the findings are described below.

**Case I:** The first couple, Ahmad Wahyudi (husband) and Sumiyati (wife), had been married for 26 years.

Ahmad Wahyudi found it surprising that his wife was not as romantic and sweet as she had been when they were still dating. As time went by in togetherness under the marriage vow, Wahyudi tried to accept the fact about the changes in his wife's attitude. He realized that his wife also faced an unexpected outcome on marriage, the truth that the marriage life was far from what she expected. It made him try harder to make his wife happier in the marriage. He tried to improve the quality and quantity of his communication with his wife. Thus, in the 5 years of marriage, they succeeded in having two sweet children. They also successfully solved the problem that occurred in the early days of their marriage life.

From Sumiyati's point of view, Wahyudi had disappointed her. However, later, she understood that marriage life is the real life that they had to face, and it was different from when they were still dating as two young adults. She learned more about her role as a wife

for her husband and a mother for her two children who had finished higher education and now had a job. Her relationship with her husband experienced the dynamics of harmony and conflicts, which were mostly caused by economic or parenting problems. Sometimes she felt that her husband was her good friend while other times she thought of him as a stranger, even as an enemy. However, she acknowledged that the quality of the communication between a husband and a wife defined the condition of their relationship.

**Case II:** The second couple, Bambang Pujo (husband) and Fitriyani (wife), had been married for 25 years.

Bambang is a worker in a town government office. He admitted that his relationship with his wife started when they dated for three years before finally taking the relationship to a "more concrete" one, as he called it, which was a marriage life. Because of this, he did not feel that his wife was a stranger when they lived together for the first time as a family. He also admitted that at the beginning of the marriage, their relationship was not as romantic as when they were still dating. He saw differences in the way they talked from when they were still dating to when they were already married. After the marriage, communication tended to be more practical and realistic. There was also some difference in the dynamics of the relationship and communication. He expressed that there were often more serious and complex problems in marriage.

Fitriyani, whose daily activity is running a small store because all three of the children are now living independently, admitted that in the early days of their marriage, she experienced confusion. However, she eventually understood that married life was indeed different from dating. Her husband's guidance had helped her to overcome her confusion in facing the condition. They had made their mind to continue their relationship to the next phase, from dating to a wedding, and they understood the consequence of it was to learn to build the strong relationship in marriage through good communication, which corresponded to the relationship status. She and her husband agreed to keep improving the quality of the communication. When there were problems with the communication between them, she took it as "the colors" of their marriage life. Hence, she believed that the relationship between a husband and a wife that sometimes includes quarreling is normal.

**Case III:** The third couple, Didik Sudarto (husband) and Ernawati (wife), have been married for 26 years.

Didik works as a fruit seller and has been doing his job since their early married life with his wife. Both of his kids are married and have families of their own, so he lives his life with his wife more easily, unlike when the children were still studying in the university. He did not date Ernawati for long. It was less than a year. Because of this, he felt that he did not have enough time to know each other during the short dating period. In the early days of their marriage, he found many differences between them, starting from the outfit preference, the

discipline in praying, to the hygiene. Even though they faced differences, he understood that the sacred vow was a promise and an obligation to keep building the family with his wife. Hence, he tried hard to adapt to his wife. He was grateful because his wife was cooperative to improve situations. As they passed the 6<sup>th</sup> year of their marriage, the communication between the two ran smoothly. He also said that there were also less tense situation and arguments between them.

Ernawati, on the other hand, stated that her husband is a patient man. She said that he is a hard worker, although sometimes he made her feel uneasy because he was not disciplined enough about cleanliness and praying. Both Ernawati and Didik enjoy cooking, and they even have relatively similar taste in food. Therefore, the cooking session in the kitchen can be used as the communication time for her and her husband. She admitted that the communication between them improved when the kids grew up and entered university. The children could help taking care of the house and the fruits. She thinks that she needs enough time to communicate with her husband. Besides the quantity, she understood that quality matters. So far, based on the quantity, she admitted that the time she has to communicate with her husband is sufficient.

#### CONCLUSION

The dynamics of relations develop in case I, where the relationship between husband and wife resembles the relationship as a "friend" or an "enemy," giving colors to the relationship in the early years of marriage.

The pattern of the "parent-child" relationship develops in the second case. The husband often facilitates the role of parents in dealing with wives. While in the third case, the "adult - adult" relationship pattern develops, because both of them manage their business (selling fruits) together so that they are involved more in the same work.

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