

Marital and Family Communication According to Virginia Satir

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Abstract: This study aims to identify problems in marital and family communication using Virginia satir's model.it categorises communication styles int four: (the placate,the blamer,the distractor and the leveler). The study attempts to shed light on the concepts of the theory.incllding the icebergs,the mandala,rules and change, self esteem and self-worth, and family rules.The focus is on handling positive and negative communication, as well as verbal and non-verbal communication,using satir's systems theory.This theory includes a comprehensive set of ideas, methods, exercise and positive tools that support positive change in individuals and families.

Keywords: communication, communication styles, theories of family systems.

ملخص: تسعى الدراسة التعرف على مشكلات التواصل الزوجي والأسري وفق نموذج ساتير، قسمت أنماط التواصل إلى أربعة: (المسترضي، اللوام، المشتت، العقلاني والمنسجم) وحاولنا إلقاء الضوء على كل المفاهيم النظرية (الجبل الجليدي، الماندلا، القواعد، التغيير تقدير الذات واستحقاق الذات قواعد الأسر) مع التركيز على كيفية التعامل في حالة التواصل الايجابي والسلبي واللفظي والغير اللفظي مستخدما نظرية النظم لساتير التي تحتوى على مجموعة شاملة من الأفكار والأساليب والتمارين والأدوات الايجابية و السلبية التي تدعم التغيير الإيجابي في الأفراد، نظرية النظم الأسرية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التواصل، أنماط التواصل، نظرية النظم الأسرية.

1.Introduction:

Communication is considered the heart of intimate relationships, forming the foundation upon which other relationships are built and serving as the key to marital success. When communication between spouses is weak, the marital relationship is negatively affected, which in turn influences family members and can lead to depression, unhappiness, decreased productivity, and an inability to fulfil tasks and responsibilities. This has an adverse effect on family and societal stability, which highlights the importance of studying communication patterns between spouses as a significant area within the fields of education, psychology, and sociology.

Communication is defined as the process of transmitting or exchanging ideas, opinions or information through speech, writing or signals. It encompasses both verbal and non-verbal communication, which can be either positive or negative.

The importance of communication lies in achieving psychological and emotional satisfaction. Expressions of love are conveyed through encouragement, support, and compliments; requests rather than commands; and affectionate expressions and special names for family members. Non-verbal communication, such as body language, eye contact, and gestures expressing care and interest, can also enhance self-esteem.

Marital communication is considered a vital aspect of family life as it enables couples to address uncertainties in their relationship and share information that can influence each partner's beliefs.

Effective communication is the foundation upon which relationships between individuals, especially spouses, are built. Effective communication is essential for achieving a positive impact, ensuring continuity and the ability to exchange ideas and interests, address problems and cope with pressures while fulfilling responsibilities. Families shape social reality by participating in communication activities and ensuring compatibility among their members, as this plays a crucial role in family stability. Negative

communication can cause disturbances that can have an adverse effect on family stability, health and satisfaction. Although absolute, clear communication is impossible to achieve because communication is inherently incomplete, there is a degree of completeness. Communication should be functionally sound, and future messages should seek to convey the thoughts and feelings of individuals. Many studies have shown that families behave as a unit, and Jackson (1954) coined the term 'family balance' to describe this behaviour. This is demonstrated through:

- The concept of family balance indicates that family members' behaviour achieves balance in their relationships.
- Family members maintain this balance both publicly and privately.
- Members exert greater effort to restore stability when family balance is unstable.

Virginia Satir's theory is one of the approaches in experiential family therapy, often referred to as 'whole family therapy'. It has been proven to be effective with both individuals and families. Satir focused on the self in her research, viewing it as the essence of each individual. She concluded that humans are miracles, continuously evolving and always ready for growth, change and understanding. She emphasised the importance of human communication through touch, gaze and voice, arguing that these are more significant than words. She believed that the way we deal with an issue is more important than the issue itself, and that this way is based on our self-esteem, values, and our family's connection to the outside world. Satir emphasised what revitalises a person, making them happy and effective, as well as what causes illness, disturbance, and ineffectiveness.

2. What do we mean by communication?

The term 'communication' is generally understood to refer to verbal and non-verbal behaviour within a social context. Thus, communication refers to interaction or exchange, including all the indicators, hints and symbols people use to convey and receive meaning.

Adopting this understanding allows us to clarify the communication techniques people use that we find genuine and consistent, indicating mutual personal relationships. Studying communication as a therapeutic aid helps bridge the gap between inference and observation, and assists in documenting the relationship between communication styles and symptoms of behavioral concerns. According to Usoroh et al. (2010), communication is defined as the process of transmitting or exchanging ideas, opinions or information through speech, writing or signals.

Brogan et al. (2008) defined marital communication as spouses' ability to listen to each other in order to understand and express themselves. (BaniSalama& Mohammad Jaradat, 2016, p. 1085). Communication patterns are the methods parents use to communicate with their children, influencing their cognitive development and ability to interact with others. These patterns include authoritarian, authoritative and permissive styles. Cherry (2016) emphasised that communication patterns are the ways in which family members engage in dialogue and discussion, which are manifested through two communication styles:

Dialogue: This involves parents discussing matters with their children without specific limits.

Respect: This involves showing obedience and appreciation towards parents, and achieving alignment and harmony in attitudes and opinions.

3. Marital Communication Patterns:

These refer to the set of positive and negative interactions between spouses that influence their emotional, psychological and behavioural states. The effectiveness of these patterns impacts couples' ability to achieve goals, provide support, and maintain relationship stability (Samek&Rueter, 2012).

3.1 Positive communication:

Positive communication patterns are characterized by each spouse's understanding of the other, as well as agreement, interest, empathy, love, clarity, humour, smiles, physical touch, and laughter. This communication style is considered the cornerstone of marital life.

3.2 Negative Communication:

In this style, the relationship between spouses is characterised by hostility, alienation, conflict, contemptuous communication and criticism (BaniSalama& Mohammad Jaradat, 2016, p. 1086).

Studies have shown that the withdrawal/demand pattern is one of the most common negative communication styles in marriages. In this pattern, one spouse tends to discuss issues in a critical manner, either by blaming the other party or by persistently pressuring them to change. The other spouse, meanwhile, avoids or withdraws from the discussion. This communication style is destructive to the relationship and is common during conflicts. It has been described as one of the most difficult and damaging patterns between spouses (Holley et al., 2013). Some studies have repeatedly shown that the most common pattern is the demanding wife and the withdrawing husband (Christensen; Eldridge et al., 2013). In the same context, Gottman (2008) identified four communication patterns termed the 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse', which are explained as follows:

*** Criticism:**

This focuses on the partner's flaws and involves constant blame and criticism. Any statement indicating that something is wrong with the spouse is considered criticism, and it can be very exhausting for the relationship, particularly with regard to relationship satisfaction. Repeated criticism can create a feeling of total rejection of one's character, causing the criticised spouse to become defensive.

*** Defensiveness:**

This is a form of self-protection involving whining or attempting to ward off the spouse's perceived attacks. Spouses sometimes respond to criticism by denying responsibility for the problem.

*** Contempt:**

This pattern includes tactics such as sarcasm, direct insults, mockery and disdainful facial expressions. These methods stem from one spouse placing themselves in a superior position to the other. This communication style is one of the most exhausting for a relationship.

*** Stonewalling:**

This pattern signifies the emotional disconnection between spouses, where the listener completely withdraws from the interaction by often leaving the room and displaying unresponsive facial expressions towards their partner.

Through her work with individuals, families and couples, Satir identified four negative communication patterns, which she referred to as 'Negative Communication Stances', including the blamer, the placater, the indifferent and the leveler. (Gottman,2008)Satir described the negative outcomes of these communication patterns as affecting individuals' physical and psychological health, considering them to be destructive and frustrating patterns that strongly indicate a decline in self-esteem (Pidlocke, 2010).

4. Satir's communication patterns:Benman(2008)

- **Leveler:**

This is an open and flexible personality that embraces change. They express their feelings and emotions clearly and honestly, which contributes to solving various problems and conflicts. They can achieve harmony between verbal and non-verbal messages, focusing on using eye contact and avoiding judgement of others during communication (Abdelkader& Abdul Latif, 2021, p. 536).

- **Placater:**

This person seeks to please others at their own expense and is characterised by indecisiveness and a tendency to agree with any decision. They deny the existence of conflict and are always kind, making excuses for others.

- **Distracter:**

The distracter avoids family problems and conflicts, distancing themselves from any involvement in issues and not offering assistance to resolve them. They tend to change the subject during discussions or arguments by referencing different situations related to life or work when the other party wishes to debate a specific problem or situation.

- **Blamer:**

The blamer has a controlling nature and always sees themselves as right and others as wrong. They are unwilling to take responsibility for resolving problems and conflicts. They judge others.

The super reasonable person:

This personality type is characterised by the ability to control their emotions and communicate logically. This rational communication style helps to address situations that may cause a decrease in the other person's self-esteem. It helps to determine needs and requirements, and identify the factors that caused those emotions and the root causes of the problem (Abdelkader& Abdul Latif, 2021, p. 536).

5. Forms of Marital Communication: satir(2016,pp80-90)

To ensure clear communication, remember that people communicate in various ways, not just through words. Individuals automatically communicate through gestures, facial expressions, body movements, signals, tone of voice and clothing choices.

All communication occurs within a context, including where it takes place, with whom, and under what circumstances. What agreement exists between the individuals exchanging communication?

These factors make communication a complex process. The recipient must evaluate the different methods the sender uses to convey their message and be aware of their communication system and how they interpret it. When Person A speaks, Person B evaluates the verbal meaning of Person A's message. They listen to the tone of voice used by Person A. They observe what Person A is doing, noting the body language and facial expressions that accompany the message. They evaluate what Person A says within the social context. This context illustrates how Person B views Person A's previous responses to them and to others, as well as their expectations and the demands of the current situation. In other words, listener B is busy interpreting the verbal and non-verbal content of person A's message in order to reach a conclusion about how to communicate with them.

Example for clarification:

A husband says, in an annoyed tone, 'The dog is on the couch,' and his wife will go through the following process:

1. He is informing me about the dog's location.
2. However, he means more than that; he seems irritated.
3. Why is he telling me about his annoyance? Is he criticising me for letting the dog on the couch?
4. If he isn't criticising me, what does he want me to do? Should I just listen to him? Should I sympathise with his annoyance? Should I get the dog off the sofa? Or what?
5. I want the dog and he doesn't. I got the dog before getting his approval. Now, his irritation about the dog means he is complaining about my actions; he is criticising me for not informing him.

6. He wants me to get the dog off the couch. Does he also want me to get rid of the dog and apologies for acting against his wishes?

Every message has an implicit request, which may or may not be clearly or meaningfully expressed. There are degrees of requests conveyed through various implications. Indirect requests or questions lack clear significance; for example, 'The dog is on the couch.' There are also direct requests or questions with a clear implication, such as 'Get the dog off the couch' or 'Get rid of it'.

Family members rarely verbally ask others to agree to their requests when communicating with each other.

They do not ask others to align their desires with their own because they want to be valued by others without having to ask for it. This desire dominates them, leading them to hope for cooperation and for others to respond as they would like. Many people may feel embarrassed by the effort to fulfil the wishes or desires of others.

Communication is considered an incomplete process based on pure logic, and incomplete or indirect communication serves personal goals. This does not necessarily imply dysfunction, and can prevent embarrassment when someone makes a request that is subsequently declined. Verbal communication uses language, while non-verbal communication uses body language (signals and gestures). Every communication process contains the following elements: sender, message, receiver, medium of communication and feedback.

Paul Watzlawick identified five axioms of communication as follows:

1. One cannot communicate: every behavior is a form of communication.
2. Every communication process involves two aspects: content (the message) and relationship (the context). The latter encompasses the former

and is called meta communication. A disturbance in the communication process occurs when the relational aspect contradicts the content, or meaning, which refers to how we want our speech to be understood.

3. Every communication includes two forms:

A digital medium (verbal), consisting of a set of social and cultural signals (language).

- A non-verbal medium, consisting of all behaviours that can be interpreted, such as gestures and movements.

4. Every communication process is integrated or symmetrical, whether based on equality or difference, such as in the relationship between a father and son, or a teacher and student.

5. The nature of communication depends on how events are perceived (Grégory Bateson, 1962).

6. Satir's Model of Communication and Interaction:

Satir's model consists of four main stages (Smith, 2010; Emery, 2001).

6.1 First stage: inputs

This is the primary step in the interaction and communication process upon which all subsequent steps rely. Inputs refer to the verbal and non-verbal elements that an individual receives during the communication process, including content, tone, manner and signals. Factors that hinder an individual's ability to process these inputs include the content, manner and signals, as well as the environment in which they are present. Often, individuals are preoccupied with other matters, leading them to listen without fully understanding the sender's intended message, resulting in silence. (Mohammad T, and Abdel Karim, 2016, p1088)

6.2 Second Stage: Meaning:

This refers to how an individual interprets the information they receive. What they see/ What they hear/ What do they touch/ Who the sender of these inputs is .(Mohammad T, and Abdel Karim ,2016,p1088)

6.3 Third Stage: Importance:

According to Satir's model, this refers to how the individual feels about the meaning they have acquired. Whether they experience happiness, anger, pain, confusion, and so on? Emotions are an internal response to the meaning that the individual has constructed.

6.4 Fourth Stage: Response: .(Mohammad T, and Abdel Karim ,2016,p1088)

In communication, response refers to the behaviour or speech an individual exhibits in response to actions, conversations or observed signals.

7. Concepts of Virginia Satir's Theory:

Virginia Satir's theory is one of the most important family systems theories and forms part of family counselling theories and System Theories. It presents the concepts of human psychology clearly and directly, adopting a perspective that sees us as possessing the power and capacity to master our destinies. Satir presented her theory as follows:

7.1 Basic Structures:

The basic structures of Satir's model include (Gladding, 2002):

Self: Satir refers to the self as the core or deepest internal structure representing each individual's 'I am'. She discusses the self metaphorically as the centre of the mandala.

Family of Origin and Extended Family: These include other significant individuals in a person's life, along with other factors that influence the first five years of life and significantly impact one's sense of self.

- Primary Triangle: This consists of the father, mother and child. They are the primary sources of early learning experiences and the realm of experience with family members, especially parents.

- Communication: Satir's work focuses intensively on the multiple aspects of communication, often referred to as communication theory.

- Congruence: Congruence within the individual is achieved when they balance the forces of self, others and context. An individual's awareness of the importance of context increases the likelihood of them placing themselves within a broader perspective.

- Six Levels of Experience: Satir identified six levels of human experience: behaviour, feelings, sensory perception, emotions, aspirations and unmet expectations. These six levels form the basis of the clinical approach known as 'going into the cold emotions' or the 'iceberg', which engages the client in an internal process.(Satir,2009)

7.2 Methods:

Virginia Satir worked with individuals and families for thirty years to develop methods and tools that empower people to communicate lovingly with themselves and others, which include the following (Li and Vivian, 2013):

The Iceberg:

Among Satir's most important tools is what she called the Iceberg, where above the water represents "current behaviors," and beneath it lies a vast array of emotions, perceptions, and expectations. This iceberg includes three dimensions: personal dimensions, internal dimensions, and spiritual dimensions (Caston, 2009).

Self Mandala:

Satir used the concept of the mandala, or magic circle, to illustrate the developmental aspects of the self. The mandala is represented by concentric circles, symbolising parts of the whole that, when viewed together, are greater than the sum of their parts (Li and Vivian, 2013). Satir envisioned eight developmental aspects for the self: physical, mental, emotional, sensory, interactive, nutritional, contextual and spiritual. These eight aspects interact with one another and influence the individual's health. At the centre of the mandala lies the heart of human existence (the self). The intellectual or mental aspect stimulates the brain and encourages thinking. Examples include solving puzzles or mysteries and reading a new book.

- Contextual aspect: This includes the surrounding areas in which an individual lives, such as their home or office. (Souad Mansour, 2015, p236)
Souad Mansour

- Interactive aspect: This represents social interactions with others. Examples include spending time with friends or family.

- Physical aspect: This involves challenging oneself physically, such as going to the gym or hiking.

- Sensory aspect: This encompasses activities that stimulate the five senses: taste, touch, sight, hearing and smell.

- Nutritional aspect: This involves consuming foods that can stimulate the body in a healthy way, such as the occasional consumption of caffeine or chocolate.

- Emotional aspect: This includes activities that stimulate emotions or make the individual feel good.

- Spiritual aspect: This encompasses activities that nourish the spirit, such as religious practices like yoga..... (Li and Vivian, 2013).

7.3 Family Rules:

Satiremphasises the importance of developing recognisable family rules, which can be identified by observing recurring behaviours among family members (Steven, 2005). Most families have different rules, including those relating to money management and household chores. Family rules can change over time. Satir indicates that some rules are easily identifiable and clear, while others are implicit.(steven,2005)

7.4 Self-Esteem Kit:

This concept pertains to the value an individual places on themselves, as well as the love and respect they have for themselves, distinct from how others view them. Self-esteem shapes an individual's sense of worth. Satir believes that individuals with low self-esteem are anxious and uncertain about themselves and are highly sensitive to how others perceive them. They may interpret exclusion from a triadic relationship as rejection, which leads to increased anxiety. The eight aspects of the self may not have developed correctly in individuals with low self-esteem, or they may have developed differently. Such individuals often resist change and prefer the safety associated with compliant behaviour.(steven,2005)

7.5 Change and learning:

One of Satir's focal points is helping individuals to become fully human. She believes that we have all learned how to be human, and that we can all learn to be more humane. She argues that outdated learning and undesirable childhood experiences can be replaced with new, more beneficial learning. Satir is confident that individuals can change and grow by learning new ways of thinking, feeling, acting and communicating. This process of discovering and reinforcing new responses enables people to experience and engage with the world differently.

8. The Counseling Process:

The counseling process in Satir's model of change consists of five stages:

Stage One: Current Situation:

The therapist's task in this stage is to identify the root cause of any family distress or problem.

Stage Two: Introducing a Foreign Element:

This stage involves introducing an element into the therapeutic system in the presence of the counsellor or therapist.

Stage Three: Imbalance:

The system begins to transition from the current situation to a state of imbalance.

Stage Four: Integration Stage:

New concepts are introduced and the situation begins to evolve, integrating new matters.

Stage Five: Application:

The new situation is supported by the application of new teachings or practice.

9. Some Assessment Techniques in Family Therapy

9.1 Genogram:

This method involves mapping core issues using lines rather than discussing them verbally. It is often used by therapists following the Bowen approach (Ben-Qawa, 2018, p. 97).

9.2 Art evaluation:

This technique uses various methods, such as drawing, colouring and clay modelling, to enable therapists to communicate with clients, particularly children with limited language skills. Children are often asked to draw a picture of their family and then describe their drawings, which helps therapists to understand each person's perspective on the family.(Satir,2009)

9.3Expressing Personal Needs:

In this activity, the therapist asks each person to write a list of what they want from a family member. They might, for example, write a list of the characteristics of an ideal father or son, and then compare these with the traits present in their actual family roles.(Satir.V,2016,p180)

9.4 Psychodramatic technique:

This approach involves re-enacting past events and situations that cause tension and suffering in a dramatic way. The aim is to achieve emotional catharsis and discover strengths and weaknesses in integrating and acquiring experiences through participation and observation, with the ultimate goal of achieving harmony.

9.5Communication games:

In recent years, games have been widely used to learn and understand how an individual's behaviour changes according to the developmental model. Examples include:(Satir .V,2016)

- family imitation games;
- family systems games;
- Communication games.

We will elaborate on communication games.

A sequential set of interaction methods has been developed as the third area for classifying games. These methods are excellent for teaching people to communicate more effectively and harmoniously. These games are used with individuals who experience a lack of harmony or mixed messages, and who are often distant from the situation with the listener.

- Workshop 01: (Satir.v,2016)

Pair up participants (for example, a mother and father) and ask them to speak to each other in the same way they would at home. For example, imagine the wife is in the kitchen cooking while the husband tries to discuss financial matters with her. Then ask them to recreate the scenario face-to-face, ensuring they communicate visually, through touch and speech. This significantly enhances learning, particularly with regard to discussing interactions and individual assumptions about others' thoughts and feelings, especially when the conversation involves sensory engagement.

Next, ask each partner to look at and touch the other without speaking. Then, instruct them to hold hands while closing their eyes and not talking. Afterwards, they can communicate visually without touching. Finally, ask the couple to argue about something while maintaining eye contact and touching each other. They may find this challenging. They will either enjoy the experience or become angry and withdrawn. It is extremely difficult to convey dissonance when talking to someone while touching and looking at them.

- Workshop 02: (Satir.v,2016)

The most important aspect of these exercises is the therapist's interventions and discussions throughout and after the series of exercises. These discussions focus on the couple's feelings, responses and body movements in relation to each other and to others during the interaction process.

- Workshop 03: The Blind Walk: (Satir.v,2016)

In this exercise, one person (for example, the wife) takes another person (the husband or one of their children) for a walk and asks them to close their eyes. While their partner guides them, the blindfolded person walks, stands and feels things that are invisible or not present in front of them. They are not allowed to speak during the walk. Afterwards, they discuss their feelings, fears, doubts and the level of trust and enjoyment they experienced.

This game is particularly beneficial for couples with significant trust issues, as dependency and relationship problems may be an issue for both partners.

10.Conclusion:

Working with couples and families presents unique challenges. Generally, the more clients involved, the more complex your sessions become. Two ironic factors add to this challenge: the need to work with more people in less time, and the numerous debates surrounding the definitions of couples and families.

Family therapists address family pain by:

When someone in the family (the identified patient) experiences distress that manifests as illness, all family members are affected in some way.

Therapists find it helpful to label the symptomatic family member as the identified patient, with the family's agreement. This is preferable to calling them the sick person or the different person.

Therapists believe that the symptoms exhibited by the identified patient serve functions for both the family and the individual.

Satir focuses on individuals' self-esteem and maturity in communicating with others. If a person has high self-esteem, their communication skills are good; if their self-esteem is low, their communication skills are poor.

Satir believed that, within a family, each individual was interconnected with the others in such a way that any change in one individual necessitated changes in the others. In reality, every individual and everything impacts and is impacted by every other person, event or thing.

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