

WARM & ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION FOR COUPLE WELLBEING IN MARITAL RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, the significance of healthy marital relationships has garnered increasing attention within the field of marital research. A multitude of studies has demonstrated that the quality of communication between partners is a crucial determinant of relationship satisfaction and overall well-being (Gottman, 1994; Carrère et al., 2000). Assertive communication, defined as the ability to express one's thoughts, feelings, and needs openly and respectfully, plays a pivotal role in fostering emotional intimacy and resolving conflicts in marital relationships (Rosenberg, 2003). As a joint collaboration with Permai Malaysia, we assumed that as migrant married couple have its own challenges such as different habits, cultures and ways of communicating. Differences in culture, habits and ways of communicating can be expected to have their own challenges in communication, especially husband-wife communication, especially if one of the couples is from a different country. This condition, of course, can affect the quality of life both as an individual, couple or family which can also affect the overall quality of life. Based on this situation, insights on how to communicate assertively yet warmly are needed so as to maintain marital quality and quality of life for as long as possible.

Keywords: Warm-assertive Communication, Couple Wellbeing, Marital-relationship.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the significance of healthy marital relationships has garnered increasing attention within the field of marital research. A multitude of studies has demonstrated that the quality of communication between partners is a crucial determinant of relationship satisfaction and overall well-being (Gottman, 1994; Carrère et al., 2000). Assertive communication, defined as the ability to express one's thoughts, feelings, and needs openly and respectfully, plays a pivotal role in fostering emotional intimacy and resolving conflicts in marital relationships (Rosenberg, 2003).

PERMAI Penang stands for Pertubuhan Masyarakat Indonesia di Pulau Pinang Malaysia. An NGO or non-political non-governmental organisation engaged in social, educational and cultural affairs. Members or Experts of PERMAI consist of Indonesian people domiciled in Malaysia including: workers, expatriates, lecturers, teachers, students, and students. Permai has a wide range of activities designed to meet the diverse needs of members, be it in the educational, social, cultural or economic fields. From skills training to cultural events, each of our programmes aims to improve the quality of life and build solidarity among fellow Indonesians.

As migrants from Indonesia in Malaysia, it is assumed to have its own challenges such as different habits, cultures and ways of communicating. Among the Permai members, there must be a married couple who migrated from outside Malaysia or married overseas. Differences in culture, habits and ways of communicating can be expected to have their own challenges in communication, especially husband-wife communication, especially if one of the couples is from a different country. This condition, of course, can affect the quality of life both as an individual, couple or family which can also affect the overall quality of life. Based on this situation, insights on how to communicate assertively yet warmly are needed so as to maintain marital quality and quality of life for as long as possible.

Couple well-being is a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, psychological, and relational aspects. Research indicates that couples who engage in assertive communication report higher levels of relationship satisfaction and lower levels of distress (Reis & Shaver, 1988). For instance, a longitudinal study by Kiecolt-Glaser et al. (2003) found that couples who communicate assertively experience less physiological stress during conflicts, leading to better health outcomes over time. Moreover, the quality of

marital relationships has been linked to individual well-being, with studies showing that individuals in satisfying relationships exhibit lower rates of depression and anxiety (Whisman, 2001).

Problem of married couple in Permai

In many Eastern cultures, traditional values often emphasize harmony, respect for authority, and collectivism, which can inadvertently suppress assertive communication. This cultural backdrop poses significant challenges for marital relationships, where effective communication is crucial for fostering understanding, intimacy, and conflict resolution. Assertive communication, characterized by expressing one's thoughts, feelings, and needs openly and respectfully, is essential for maintaining healthy relationships. However, in cultures where non-assertive behavior is the norm, individuals may struggle to articulate their needs and boundaries, leading to misunderstandings and resentment.

The lack of assertiveness in communication can result in several detrimental effects on the quality of marriage and overall marital well-being. Firstly, non-assertive communication often leads to unresolved conflicts. When partners avoid discussing their grievances or suppress their true feelings to maintain peace, issues can fester, resulting in emotional distance and dissatisfaction. This avoidance can create an environment where one or both partners feel unheard and undervalued, ultimately eroding the foundation of trust and intimacy in the relationship.

Moreover, the inability to communicate assertively can hinder personal growth and self-expression within the marriage. Partners may feel compelled to conform to societal expectations or the desires of their spouse, leading to a loss of individuality and autonomy. This dynamic can contribute to feelings of frustration and helplessness, negatively impacting mental health and marital satisfaction.

Additionally, research indicates that assertive communication is linked to better conflict resolution skills and higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Couples who engage in open dialogues about their needs and concerns are more likely to experience emotional support, mutual respect, and a deeper connection.

Therefore, addressing the cultural barriers to assertive communication is crucial for enhancing marital quality and well-being.

In summary, the problem of Couple as Permai Member are:

- 1.Do not have knowledge enough about assertive communication in married
- 2.Lack of assertive behavior/communication skill due to eastern culture
- 3.Lack of knowledge about married or couple well-being
- 4.Lack of couple wellbeing skill

The Dynamics of Couple Well-being

The dynamics of couple well-being are influenced by various factors, including communication styles, conflict resolution strategies, and external stressors. According to the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), which measures relationship quality, couples who practice assertive communication tend to score higher on measures of satisfaction and intimacy (Spanier, 1976). Additionally, research by Markman et al. (2010) highlights that effective communication skills can mitigate the negative impacts of external stressors, such as financial difficulties or job loss, on marital satisfaction.

Despite the wealth of literature on the importance of communication in relationships, there remains a notable gap in research focusing specifically on assertive communication as a targeted intervention for enhancing couple well-being. Most existing studies have primarily examined general communication patterns or conflict resolution strategies without delving deeply into the specific role of assertiveness. This oversight presents an opportunity for further exploration and community intervention

To address this gap, we propose a community service initiative aimed at enhancing couple well-being through assertive communication workshops. These workshops will provide couples with the tools and techniques necessary to communicate effectively, fostering a healthier relationship dynamic. The initiative will involve a series of interactive sessions where couples can learn about assertive communication, practice skills in a supportive environment, and receive feedback from trained facilitators. For Student, this activities, will implementing MBKM, focusing in Mental Health and Well-being.

To fulfill the requirement of MBKM and IKU, we address 3 goals : 1. (KPI 2) Students gain experience outside the campus, 2. (KPI 3) Lecturers do activities outside the campus, 3. (KPI 5) The work of lecturers is used by the community, Specially for married couple as PERMAI member

2. METHOD

A.Method of deliveries to enhance warm and assertive communication skill and enhancing couple wellbeing as follows:

1.Conducting pre-survey about warm and assertive communication skill among married couple as permai member with Functional Assertive Scale (Mitamura,T., 2018) and Couple Ceklis

- Married couple category should already marriage for 5 years minimum
- Age of participant around 20 to 50 years old
- Living in Penang or Malaysia
- Both immigrant or one of them is immigrant

2.Delivering workshop warm and assertive communication and couple wellbeing skill

In this workshop, we will target essential knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors to enhance assertive communication among married couples.

- Knowledge: Participants will learn the principles of assertive communication, including its benefits and the differences between assertive, passive, and aggressive communication styles.
- Attitude: We will cultivate a positive mindset towards open dialogue, emphasizing respect and empathy for each partner's perspective.
- Skills: Couples will practice techniques such as "I" statements, active listening, and effective feedback to express their needs and feelings constructively.
- Behavior: Finally, we will focus on real-life application through role-playing scenarios, helping couples to confidently implement assertive communication in their daily interactions, ultimately fostering healthier relationships.

3.Conducting post-survey about warm & assertive communication also couple wellbeing after workshop. Post test survey will give information to improve the workshop

4.Report and evaluate workshop

Partner Participation

Permai as an organization of immigrant help the program with these tase:

- 1.Invite member or workshop participant that match with the criteria
- 2.Provide place for conducting workshop

Role of each member

- 1.Programme leader will be responsible for the overall programme
- 2.Members are responsible for assisting the technical implementation of the programme
- 3.Students will be helping to develop promotion flyer and develop learning videos

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of Community Service

The implementation of Community Service Community service in collaboration with Permai Penang, carried out on :

Day/Date: Sunday, April 27th 2025

Location : Penang, Malaysia

Hours : 08.30 - 15.30

Attended by : 50 participants in total

The “Warm and Assertive Communication” training was attended by approximately 20 participants consisting of 8 women, 12 men. There were also some children who participated, as shown in the picture.



Pic. 1 Delivering the topic of warm dan assertive communication



Pic. 2. Delivering Questionnaire

Pic. 3. Workshop attendee

This program conducts 2 types of surveys:

1. A survey on knowledge about warm and assertive communication in families.
2. A participant satisfaction survey.

The knowledge survey about warm and assertive communication in families asks 5 questions with 4 answer choices, namely:

1. What is the definition of assertive communication?

- A. Communication style where a person avoids conflict and gives in to the desires of others.
- B. Communication style where a person expresses opinions and needs honestly and respectfully, without violating the rights of others.
- C. Communication style where a person expresses opinions by forcing and dominating, often disregarding the feelings of others.
- D. Communication style where a person does not express their opinions directly and tends to be passive-aggressive.

2. What is the definition of passive communication?

- A. Communication style where a person expresses opinions and needs clearly and firmly.
- B. Communication style where a person tends to prioritize the needs of others over their own and avoids confrontation.
- C. Communication style where a person expresses their anger indirectly.
- D. Communication style where a person expresses their opinions by forcing and dominating.

3. What is the definition of aggressive communication?

- A. Communication style that builds good relationships and mutual understanding.
- B. Communication style where a person expresses opinions politely and considers the feelings of others.
- C. Communication style where a person tends to attack, belittle, or intimidate others to get what they want.
- D. Communication style where a person is afraid to express their opinions.
4. What is the definition of warm communication in families?
- A. A Pattern of interaction where family members often argue and do not listen to each other.
- B. A pattern of interaction characterized by emotional support, affection, understanding, and openness among family members.
- C. A pattern of interaction where family members tend to keep their distance and do not interact much.
- D. A pattern of interaction where decisions are always made by one party without involving other family members.
5. The following is an example of warm communication in families, except...
- A. A child shares their problems at school, and their parents listen attentively and provide support.
- B. During dinner, family members enthusiastically share stories about their activities that day.
- C. An older sibling scolds their younger sibling for using their belongings without permission.
- D. A father and mother exchange compliments and show affection in front of their children.

Tabel 1. Questionare of Warm & Asertive Communication knowledge

No	Attendee	Pre test score	Pos Test	Score Result
1	K	6	6	Score remains
2	R	2	4	Score decrease
3	E	6	8	Score increase
4	S	6	4	Score decrease
5	H	8	4	Score decrease
6	P	8	6	Score decrease
7	SW	2	4	Score increase
8	OM	6	8	Score increase
9	RH	4	6	Score increase
10	AH	4	10	Score increase
11	CH	6	6	Score Remains
12	RP	2	6	Score increase
13	Et	8	4	Score decrease
14	Yl	0	4	Score increase

No	Attendee	Pre test score	Pos Test	Score Result
15	Sep	4	0	Score decrease
16	SY	4	8	Score increase
17	SK	8	4	Score decrease
18	PJ	2	4	Score increase
19	AP	2	8	Score increase
20	AR	8	0	Score decrease

The recap of the survey results on knowledge about warm and assertive communication before and after the training is as follows: Out of a total of 20 participants, there were 2 individuals whose scores remained the same (10%), 12 participants whose knowledge scores increased (60%), and 8 participants whose knowledge scores decreased (20%). Essentially, this workshop can be considered quite successful because more than 50% of participants experienced an increase in their knowledge scores about warm and assertive communication. However, there was also a decrease in knowledge scores about warm and assertive communication by 20%. This result occurred due to several factors:

The very short time allocated for delivering the material, only 15 minutes per individual in each knowledge group (Psychology). No preliminary survey was conducted to identify the underlying issues faced by participants, particularly related to knowledge about communication and mental health. The atmosphere for filling out the questionnaire was not conducive, as there was no break given after the psychology material was presented, causing participants to lose focus while reading the survey.

4. CONCLUSION

The "Warm & Assertive Communication for Couple Wellbeing in Marital Relationship" project, conducted in collaboration with Permai Penang, highlights the critical importance of effective communication in enhancing marital satisfaction among couples, particularly those facing cultural challenges as migrants. This initiative recognizes that assertive communication is essential for fostering emotional intimacy and resolving conflicts, which are vital for maintaining healthy relationships.

Through workshops designed to educate couples on assertive communication, the project aims to equip participants with practical skills and knowledge that can significantly improve their interpersonal dynamics. The findings from pre- and post-workshop surveys indicate a notable increase in participants' understanding of assertive communication, although some challenges were identified, such as the need for more conducive learning environments and better time management during sessions.

Overall, this community service initiative not only addresses the immediate needs of couples within the Permai community but also contributes to broader academic discussions on the role of communication in relationship quality. By fostering a supportive environment for couples to learn and practice assertive communication, the project aims to enhance their overall wellbeing and quality of life, paving the way for future interventions in similar contexts.

Continued efforts in this area will be essential to further explore the dynamics of couple wellbeing and to develop effective strategies that can be adapted to diverse cultural settings, ultimately benefiting families and communities at large.

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