

THE INFLUENCE OF PREMARITAL COUNSELLING ON MARITAL STABILITY AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN AMAC, FCT

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ABSTRACT

The general aim of this study was to investigate the influence of premarital counselling on marital stability among married couples in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The research questions that guided the study were to examine: the extent the content of information provided by the premarital counsellors' affect married couples; what extent do these reasons affect intending couples who do not participate in premarital counselling and what extent does premarital counselling programme affect overall marital stability among couples. A descriptive research design was employed in this study. A sample of 194 married respondents was used as a primary source of data. The sampling technique employed was a simple random sampling method and a self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from primary sources. A mean score and Analysis of Variance was used to answer the research questions at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the study indicated that the content of information on communication skills significantly influences married couples, that there is a significant impact on couples who did not participate in premarital counselling and couples' readiness for marital challenges. There was a significant impact of premarital counselling programmes on the overall marital stability of couples. The findings of the study have practical implications in premarital counselling which encourages couples to have premarital skills acquisition, enhanced communication and conflict resolution, resource allocation for counselling programmes, defined role of religious institutions in premarital counselling, continuous improvement in counselling and how premarital counselling can improve mental health and well-being of couples.

Keywords: Influence, Premarital Counselling, Marital Stability, Married Couples, AMAC.

I. INTRODUCTION

People marry for different reasons best known to them but their end goal is happiness. It is important that an intending couple should be properly guided on what marriage is all about. A troubled marriage may lead couples to unstable health and finances. To avoid instability in marriages for intending couples, couples are to go through premarital counselling. This chapter uncovers the study through the background, objective, research questions and hypotheses, delimitations, significance and definition of terms of the study.

Premarital Counseling is a kind of therapy that helps couples prepare for marriage. Premarital counselling helps to ensure that you and your partner have a strong and healthy relationship thus offering you a better chance for a stable and satisfying marriage.

Premarital counselling has long existed in Nigeria whereby our parents, relatives, elders and spiritual leaders prepared young adults for marriage and parenthood. Premarital counselling is an important factor for couples who are ready to get married. It gained its popularity in the twentieth century and it's a form of therapy that prepares intending couples before marriage (Naylor 2014, as cited in Nwaobi, 2014). Premarital counselling is a therapy that helps prepare couples mentally for marriage (Apollo, 2022). Premarital counselling ensures a couple to develop a strong and healthy relationship for a lifetime (Apollo, 2022). On that note, premarital counselling is not meant for only couples who have problems but also for those who seek advice before making any critical decision in life. Unmarried individuals who are interested in each other and have decided to get married are mostly the ones who participate in premarital counselling. These individuals acquire useful information about the institution of marriage; on how to prepare for it and marrying the right person.

Individuals sought marital advice from their parents, friends, families, and spiritual leaders (pastor, Mallam, or traditional priest) in order to sustain their marriages.

Premarital counselling can be approached from both traditional and western perspectives. Akintola (2022) noted that in the traditional setting, it is important to understand the spiritual realm of a purpose that guides day-to-day living, especially among the Yoruba people of south western Nigeria. While in the Western setting, churches organize premarital counselling for couples (Akintola, 2022). This is still the case in some churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church, where couples intending to get married are required to attend premarital counselling for a period of at least six months before marriage (P. Ragontse, 2016 as cited in Gaolatlhe et al. 2018). According to A. Najla'a et al., 2008 as cited in Aliyu et al., 2019) in Islam, it is recommended that couples consult with some knowledgeable people before making an important life decision such as marriage. Thus, it is advised for the man and woman, or her wal (protector), to conduct research on his or her intended partner, ensuring that she or he possesses the necessary positive characteristics (A. Najla'a et al., 2008, as cited in Aliyu et al., 2019). However, premarital counselling in the Islamic religion is not strictly compulsory for couples before marriage in Nigeria, compared to the Christian religion, where premarital counselling is mandatory before any marriage. Intending Christian couples not only attend counselling; they also go through medical tests such as HIV/AIDS and genotype tests to know their compatibility. In recent times, premarital therapy style depends on the unmarried couple's religion, personality, and other factors identified, which include: religious therapy; online courses; one-on-one professional therapy; compatibility tests or questionnaires; and group courses and discussions (Stephanie, 2021).

Currently, the clergy, professional counsellors or therapists, and physicians have been the three main categories of people who provide premarital counselling. The clergy provides the greatest amount of formal premarital education as part of mandatory marriage preparation programmes before church weddings (Stahmann and Hiebert 1997; Stahmann and Salts, 1993, as cited in Nwaobi, 2014). Premarital education is frequently provided by professional counsellors or therapists for those who have been divorced and are preparing to marry again (Stahmann and Hiebert, 1997, as cited in Nwaobi, 2014). Physicians do some premarital education as well, but that is often limited to one meeting where they give contraceptive and sexual information (Stahmann and Hiebert, 1997, as cited in Nwaobi, 2014). On the other hand, marriage involves two different individuals with different views who want to spend the rest

of their lives together. On that note, God defined marriage from the beginning as one man and one wife joined together in unity, indivisibility, and the union that occurs (Hampshire, 2020). Hampshire (2020) further stated that God designed marriage in such a way that it offers a couple the enjoyment in having a deep friendship, being sexually intimate, sharing life-long experiences, and having a family (Hampshire, 2020). These are the known purposes for marriage in our society. In Nigeria, a marriage can be said to be successful if the couple has a good spouse, well-trained children, effective communication, understanding, tolerance, unconditional love, selflessness, faithfulness, truthfulness and peace at home (Taiwo, 2018). These are indicators that a married couple has a stable marriage. Accordingly, Katherine (2016) defined marital stability as remaining legally married without divorce, physical separation, or legal separation. Marital stability is related to but distinct from marital adjustment, marital quality, marital satisfaction, and marital success (Katherine, 2016). Factors linked to marital stability encompass financial strain, employment status, insufficient income, parental split, educational achievement, spousal disparities, early marriage, religiosity, and successive premarital cohabitations. (Katherine, 2016). Katherine (2016) added that marital stability is generally associated with positive outcomes for adults and children. Achieving marital stability for couples who participate in premarital counselling involves establishing practical marital expectations, honing conflict resolution abilities, and enhancing communication skills. Additionally, premarital counselling can cultivate a positive attitude toward seeking assistance in the future. (Goodings, 2021). Consequently, research conducted by Maciver et al. (2012) noted that it has been seen that, domestic, behavioural, social, sexual, religious, and monetary elements add to the stability of marriage. Hence, marriage counsellors and government bodies should collaborate to arrange workshops and seminars aimed at upholding marital satisfaction and stability among couples (Maciver et al., 2012).

According to the Sun (2020), records from the FCT High Court, more than 2,000 divorce petitions were submitted between 2019 and 2020, averaging about 30 cases processed daily. Despite efforts by the court to reconcile couples through arbitration panels, the number of filings remains significant. Although, official statistics from 2016 revealed that conjugal dissolution was infrequent in Nigeria. (Vanguard, 2020). The National Bureau of Statistics acknowledged that only 0.2% of men and 0.3% of women had legally terminated their marriages, with less than 1% of couples reporting separation. (Vanguard, 2020). These records do not encompass the majority of Nigerians who enter into marriages through traditional practices not governed by current Nigerian laws. (Vanguard, 2020). Premarital counselling serves as a vital tool in mitigating the prevalence of divorce within our society. Another effective measure in preventing divorce is premarital counselling, providing couples with the opportunity to engage in essential premarital preparations before embarking on life's most significant decision, so as to get into marriage armed with skills that are going to be very helpful (Braithwaite, as cited in Lauren, 2017). Adzovie et al. (2021) also posited that majority of the churches require prospective couples to participate in premarital counselling before their weddings can be officiated within the church. This has assisted in building marital stability among married couples.

Over the years, studies have shown that broken marriages can possibly lead to depression, anxiety, intimacy issues, substance abuse, stress, and financial instability. However, the marriage institution is inherently challenging. Thus, it is crucial to address certain marital concerns before couples tie the knot. Premarital counselling serves as a valuable platform to

tackle the aforementioned issues in marriages effectively. Some premarital counselling researches revealed that premarital counselling reduces the chances of divorce by 50% (Braithwaite, as cited in Lauren, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

The number of divorce cases and instability in marriages is on the increase in AMAC, FCT. Some of the reasons for marriage failure in society include: lack of premarital education; infidelity; lack of commitment; financial instability; sexual dissatisfaction; poor communication; lack of understanding; incompatibility; lack of intimacy; unrealistic expectations; becoming addicted to the internet; and getting married through online dating (Kachi, 2020).

Marital instability has effects on both couples and the children the couples have and will have in the future. Couples become aggressive and frustrated in unstable marriages, which affect them psychologically, mentally and emotionally. Unhappy couples with children transfer negative energy to their children, which in turn make the children sad and unproductive in school.

Marriage stability is also based on proper premarital counselling before marriage. Some couples who engage in premarital counselling do not complete their sessions or do not even start because they are in a hurry to get married. Consequently, these couples will lack the skill to manage a home and find marital satisfaction. Although some marriages have failed because some marriage counsellors do not give the couples appropriate marriage counselling. The divorce rate in the society is alarming, so the need arose to investigate the influence of premarital counselling on marital stability.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study is to investigate the influence of premarital counselling on marital stability among married couples in AMAC, Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

The specific objectives are as follows:

- i. To examine the content of information provided by premarital counsellors particularly on communication skills and how it affects married couples in AMAC.
- ii. To examine the reasons why intending couples do not partake in premarital counselling for married couples in AMAC; and
- iii. To examine how premarital counselling programmes affect general marital stability among couples in AMAC.

Research Question

- iv. To what extent does the content of information provided by premarital counsellors especially on communication skills affect married couples in AMAC?

Research Hypothesis

- **HO1:** There is no significant influence on the content of information on communication skills affecting married couples.

II. Methodology

A **systematic survey research design** was adopted in this study. The research design systematically describe how premarital counseling impacts marital stability, focusing on the information shared and the participation of couples. The population of the study Conducted in the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) within the Federal Capital Territory consists of 200 participants (100 married males and 100 married females).

The Research Instruments Questionnaire: A 22-item questionnaire with sections on counseling content, effects of non-participation, and overall impact on marital stability. Responses were rated on a four-point scale. **To analyze the data,** Mean scores and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used at a 0.05 significance level. Mean scores were categorized to interpret levels of agreement. This methodology combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the impact of premarital counseling on marital stability.

III. Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does the content of information provided by premarital counsellors affect married couples in AMAC?

Table 1: Responses of couples on the extent the content of information provided by premarital counsellors affect their marriages in AMAC.

ITEMS	Agree	Disagree	Mean	S.D	Decision
Having received counselling on communication skills with my spouse, as well as on managing conflicts and problem-solving skills it has positively influenced me.	116 (59.8%)	78 (40.2%)	2.80	1.11	Agreed
Having received premarital counselling it has helped me to be more responsive to my partner's needs and how to cultivate tolerance in our relationship.	118 (60.8%)	76 (39.2%)	2.88	1.11	Agreed
Having received premarital counselling it has helped me and my spouse on budgeting, managing funds, and sharing responsibilities.	106 (54.6%)	88 (45.4%)	2.75	1.11	Disagreed
Having received counselling on sexual behaviours it has influenced my marriage positively.	106 (54.6%)	88 (45.4%)	2.67	1.09	Disagreed
Having received counselling, I am aware about family planning and making decisions regarding the number of children to have.	86 (44.3%)	108 (55.7%)	2.58	1.05	Disagreed

Note: Decision was based on the Grand mean which = $13.68/5 = 2.78$

On Table 1, a significant number of respondents which the decision was based on the grand mean of 2.78 acknowledged that premarital counselling had facilitated their increased responsiveness to their partner's needs and the development of tolerance within their relationships. On the contrary, some couples disagreed that the counselling content had effectively assisted them in areas such as financial management, sharing of responsibilities, sexual behaviours, family planning issues, or decision-making regarding the number of children they should have.

The Test of Hypothesis

Hypothesis One

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant influence on the content of information on communication skills affecting married couples.

Research Question 1: To what extent does the content of information provided by premarital counsellors affect married couples in AMAC?

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Rows	942.0371	193	4.881021	18.12472	6.9392	1.198973
Columns	10.49897	4	2.624742	9.746469	1.07752	2.383466
Error	207.901	772	0.269302			
Total	1160.437	969				

Sum of square (SS), Degree of Freedom (DF), Mean Square (MS), F-Statistics (F), P-value and F-critical

Decision Rule: Since the p-value of 1.08 is greater than the significant value of 0.05, we accept the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis is accepted (**HO1**) that “there is no significant impact on the content of information on communication skills affecting married couples”.

Discussion of findings

In the study, one research question and one hypothesis was raised. The result from the first research question seek to determine how the extent the content of information provided by premarital counsellors affects married couples in AMAC, FCT. On Table 1, a significant number of respondents which the decision was based on the grand mean of 2.78 acknowledged that premarital counselling had facilitated their increased responsiveness to their partner's needs and the development of tolerance within their relationships. On the contrary, some couples disagreed that the counselling content had effectively assisted them in areas such as financial management, sharing of responsibilities, sexual behaviours, family planning issues, or decision-making regarding the number of children they should have.

A majority of over 59% agreed that counselling on communication skills and conflict management positively influenced their marriages with the mean scores of 2.80 and 2.88 indicating a consensus on the importance of these skills in promoting responsiveness and tolerance in relationships. This is consistent with views of Bradley, B. P., & Furrow, J. L (2011) that couples who received premarital counselling reported improved communication skills and conflict resolution skills. Nevertheless, on the contrary, a significant portion of couples disagreed that premarital counselling effectively addressed financial management (54.6% disagreed) and family planning issues (55.7% disagreed). The mean scores for these items were below the grand mean (2.78), indicating that couples felt less supported in these crucial areas. While there's a positive acknowledgment of the role of counselling in enhancing communication, the findings suggest a gap in other vital areas that could result into marital challenges. A vast majority of over 85% agreed that lack of knowledge about healthy relationships contributes to divorce, emphasizing the importance of premarital counselling in preparing couples for marriage and this is in line with the study by Markman et.al (2010)

stating that couples lacking knowledge about healthy relationships were 2.5 times more likely to experience divorce.

Data analysis on Hypothesis One indicated that there is no significant influence of counselling content on communication skills affecting married couples, the study indicate that premarital counselling positively influence couples' communication and responsiveness. This is supported by Hawkins et al (2015) stating that premarital counselling increases emotional responsiveness, decreasing rates of divorce. Furthermore, a study by Stanley et al (2006) found that premarital counselling improves communication skills, leading to better marital quality.

It can be deduced from the above study that a vast majority of couples do not prioritize financial management and family planning issues during premarital counselling hence the reason why a significant portion of couples disagreed that premarital counselling effectively addressed financial management (54.6% disagreed) and family planning issues (55.7% disagreed). Furthermore, the study also deduced that effective communication and conflict resolution skills are crucial to healthy relationships hence why a vast majority of over 85% agreed that lack of knowledge about healthy relationships contributes to divorce, emphasizing the importance of premarital counselling in preparing couples for marriage.

Premarital counselling plays a crucial role in preparing couples for marriage. The study highlight that while there is a positive impact on communication skills and conflict management, there is a significant gap in other areas, such as financial management and family planning. Emphasizing the comprehensive approach that counselling should take can uphold the argument for its importance in covering all aspects of marital life. It is also indicated that significant percentages of respondents feel inadequately prepared in key areas such as financial management and family planning thus indicating a need for counsellors to expand their curriculum to include these critical topics, which can prevent future conflicts. The overwhelming agreement that lack of knowledge about healthy relationships contributes to divorce outlines the crucial need for effective premarital counseling. Enhancing educational components in counselling can empower couples with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate or overcome potential challenges as supported by the study from Markman et al. (2010).

From the above study, it is deduced that couples who received counselling reported improvements in communication and responsiveness. This finding can be buttressed by incorporating theories of emotional intelligence and its role in fostering effective communication in relationships, thereby providing a theoretical framework for the results. Investigating specific strategies to examine the long-term effects of comprehensive premarital counselling on marital stability, could contribute significantly to the field. The study can act as a practical guide for counsellors thereby urging them to address the significant gaps. By promoting specialized counselling sessions that cover communication skills and essential life management areas, counsellors can better prepare couples for a successful marital union. Nevertheless, while some studies asserts the positive impacts of counselling, others present conflicting views and thus this can result into a dialogue or an argument on the dynamic nature of premarital counselling and the need for ongoing adaptation to meet couples' needs effectively. By concentrating on these aspects, the validity of the study's discussion can be

enhanced thus demonstrating the complex impact of premarital counselling on marital outcomes.

IV. Conclusion

This research offers robust insights into the influence of premarital counselling on marital stability within AMAC, FCT. Via meticulous examination, including statistical analyses and comparison between counselled and non-counselled couples, the study illuminates the pivotal role of communication skills in shaping marital dynamics. The findings resonate with the extensive literature underscoring the significance of premarital counselling in mitigating divorce risks and nurturing resilient relationships. Furthermore, the study's exploration of respondents' perspectives unveils hinted motivations and barriers surrounding premarital counselling uptake, enriching our understanding of related factors at play. Contrary to initial hypotheses, the research underscores the significant impact of counselling content on couples' relational dynamics and readiness to navigate marital challenges. Premarital counselling programs can be more effective in preparing couples for a stable and fulfilling marriage, ultimately contributing to reduced divorce rates and improved marital satisfaction. Finally, these findings advocate for the widespread promotion of premarital counselling as an indispensable tool for fostering enduring and fulfilling marriages, with far-reaching implications for societal well-being in the AMAC, FCT, and beyond.

Recommendations

Based on the outcome of the study, it is therefore, recommended that:

- Premarital counselling should place a stronger emphasis on communication skills, conflict management, and problem-solving techniques and since these areas are perceived as having a positive impact on marital stability, counselors should integrate comprehensive training on these skills into their programs to better prepare couples for the challenges of marriage.
- Premarital counselling programs often fall short in areas such as financial management, sexual behaviors, and family planning and thus, it is recommended that these aspects be given more attention in counselling sessions to ensure couples are well-prepared to handle financial and reproductive decisions in their marriage.
- Educational campaigns should be launched to inform intending couples about the importance of counseling and how it can improve marital readiness and stability.
- Premarital counselling programs should be adapted to respect and incorporate various traditions and beliefs as this can make counseling more relevant and acceptable to couples from different backgrounds.

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