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**Perceptions and Experiences of Christian Premarital Counselling in
Ghana: A Qualitative Study**

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ABSTRACT

Majority of premarital counselling in Ghana are conducted in religious settings. Some studies examined the content and benefits of Ghanaian Christian premarital counselling from the perspective of providers. However, the experience of counselees, as well as how they perceive their premarital counselling to be helpful has not been explored. This study examined the experiences of counselees, and explored their perception, helpfulness and relationship related benefits of premarital counselling. It explored how premarital counselling informed help-seeking in marriage and connections with the odds of divorce. Using a qualitative research approach, 40 individuals (including yet-to-marry, newlywed, married for 4-9 years and married over 10) in Orthodox, Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations were interviewed. Interview transcripts were analysed thematically. Findings revealed process-related and content related benefits. Participants also highlighted areas for improvement for premarital counselling and expressed a desire for in-marriage counselling. The study highlights the need for religious institutions to undertake in-marriage counselling to augment the benefits given by premarital counselling.

Keywords: Premarital counselling, usefulness, Christian premarital counselling, help-seeking, counsellor- and process-related aspects, contents of premarital counselling, in-marriage counselling



DEDICATION

To my nephews and nieces; Kweku, Emmanuel, Daniella, Favour, Joy, Michael and Arielle. Go for gold.



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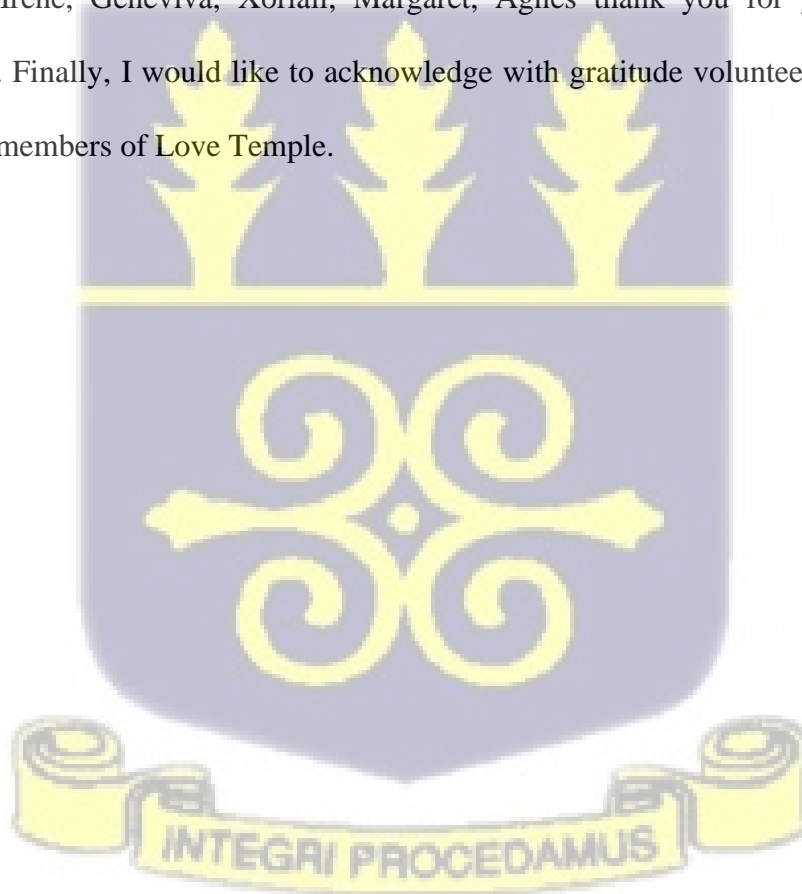


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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Definition of premarital counselling

There are several descriptions for premarital programmes offered to would-be couples. These include premarital counselling, premarital education, premarital educative counselling, premarital therapy and marriage preparation (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Kepler, 2015). Carroll and Doherty (2003) classify premarital prevention programmes as a generic term that encapsulates any example of formal, standardized approach aimed at preparing premarital couples for marriage. This includes the several descriptions offered above. Stanley et al. (2020) also classifies relationship education as a broader term that can be used to refer to educational interventions that focuses on adult romantic relationships, targeting either couples or individuals or both. Here, whether the participant is currently in a romantic relationship or not does not matter. This may have a preventive education focus, relationship enhancement focus or may be interventions tailor-made for relationship distress (Stanley et al., 2020). In Ghana, premarital counselling is the most common terminology used. Therefore, premarital counselling will be used predominantly throughout this study.

Osei Tutu et al. (2020) state that premarital counseling is a specialized kind of counseling which aims at providing individuals approaching marriage with opportunities to do self-exploration and examine the couple process. Others such as Kepler (2015) and Osman et al. (2021) have defined premarital counselling as a method that offers would-be couple information on how to improve their relationship with the aim of increasing their marriage satisfaction, lowering their chances of divorce and enhancing premarital relationships. Relationship education has been seen

for years to be a way of helping people develop and sustain healthy relationships (Stanley et al., 2020).

1.1.2 History of premarital counselling

Premarital counselling dates to the early 1930's (Duncan et al., 2010; Goodman, 1972). The Merrill-Palmer Institute in the United States of America developed the first programme in 1932 (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). Goodman (1972) states that the start of these premarital counselling programmes was precipitated by several factors including some socio-cultural changes. The traditional source of help which was mostly from close friends and family (both nuclear and extended families) was no longer readily available due to cultural changes (Goodman, 1972).

The historic role religious institutions played in the development of premarital counselling cannot be over emphasized. Carroll and Doherty (2003) stated that the clergy were meeting would-be couples prior to the 1930s. The focus of such meetings simply revolved around educating the would-be couples about the meaning of the marriage rite. This focus was later shifted to preparing would-be couples for marriage. Some early religious programmes which sought to help prepare would-be couples for marriage dates back to the 1960s (Tuffour, 2017). These include the Roman Catholic Marriage Encounter Programme and United Methodist Church's leadership training programmes for couples.

The interest to prepare would-be couples for marriage were heightened among both the clergy and some family professionals in the 1970s (Kepler, 2015). Kepler stated that premarital counselling has been offered in diverse structures including group meetings, partnered couples counselling, workshops, conferences and self-directed programmes. Similarly, Duncan (2010) had earlier classified interventions that aims at helping couples prepare for marriage under four types namely self-directed, community-based, school-based and therapeutic approaches. Premarital

counselling is an example of the therapeutic approaches (Duncan et al., 2010; Osman et al., 2021), whereas the self-directed approaches include information from books and websites, school-based approaches include courses for marriage preparation in educational institutions and the community-based approaches include conferences and workshops (Duncan et al., 2010).

1.1.3 Marriage in Ghanaian society

Marriage under Customary Law, Islamic Law and Ordinance are three ways in which individuals can get married in Ghana (Sarkodie, 2017). The marriage under customary law is often referred to as traditional marriage. Also, Christian marriages can be placed under marriage under Ordinance. Generally, marriages in Ghana may be seen as a combination of one or more of the aforementioned types of marital arrangements. No marriage, be it marriage under ordinance or Islamic law may be accepted by a person's family until the customary marriage has been performed (Sarkodie, 2017). This suggests that marriage under customary law is performed alongside marriage under the ordinance (Christian marriage) and marriage under the Islamic law (Sarkodie, 2017).

Both Islamic and traditional marriages permit polygamy. Men who marry under such law are at liberty to take on multiple partners. Marriage under the ordinance however prohibits polygamy.

When Christian couples decide to get married, they must fulfill all civil requirements of the marriage under the ordinance. First, the union must have been officially registered with the district assembly or a court before a pastor/priest can conduct a Christian marriage ceremony (Sarkodie, 2017). Giving notice to the marriage registrar in the district where the marriage will take place is a requirement of this registration process (Registrar General Department, n.d). If no objection is voiced, the registrar will then publish a notice of marriage and issue a certificate after 21 days. In order for the certificate to remain valid the couple must get married within three months after

presenting the marriage certificate to a licensed marriage officer (Registrar General Department, n.d).

From a Christian viewpoint marriage is not man-made but an institution established by God (Sarkodie, 2017). Although marriage may serve several purposes, a pivotal function of marriage from a Christian perspective is procreation and raising of children (Sarkodie, 2017). Christians may also see marriage as a lifelong commitment. Beyond the legal contractual agreement made by couple, Christians see marriage more as a covenant. A covenant which may be considered as a typology of the covenant between Christ and the Church (Sarkodie, 2017).

1.1.4 Premarital counselling in Ghanaian society

Historically, marriage in Ghana has been seen to be communal in nature, where the marriage is seen as a union between two families rather than just two individuals (Kyerematen, 1967; Tuffour, 2017; Quashie, 2002). The communal nature of marriage led to the family and community serving as the major and vital institution for preparing individuals for marriage (Tuffour, 2017). Socialization was a vital tool for preparing young individuals into marriage in Ghanaian societies through some rites of passage (Gyekye, 1996; Tuffour, 2017).

In Ghana, traditional marriage preparation may take the form of older individuals giving advice to younger couples, either prior or during the traditional marriage ceremony through optional speeches (Geest, 2015). During traditional wedding ceremonies, such advice giving may come from family members in different forms including the use of proverbs (Owu-Ewie, 2019). These proverbs revolve around subjects such as co-operation, patience, respect for each other, respect for in-laws, sexual denial, hard work, faithfulness and truthfulness, caution against polygamy, heeding to advice, excessive friendship, provision of security, caution against violence, child bearing and evaluating good behaviour (Owu-Ewie, 2019).

In the past couple of years, the work for preparing individuals for marriage in Ghana has been a major role of religious organizations through their premarital counselling programmes (Osei-Tutu et al., 2020). The content of premarital counselling programmes in religious settings focuses on medical requirements and interpersonal domains (Osei-Tutu et al.). For the medical domain some premarital counselling providers prescribe or require health screening from participants (Osei-Tutu et al., 2020; Osman et al., 2021).

The interpersonal domain deals with issues such as beliefs and values; expectations; partner knowledge; roles and duties in marriage; sex; parenthood; financial management; communication; and conflicts (Osei-Tutu et al., 2020). Ansah-Hughes (2015) states that sex in marriage, financial management, communication, the purpose of the marriage, dealing with conflict, coping with each other's differences, couples' expectations, divorce prevention, extended family relationships, partners' future aspirations, religious differences and children and parenthood are topics treated during premarital counselling in Ghana.

1.1.5 Nature and forms of premarital counselling

Premarital counselling can be broadly classified into two: Skills-based and Information-based programmes (Wilmoth & Smyser, 2012). Information-based programmes uses lectures and audio/visual presentations to advance ones understanding of a subject or a concept whereas skills-based programmes on the other hand transcends offering understanding and knowledge to providing an avenue to practice relationship skills and receiving feedbacks on these skills (Tuffour, 2017; Wilmoth & Smyser, 2012).

Information-based programmes may help premarital couples develop in-depth knowledge about themselves and the institution of marriage (Wilmoth & Smyser, 2012). Skills-based programmes on the other hand often seek to offer couples skills for communication and conflict

resolution (Lee, 2007). Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS), Relationship Enhancement (RE), Couple Communication and Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) are some examples of skills-based programmes (Kepler, 2015; Lee, 2007; Tuffour, 2017; Wilmoth & Smyser, 2012).

The quality of the premarital counselling predicts both the short-and long-term effect of the counselling on the couple (Schumm et al., 2010). Long-term positive effects of premarital counselling depend on both the content and delivery, such as who delivers the counselling and how the counselling is presented (Schumm et al., 2010). Content and process-related aspects of premarital counselling are seen as essential for programme efficacy and success (Wilmoth & Smyser, 2012). Some process-related aspect of premarital counselling includes the intensity and methodology (Hawkins et al., 2004), format, dosage and approach (Murray, 2005). Kepler (2015) asserts that the providers of premarital counselling could be faith-based or private. It is worth noting that the majority of providers of premarital counselling in Ghana has been faith-based (Osei-Tutu et al., 2020).

A common format for premarital counselling in church settings is the private meeting of a would-be couple with the pastor or lay counselor (Lee, 2007). The length of such interaction may vary from one church to the other. Mentor couples is another form of premarital counselling in which couples yet to marry meet in the home of a mentor married couple to examine key aspects of marriage over a period of time (Lee, 2007). Also, premarital counselling may be given in group meetings or class format (Kepler, 2015).

Premarital inventories are used in some premarital counselling to offer couples feedback about their relationship. This helps them identify areas of potential growth or strength (Lee, 2007).

1.1.6 Benefits of premarital counselling

Stanley et al. (2020) state that the effectiveness of relationship education, which is a broader term covering premarital counselling and other relationship education interventions, has been largely reported over the last decades. Relationship education fosters relationship quality by leading to improve communication, relationship satisfaction and relationship stability which is shown in less breakup and divorce (Stanley et al., 2020).

One key benefit gained from premarital counselling is the potential of building help-seeking behaviour in the couple (Bruhn & Hill, 2004; Williamson et al., 2018). The premarital counsellor becomes a source the couples can seek help from later when they encounter any challenge in their marriage (Bruhn & Hill, 2004). The religious premarital counsellor may also refer the couple to other professionals in situations where the problem at hand is outside their area of specialty (Bruhn & Hill). Williamson et al. (2018) states that wives who received premarital counselling expressed more help-seeking intention than those who did not have premarital counselling. At a lower level of relationship satisfaction couples who had premarital counselling sought therapy earlier than those who did not have premarital counselling.

In addition, relationship satisfaction has been identified as a key benefit of premarital counselling (Lee, 2007; Stanley et al., 2020; Yilmaz & Kalkan, 2010). Marital satisfaction can be defined as a couple's "global subjective evaluation about the quality of their marriage" (Li & Fung, 2011, p. 246). Udofia et al. (2021) state that couples who received premarital counselling were more satisfied with their marriages than those who did not have a premarital counselling experience. Cobb and Sullivan (2015) stated that the more hours newlyweds participated in relationship education the less steeply their marital satisfaction declined. At the core, premarital counselling seeks to foster marriage satisfaction and stability (Adejare et al., 2019; Carroll & Doherty, 2003). Some contrary findings suggest that wives who did not have relationship

education maintained their marital satisfaction whereas those who had relationship education experienced a decline in their marital satisfaction (Williamson, 2018).

Another key benefit of premarital counselling and relationship education in general is reducing the odds of divorce (Lee, 2007; Scott et al., 2013; Stanley et al., 2020). Marital conflict and divorce are said to have some negative effects on children such as poorer psychological well-being, lower academic success and increased anxiety and depression (Scott et al. 2013) and premarital counselling has the potential of helping prevent these secondary effect.

Adzovie and Dabone (2021) state that a key importance of premarital counselling is to help couples decide whether to break off their relationship or continue with their intention to marry. The information they receive from their premarital counselling assist them in making this decision.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Most of the premarital counselling in Ghana is done in the religious settings (Osei-Tutu et al., 2020). Studies have explored the content of premarital counselling offered by religious leaders in Ghana (Adzovie & Dabone, 2021; Osei-Tutu et al., 2020). Ansah-Hughes et al. (2015) and Cobbinah and Osei-Tutu (2019) in their quantitative studies reported that most married couples in Ghana perceived premarital counselling as relevant. Although the general benefit of premarital counselling on couple marital satisfaction and the content of the programme has been revealed in many research worldwide including Ghana (Adzovie & Dabone, 2021; Ansah-Hughes et al., 2015; Cottle et al., 2014; Dasmian, 2015; Osei-Tutu, et al., 2020) a detailed study of participants' experience of premarital counselling has not been explored. It is important to examine how counsellees believe their premarital counselling has helped their relationship in Ghana. In addition, Osei-Tutu et al. (2020) reports that majority of premarital counselling programmes in religious settings in Ghana are unstructured. Thus, if the counsellees perception of aspect of their premarital

counselling programme, specifically the content, counsellor-and process-related aspects is explored, meaningful information will be obtained that can be used to help provide well-structured premarital counselling programmes. Also, Osafo et al. (2021) state that currently several marriages are being dissolved in Ghana through the legal system. Premarital counselling on the other hand has been reported widely to help reduce odds of divorce (Lee, 2007; Scott et al., 2013; Stanley et al., 2020; Udofia et al., 2021; Williamson et al., 2018). Thus, if the experience of counsellees and benefits of premarital counselling is explored from counsellees perspective meaningful information will be obtained that can be used to improve premarital counselling programmes in hope of curbing the divorce rate in Ghana.

1.3 Specific Aims or Objectives of Study

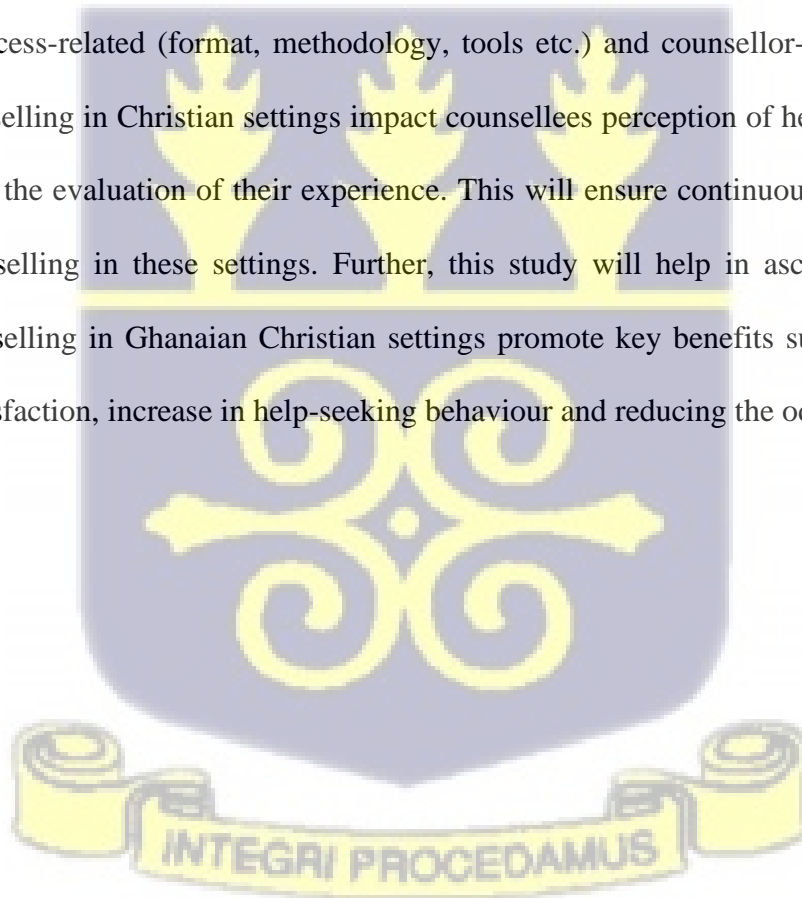
The study aims at exploring Ghanaian counsellees experience of premarital counselling and how they perceive it to be helpful to their relationship.

The specific objectives are:

1. To examine what participants experience during premarital counselling programmes in Christian settings in Ghana.
2. To explore participants' perception of how helpful the programme has been in general
3. To investigate whether participants perceive their experience of premarital counselling as beneficial to (a) their relationship satisfaction, (b) promoting help-seeking behaviour and (c) reducing the odds/chance of divorce.
4. To explore how the content, counsellor-related and process-related aspect of the premarital counselling programme influence participants experience as well as how they perceive their counselling as helpful.

1.4 Study Relevance

Knowing more about the experiences of the participants of premarital counselling in Christian settings in Ghana will help in ascertaining the utility of these premarital programmes. This study sought to fill the knowledge gap on the helpfulness of premarital counselling in Christian settings in Ghana and will offer information to religious leaders, lay counsellors and counselling psychologist to help improve their premarital counselling programmes. Knowing more about premarital counselees experience and perception of helpfulness will also be essential to individuals and institutions who seek to develop new premarital counselling programmes for couples in a form that will be most beneficial to them. This research will also help in knowing how the content, process-related (format, methodology, tools etc.) and counsellor-related aspects of premarital counselling in Christian settings impact counselees perception of helpfulness on their relationship and the evaluation of their experience. This will ensure continuous improvement of premarital counselling in these settings. Further, this study will help in ascertaining whether premarital counselling in Ghanaian Christian settings promote key benefits such as increase in relationship satisfaction, increase in help-seeking behaviour and reducing the odds of divorce.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the expectancy paradigm and the theory of help-seeking.

2.1.1 Expectancy/disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980)

Oliver (1980) states that satisfaction is as a result of how an individual's experience differ from their initial standard or expectation regarding a thing. Satisfaction then can be seen as an interplay between how an individual's experience falls short or exceed their initial standard. The comparison of what they experience and the standard, perception or expectation they hold about the thing can be seen as a contributor to their feeling of satisfaction.

Satisfaction can be seen as a result of the interrelation between level of expectation and the kind of disconfirmation experienced (Oliver,1980). Green et al. (2005) states that the expectancy/disconfirmation paradigm suggests that a consumer experience dissatisfaction when their experience is worse than expected and satisfaction when their experience is better than expected.

Negative vs positive disconfirmation

Oliver (1980) states that individuals are said to create a frame of reference through which they make comparative judgement. They may make comparative judgements through a frame of reference created by their expectation. This frame of reference becomes a yardstick for judging how satisfying an experience is. A negative disconfirmation is when an individual's experience falls short to this standard. Having a poorer experience than expected influence the individual's satisfaction. Here they are likely to be less satisfied (Oliver, 1980). Positive disconfirmation on

the other hand is when an individual's experience is better than they expected. Here such experience is rated above their frame of reference. This suggest that they would be satisfied since their experience exceed their expectation.

The use of expectancy/disconfirmation paradigm to this study will help understand counselees satisfaction with their premarital counselling experience. Premarital counselees prior to their premarital counselling programme may have some expectations. This may help them form a frame of reference by which they may judge how satisfying their premarital counselling is. There is positive disconfirmation when premarital counselees' experience exceeds their frame of reference or expectation. On the other hand, there is negative disconfirmation when counselees' experience falls short to their expectation.

2.1.3 Theory of help-seeking

Help-seeking may be seen as the process of actively seeking for help from other people (Cornally & McCarthy, 2011). This involve talking to other people to obtain help in the form of understanding, information, advice, treatment and general support in response to a distressing experience or problem (Cornally & McCarthy, 2011). Cornally and McCarthy (2011) suggest that help seeking is active rather than a passive response. They emphasize the intentionality of seeking help by communicating with other individuals concerning different types of help (Cornally & McCarthy, 2011). Help-seeking behaviour can be seen as a multistage process that a person undertakes with the intention of securing needed assistance from another person (Cornally & McCarthy, 2011)

Doss et al. (2003) offered three help-seeking steps for couples namely problem recognition, treatment consideration and treatment-seeking. Scott and Walter (2010) build on this by suggesting

four help-seeking steps in response to symptoms of a disorder. They indicated these four steps begins with symptoms perception, interpretation, appraisal and ends with decision making. The individual must possess the ability and motivation to carry this decision through by going to see a health-care professional (Cornally & McCarthy, 2011)

Cornally and McCarthy (2011), differentiated between help-seeking behaviour and health-seeking behaviour. They were of the view that whereas health-seeking behaviour goes beyond health problems to include other factors such as health promotion and lifestyle changes, help-seeking behaviour is entirely problem-focused (Cornally & McCarthy, 2011).

The use of the theory of help-seeking will help in understanding the role the experience of premarital counselees plays in their future help-seeking as a couple and their participation in in-marriage counselling. Prior to experiencing Christian premarital counselling, the couple may go through the process of problem/need recognition (the need to prepare for marriage), treatment consideration (considering to use Christian premarital counselling) and treatment-seeking (starting premarital counselling). In addition, when premarital counselees recognize a need in their marriage, their experience of their premarital counselling may influence their treatment consideration. This will have an influence on their treatment-seeking. Whether they take steps to go back to their premarital counsellors for help or not may be dependent on their prior experience.

2.2 Review of Related Studies

Several studies have investigated premarital counselling. While some have investigated the content of the programme (Cobbinah & Osei-Tutu, 2019; Harley et al., 2021; Osei-Tutu et al., 2020) others have studied the benefits of premarital counselling (Ansah-Hughes et al., 2015; Udofia et al., 2021; Williamson et al., 2018). Other studies also focused on the form and processes involved in premarital counselling (Hawkins et al., 2012; Stanley et al., 2020).

2.2.1 Content of premarital counselling in Ghana

Osei-Tutu et al. (2020) investigated the practices of counsellors of premarital counselling as conducted in both Muslim and Christian settings in Ghana. They interviewed 85 individuals who provide premarital counseling in their religious set-ups. They range from clerics, lay ministers, elders and ordinary worshippers who are tasked to offer premarital counselling. Osei-Tutu et al. discovered that most premarital counselling provided in these religious settings was unstructured although some Christian providers indicated offering a structured premarital counselling service.

They discovered the premarital counselling programmes offered focus on medical requirements and behavioural/interpersonal domains. They stated that in religious settings in Ghana some providers of premarital counselling prescribed or required health screening from participants. These screening required tests on some infectious diseases such as hepatitis B and C and HIV. They tested for rhesus factor compatibility and also ascertained whether the couple coming together will pose threats to their unborn children with regards to their likelihood of having sickle cell anemia. Issues such as beliefs and values, expectations, partner knowledge, roles and duties in marriage, sex, parenthood, financial management, communication, and conflicts comes under the behavioural and interpersonal domain (Osei-Tutu et al., 2020).

Cobbinah & Osei-Tutu (2019) in their study sought to identify the content and ascertain the processes of premarital counselling offered among members of three suburbs in Accra. They also sought to evaluate the importance of premarital counselling and how vital it is to marriages and whether it fosters the sustenance of marriage. The most common topics they identified as being treated during premarital counselling were communication and finance. About 87% and 80% of respondents indicated treating communication and finance respectively. In addition, two out of

three respondents affirm conflict resolution, in-laws and family planning as topics treated during premarital counselling.

The filling of forms individually by would-be couples about themselves concerning their reasons for getting married, their desired number of children, their age, parental concern etc. was indicated by the counsellors as assisting in bringing to the fore some topics and issues that may have been overlooked during courtship. Here the role of the counsellor is to assist the couple to reconcile their differences as revealed through the filling of the form.

Ansah-Hughes et al. (2015) in their quantitative study sought to ascertain the impact premarital counselling by professional counsellors, ministers and non-professional counsellors had on marriages of individuals at Techiman in Ghana. They also sought to determine the content of premarital counselling provided by Christian institutions in the Techiman Municipality and the perception of married people (those who did and those who did not have premarital counselling) about premarital counselling. Under the content treated during premarital counselling, the participants indicated treating sex in marriage, financial management, communication, the purpose of the marriage, dealing with conflict, coping with each other's differences, couples' expectations, divorce prevention, extended family relationships, partners' future aspirations, religious differences and children and parenthood.

Khamis (2013) through qualitative interviews examined premarital counselling in two Muslim communities in Ghana and observed two forms of premarital counselling offered in the Nima and Mamobi communities. These were the traditional means of counselling provided to prospective couples by the Imams, "*aluwanka*" and relatives of the bride and the formal premarital counselling offered by two individuals namely Hajia Memuna Maliki and Sheikh Muhammad Zakariya Addo. She discovered that despite the vital role of the traditional form of counselling for

couples it often did not cover extensively some essential topics such as parenting and sexual relationship among couples. In addition, such counselling offered to would-be couples was seen to focus more on the woman than the man with topics such as the roles and responsibilities of the wife taking center stage (Khamis, 2013).

Harley et al. (2021) studied 241 Ghanaians, some living in Ghana and abroad in order to examine topics counselees of premarital counselling felt were inadequately covered and topics they think can help strengthen their marriage. Their sample included married, cohabiting, widowed and divorced individuals. They found the top three topics participant reported receiving inadequate information on during their premarital counselling were sex/intimacy, finances and parenting difficulties. They also found the top three topics couples indicated can help strengthen their marriages were values in marriage, finances and sex/intimacy.

2.2.2 Process-related aspect of premarital counselling

Hawkins et al. (2012) explored programmatic moderators of effectiveness of relationship and marriage education programmes. They considered dosage, content emphasized, institutional status of a programme (i.e., programmes that use formal manuals, require formal instructor training, having ongoing presence in the field and have had multiple evaluation studies), and settings (university/ “laboratory”-classroom or mental health clinic associated with a university and religious or other community settings) as programmatic moderators of relationship and marriage education programmes.

One programmatic moderator highlighted by Hawkins et al. (2012) and of interest to this research is dosage. Dosage here is used to represent two items namely contact hours per session and the number of sessions in total. They classify 1-8 contact hours programmes as low-dosage, 9-20 contact hours as moderate-dosage and high dosage programmes having 21 and over contact

hours. Whereas low dosage programmes may often cover these contact hours in a one or two sessions, high-and moderate-dosage programmes turn to break down their contacts hours into shorter sessions spanning over a number of weeks or months (Hawkins et al., 2012).

They found that programme dosage correlates with programme efficacy. Hawkins et al. (2012) state that relationship interventions may not produce significant effect when offered with less than 9 hours of contact hours. They found that moderate-dosage programmes have a significantly larger effects than low-dosage programmes. Although not at a statistically significant level, moderate-dosage programmes had a larger effect than high-dosage programmes (Hawkins et al., 2012). They found a curvilinear relationship between dosage and outcome, with moderate dosage being the optimal.

Although Hawkins et al. (2012) concluded that moderate dosage marriage and relationship programmes yielded the largest effect, they were quick to add that in some cases high dosage were administered because such programmes target at-risk couple. This may in turn confound the effect of dosage with prior risk leading to the slight larger effect of moderate-dosage programmes over high-dosage ones. They however recommend that high-dosage programmes should be available for couples with more risk characteristic. They also found that pre-post studies suggest a linear relationship between dosage and outcomes where high-dosage programmes show larger effect than moderate-dosage programme and moderate-dosage programmes having larger effect than low-dosage programmes.

In relation to the number of sessions, they indicated that some effect could be seen with low-dosage interventions however the largest effect of relationship programmes could be seen when the programme has 10 or more sessions which is often spread out over 10 or more-week period (Hawkins et al., 2012). Cobbinah & Osei-Tutu (2019) in their study with Ghanaian

participants asked the preferred duration premarital counselling programmes should take. They found that 24 weeks was suggested by 52% of the respondent, whereas 16- and 12-weeks duration was suggested by 34% and 14% of the respondent respectively. Hawkins et al. (2012) suggest that there is a likelihood that when relationship programmes over stretch for more than 6 months the programme may not yield any greater effect and may also have the tendency of being counterproductive.

Beyond the breakthrough information offered on programmatic moderators Hawkins et al. (2012) has some limitation. A limitation of the study was that the researchers were limited to the range of potential moderators they could examine due to most study reports not offering detailed description of the programme provided and the fact that there is lack of diversity of the education structure of marriage and relationship programmes (Hawkins et al. 2012). Also, since this study used a meta-analysis design it is unable to rigorously test effect of specific programmatic factors on program outcomes.

2.2.3 Perceptions about premarital counselling

Adzovie and Dabone (2021) studied how married couples viewed premarital counselling among individuals living in the Accra Metropolis. They sought to evaluate the perception of the effectiveness of premarital counselling by asking participants the following questions using a 3-point Likert scale. The items included “It helped me understand my partner better, it helped me identify my weaknesses, it helped me know myself better and appreciate my partner better, it helped me know most of the weaknesses of my partner, important areas of marriage were thoroughly discussed and it addressed all my marital concerns before the marriage started”.

Adzovie and Dabone (2021) concluded that Christian married couples held a negative perception about the effectiveness of premarital counselling. They came to this conclusion by

using the midpoint of the 3-point weighted Likert scale. They indicated that the mean of means of the responses to their questionnaire fell below the cut-off mean of 2 which suggested participants had a negative perception about premarital counselling. Adzovie and Dabone stated that there was significant mean difference between male and female participants perception of the importance of premarital counselling. They also indicated that the duration of a premarital counselling programme was positively correlated with the effectiveness of the premarital counselling programme. However, they indicated that such effect was not significant.

There are some limitations of the above study. Some items used in their questionnaire to tap for the perception of effectiveness of premarital counselling programmes may not be the objective or may be outside the domain of premarital counselling programmes offered in religious settings in Ghana. It is unlikely, for instance, that the premarital counselling offered by the religious groups seeks to directly help participants know the negative side of their partners.

Ansah-Hughes et al. (2015) in their quantitative study assessed the impact premarital counselling by professional counsellors, ministers and non-professional counsellors had on marriages of individuals in the Techiman Municipality. They sought to know the perception of 259 participants about premarital counselling through a questionnaire developed by the researchers. Items on their questionnaire affirmed by participants of premarital counselling included, premarital counselling is necessary and must be continued, premarital counselling must be made mandatory throughout the churches, premarital counselling helps couples have an understanding of what marriage entails and the difference with their partner they must deal with. They stated that the perception of participants of premarital counselling also include an affirmation of the importance of confidentiality in premarital counselling, the importance of extra knowledge gleaned from books, magazines and films as essential in determining the success or failure of

marriage beside going through premarital counselling and pieces of advice from parents, friends and other individuals who can be of help also determine the success or failure of a marriage.

Ansah-Hughes et al. (2015) stated that participants of premarital counselling held the perception that premarital relationships have the tendency of building the confidence of would-be couples. They also indicated that premarital counselling helps bring to the front problems that have not been noticed by the couples. Ansah-Hughes et al. also indicated that counselees of premarital counselling held the perception that effective premarital counselling covered critical issues that can affect the success or failure of marriage rather than a mere pre-ceremony meeting with a counsellor and premarital counselling gives the couple the platform to talk about their responsibilities in marriage.

There are some limitations of the above study. It is worth noting that some of items used by the researchers to tap the perception of counselees on premarital counselling as indicated above cannot be seen as the perception people have of premarital counselling. For instance, getting advice from friends or parents cannot be classified under premarital counselling, which can be seen as the structured preparation given to would-be couples by religious institutions in Ghana. It is difficult to understand how these items relate to the perception about premarital counselling. Also, premarital relationships having the potential of building the confidence of would-be couples may not be a good marker of the perception individuals have about premarital counselling.

2.2.4 Importance of premarital counselling

Marital satisfaction

Udofia et al. (2021) in a cross-sectional survey assessed the effect of premarital counselling on marital satisfaction and how marital satisfaction relate to three psychological variables namely

self esteem, intimacy and locus of control. This was done among married couples living in Laterbiokoshie community in Accra, Ghana . They found that couples who received premarital counselling prior to marriage were more satisfied with their marriages than those who did not have a premarital counselling experience prior to marriage. Self-esteem, intimacy and locus of control had a much stronger relationship with marital satisfaction of individuals who participated in premarital counselling than couples who did not have any premarital counselling experience (Udofia et al., 2021).

Heydari et al. (2020) sought to assess the effectiveness of divorce prevention pattern of counselling on marital satisfaction during early marriages. They used a semi-experimental, pre-test and post-test design, having both experimental and control groups. Their sample were individuals who have applied for divorce in Iran. They found that couples' enjoyment of premarital counselling has great influence on the success of a marriage (Heydari et al., 2020).

Kepler (2015) through a cross-sectional design with 27 individuals affiliated to St. Catherine University in the United States of America examined the connection between premarital and marital counselling and marital satisfactions among couples. They indicated not finding any significant relationship between premarital counselling, marital counselling and marriage satisfaction. The researcher however indicated that the findings may be as a result of two things namely the lack of variability in the measures and secondly the number of participants used for the study. Kepler (2015) however discovered that there was a likelihood for couples who had premarital counselling to highly rate marriage satisfaction than those who did not participate in premarital counselling.

Promoting help-seeking

Williamson et al. (2018) sought to predict how premarital education participation relates to how a couple progress through help-seeking stages. They used a self-report from 431 newlywed couples from ethnically diverse background living in Los Angeles County in the United State of America. They found that among couples who were experiencing higher level of relationship satisfaction and were also experiencing some relational problems but at a lower level of severity, the wives who had received premarital education sought for therapy than wives who did not go through any form of premarital education. However, the husbands who had received premarital counselling did not seek for therapy more than those who did not go through any form of premarital counselling.

Secondly, their analyses revealed that newlywed women who had premarital education were more likely to express help seeking intentions by indicating they would seek therapy in time of a marital distress than those who did not go through premarital education. The husbands however did not show the likelihood to express help-seeking intentions by indicating they would seek therapy in time of marital distress than husbands who did not go through premarital education.

According to Williamson et al. (2018) couples who had premarital education were more likely to follow through participation when they consider seeking therapy whereas those who did not participate in premarital education were more likely to consider seeking therapy without following through. They also found that among couples who had received therapy after their marriage, individuals who had premarital education sought therapy earlier than individuals who did not have any premarital education.

Despite the importance of this findings in offering in-depth understanding on how premarital education affect later help-seeking the study has a few limitations. These include the

fact that the study only considered newlywed couples, this limits its application to couples in various stages of their marriage life.

Hubbard and Harris (2020) in their critical review of help-seeking behavior for couple therapy highlighted some key themes. First, it was found that a key predictor of help-seeking was the presence of a lower level of marital satisfaction (Hubbard & Harris, 2020; Trillingsgaard et al., 2018). Secondly, Hubbard and Harris (2020) stated that prior help-seeking increased the likelihood for future help-seeking. Couples who had previously attended couples therapy were more likely to seek help when faced with other issues. Also, couples who attended premarital counselling were more likely to seek help earlier than those who did not attend premarital counselling (Hubbard & Harris, 2020).

Third, Hubbard and Harris (2020) indicate that although an individual's attitude is the greatest predictor of their personal help-seeking, there is less clarity and research on the role an individual's attitude plays when it comes to couple help-seeking. They indicated that among couples, individual help-seeking differs from couples' help-seeking process. Fourth, Hubbard and Harris (2020) emphasized the relationship gender has with couple help-seeking. They indicated that help-seeking is often initiated by women than men. Men may know of problems in their relationship but seem reluctant to seek couples therapy (Hubbard & Harris, 2020).

Velasco et al. (2020) in their systematic review identified some barriers and facilitators of help-seeking for common mental health challenges. Help-seeking was found to be facilitated by several issues including prior help-seeking behaviour (Velasco et al., 2020), previous experience of mental health service (Watsford & Rickwood, 2014), established relationship with provider (Gulliver et al., 2012), positive perception of mental health professionals (Martinez-Hernaez et al., 2014), helpfulness of prior mental health care (Wilson & Deane, 2012), awareness of service

availability (Haavik et al., 2017) and perceived benefits of mental health treatment (Velasco et al., 2020). Some negative barriers to help-seeking include negative past experience of help-seeking (Gulliver et al., 2012).

Divorce and premarital counselling

Cobbinah and Osei-Tutu (2019) in their study among members of three suburbs in Accra also discovered that 91% of respondents indicated that premarital counselling fosters sustainable marriages; 88% disagreed that premarital counselling was a waste of time. Most individuals who were separated or divorced who took part in this study did not go through premarital counselling. With 56% of separated individuals and 55% of divorced individuals not partaking in premarital counselling.

Scott et al. (2013) in their mixed method study involving 52 divorced individuals who received premarital education before their marriage sought to understand their reasons for divorce. They also found some suggestions from participants which they believe can help improve future premarital education programmes. They found that some reasons individuals indicate as contributing to their divorce are lack of commitment, arguing or too much conflict, extramarital affairs, marrying too young, communication problems, spousal abuse, incompatibility, childlessness, lack of love, religious difference, drug and alcohol use (Scott, et al., 2013). They stated that participants recommend receiving relationship education before marital commitment. This will enable a couple break off the relationship at an early and easier stage when they discover the need to do so. Also, they indicated that participants recommended that premarital counsellees be taught more about the marital developmental stages and also offered support to implement what they learn in the real world outside the counselling settings.

Help reduce idealistic marital expectation

Rajabi and Abbasi (2020) sought to examine the effectiveness of premarital counselling based on a relationship education programme in Iran. Their aim was to see whether the counselling programme would help reduce idealistic marital expectations among single young adults. They used a quasi-experimental design with pretest, posttest and extended follow-up. They found that the use of the relationship education programme as a form of premarital counselling have the potential of reducing idealistic marital expectation.

In conclusion, the related studies reviewed above shows some studies revolving premarital counselling. The content and some process-related aspect of premarital counselling has been studied as well as the importance of premarital counselling.

2.3 Research Questions

1. What do participants experience during premarital counselling?
2. How do participants evaluate helpfulness of their premarital counselling programme?
3. To what extent do participants perceive their experience of premarital counselling as offering benefits such as relationship satisfaction, promoting help-seeking behaviour and reducing the odds of divorce?
4. How does content, counselor-and process-related aspects feature in the experience and perception about helpfulness of premarital counselling programme?



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A phenomenological approach which helps to better understand the subjective, lived experience of a particular phenomenon as it was experienced by a person or a group of people (Moustakas, 1994) was used for this study. What a person says, do and how they behave portrays how such an individual define the world (Taylor et al., 2016). It was vital to use phenomenology as the methodological orientation for this study in order to have a better understanding of counselees' subjective and lived experience of the phenomenon of premarital counselling in Christian settings in Ghana.

3.2 Research setting

Individuals from Eastern, Volta, Central, Western and Greater Accra regions of Ghana who participated in premarital counselling were interviewed. Participants were selected from large, medium and small-sized churches from various Christian denominations in selected urban, peri-urban and rural areas in these regions. Participants were interviewed at their home, office, or over phone.

3.3 Selection of Participants

3.3.1 Participants

Participants were individuals who had gone through premarital counselling in Christian settings in Ghana. Participants are men and women who are 18 years and above with varying socioeconomic statuses. They included four subgroups, that is, those yet-to-be-married, newlyweds (1-3 years), individuals married for 4 to 9 years and individuals married over 10 years.

Forty (40) individuals who had participated in premarital counselling and are in either of these categories were interviewed. The objective was to get a sample that represent individuals who experience premarital counselling in Christian setting in Ghana. Here the number of years of marriage or individuals yet-to-marry after premarital counselling and the denomination was a determinant in the selection process.

3.3.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The study included participants of premarital counselling programme in Christian settings in Ghana only. These individuals must have completed a premarital counselling programme. Individuals who have participated in the programme of a single denomination were included whereas individuals who have gone through two or more premarital counselling from different denominations were excluded from the study. This was to ensure that the experience a participant shared represented a premarital counselling experienced in a single denomination. Also, individuals who were divorced were not included in this study.

3.3.3 Participant selection

Purposive and snowballing sampling methods were used to select participants. Various church leaders made announcements inviting eligible members to partake in the study. Some members who volunteered to participate in the study also referred other church members, work colleagues or friends who were eligible and interested in participating in the study.

The level of saturation point reached from the interviews across the various denomination determined the sample for the study. Here saturation was determined when the responses for my latter interviews came to confirm the content of some of the initial interviews and did not offer anything new or significant (Bryant , 2014).

3.4 Interview guide

In order to have a rich and in-depth description of counselees' experience of premarital counselling in church settings in Ghana and how they evaluate it to be helpful to their relationship, a semi-structured interview guide was used. The interview guide was designed by the researcher based on literature. The interview guide had a total of 11 major questions with relevant probes. The interview guide taps information about the participant's premarital counselling history, including the time, form and structure of the programme (see Appendix 1). It also taps information on their experience of the programme, how helpful it has been to their current relationship and whether it has offered them some key benefits such as marital satisfaction, reduce the odds of divorce or promoted help-seeking behaviour. Examples of these questions are "how was your premarital counselling conducted?" "What topics were discussed during your premarital counselling?" "How has your premarital counselling experience helped sustain your marriage?" As part of the interview guide were questions which were used to obtain demographic information about participants.

3.5 Procedure

The researcher sought ethical approval from the Ethics Committee for Humanities of the University of Ghana before any interview was conducted (Reference: ECH 176/20-21). In addition, an introductory letter was acquired from the Department of Psychology of the University of Ghana to be given to church leaders or religious gate keepers (see Appendix 2).

3.5.1 Pilot Study

Pilot interviews of two individuals were conducted to help assist in fine-tuning the interview guide. Two individuals married for five (5) and seven (7) years from an orthodox and charismatic church respectively took part in the pilot study.

After the first interview, a careful evaluation and analysis of the transcription together with the researcher's supervisors revealed some shortfalls of the interview guide. Some questions were completely taken out of the interview guide whereas others were rephrased or revised into simpler questions with relevant probes to better assist in taping the relevant information from the participants. For instance, the question "tell me about how premarital counselling helped you address a challenge in your relationship" was rephrased into "what are some of the common challenges or disagreement you have had in your marriage/relationship?" The probe, "how has your premarital counselling help you in resolving these challenges?" was added.

On the other hand, a set of questions that sought to ascertain how useful premarital counselling has been to the couple under the areas of communication skills, conflict resolution, financial skills and sexual intimacy with several probes under each area was simplified. This was simplified into "how useful is premarital counselling to your marriage/relationship?" with probes such as "do you have any examples to share?" and "has the program been useful in these areas (i.e., Communication skills, conflict resolution skills, financial skills, sexual intimacy etc.)?"

The second interview was conducted after these several adjustments were made to the interview guide. The transcript of the second interview showed a great improvement over the first.

During the pilot interviews, the interviewees introduced a theme which was not part of the researcher's aim. Both interviewees of the two pilot interviews introduced the subject of "post marital counselling"/ "in-marriage" indicating that it is something they think has to be done. The researcher was compelled to ask follow-up questions such as "what is your view on it" and "how do you suggest it is done?". Hence these questions were introduced into the main interview guide. On multiple occasion some interviews in the main study also had this subject brought up by participants before the question was asked. Hence the pilot study was instrumental in preparing

the researcher for this theme that was introduced by participants which was not part of the research aim.

3.5.2 Main study

Seven leaders of assemblies of selected Christian denominations (International Central Gospel Church, The Church of Pentecost, Assemblies of God Church, Roman Catholic Church, Royal House Chapel International, Baptist Church and Light House Chapel International) were contacted in August 2021 for permission to engage their past premarital counselling participants to undergo this study. Other church members and colleagues of individuals who volunteered were also contacted through snowballing.

About nine individuals from the list provided from the church leaders did not participate in the interview. Some of them could not be reached through the contacts provided whereas others who were contacted could not make the time for the interview due to their busy schedule. Also, some church leaders delayed in providing a list of counselees. This made their congregants unable to participate in the study. A date was scheduled with those who agreed to be part of the study. The researcher corresponded with participants through calls and text messages until suitable dates and times for the interview were settled on.

The interviews were conducted in either the home or office of the participant or through phone calls from September to November 2021. The option for phone interviews became necessary due to the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is worth noting that there were some participants who due to their busy schedules indicated their availability only if the interviews were conducted on phone. In all, 29 individuals were interviewed in-person whereas 11 individuals had their interviews done on phone.

Strict COVID-19 protocols (i.e., maintaining social distance, wearing a nose mask, avoiding physical contact, using hand sanitizer) were observed during all in-person interviews. The engagement began with an explanation of the aim and objective of the research to the participant. Written consent was obtained. Participants were guided to read and sign the informed consent document. Individuals who were interviewed over the phone were sent a soft copy of the informed consent document. All participants were interviewed alone with the exception of one phone interview in which the participants conferred with the husband over some questions asked. For most of the in-person interviews conducted at the homes of participants, the partners of interviewees were present at home but excused their partners and gave them privacy as they were interviewed. Couples who both participated in the interviews took turns and were absent when their partner was interviewed.

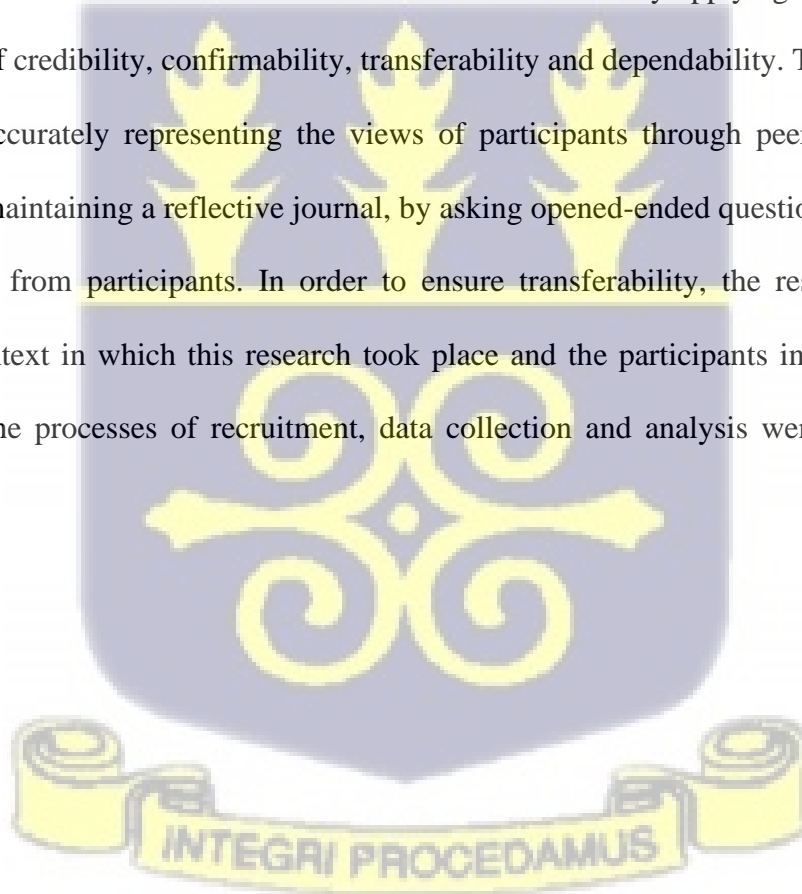
All in-person interviews were tape-recorded whereas phone interviews were recorded with the aid of a recording software application. Since all interviews were recorded, participants were informed about the need to record and how audio recordings would be handled, and based on this information gave permission for the interviews to be recorded. Here the participants were assured of confidentiality and privacy. They were informed that what they shared would be kept confidential. The interviews lasted an average of 45-50 minutes. The shortest interview lasted 16 minutes whereas the longest interview lasted 69 minutes. All interviews were conducted using the English language.

The researcher kept a diary which assisted in personal reflections during the research. Also, some observations made and intriguing remarks from participants were jotted down.

3.6 Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

The researcher identifies as a Christian and as a leader of a Christian denomination and was familiar with the Christian tradition and has an experience of Christian premarital counselling. I was mindful to put aside any bias and evaluation of premarital counselling in order to obtain premarital counselees' accurate perception and experience of their premarital counselling. The researcher was trained in qualitative research methods and psychotherapy which was particularly helpful during the interview process through attentive listening, making use of non-verbal communication/cues and asking probing questions.

The researcher ensured the trustworthiness of this research by applying Lincoln and Guba (1985) criteria of credibility, confirmability, transferability and dependability. This study ensured credibility by accurately representing the views of participants through peer and supervisory debriefing and maintaining a reflective journal, by asking opened-ended questions and presenting direct quotation from participants. In order to ensure transferability, the researcher carefully describe the context in which this research took place and the participants involved. A careful description of the processes of recruitment, data collection and analysis were done to ensure dependability.



CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Overview

Qualitative research seeks to understand individuals from their own frame of reference (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). According to Taylor et al. (2016) qualitative approach offers an opportunity to the researcher to identify with their research participants. This helps better appreciate how they see things. In qualitative research, understanding and insight is gained through patterns in the data. Qualitative researchers focus on meaning people attach to aspect of their lives by identifying and empathizing with the people being studied while setting aside their own perspective. Inductive nature of qualitative research implies that through the data the researchers develop insights and understanding rather than collecting data to assess a preconceived hypothesis (Taylor et al., 2016).

4.2 Thematic Analysis

Data was transcribed by the researcher. Thematic analysis was used for the analysis of the data of this study. This involves a method of identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within a data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis offers a great deal of theoretical freedom which can result in a rich and detailed yet complex account of data due to it being a flexible and useful research tool (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six phases of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke were used in analyzing the data. These are familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report. Under the first phase the act of transcribing the interviews was the first step to help the researcher familiarize himself with the data. The transcripts were reread on multiple occasions. Although the researcher did the interviews, the researcher still listened to the audio recordings again to help get better acquainted with the data. While listening to the audio and

reading the transcript, the researcher typed out some comments, ideas of interest and some areas the researcher felt were important or worth noting. These were added to some remarks jotted down earlier during the interview process. In the second phase the researcher generated initial codes. This was done at a semantic or face value level of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The coding and analysis as a whole were driven by what was in the data. Table 1 offers an example.

Table 1 *Example of coded transcript*

Example of Coded Transcript	
Transcript	Codes
Maybe I have this preconceive idea that it is a formality. And I wasn't disappointed until the latter part where the assessment part came in. That looked different from what I have been hearing...yeah apart from that part I think it was basically a routine, the routine stuff... But the latter part where we did the assessment, knew our differences and we tried to resolve it or talk about, that one really made it for me	Just formality Assessment quite different Routine stuff Nothing new Assessment part outstanding Help knowing ourselves

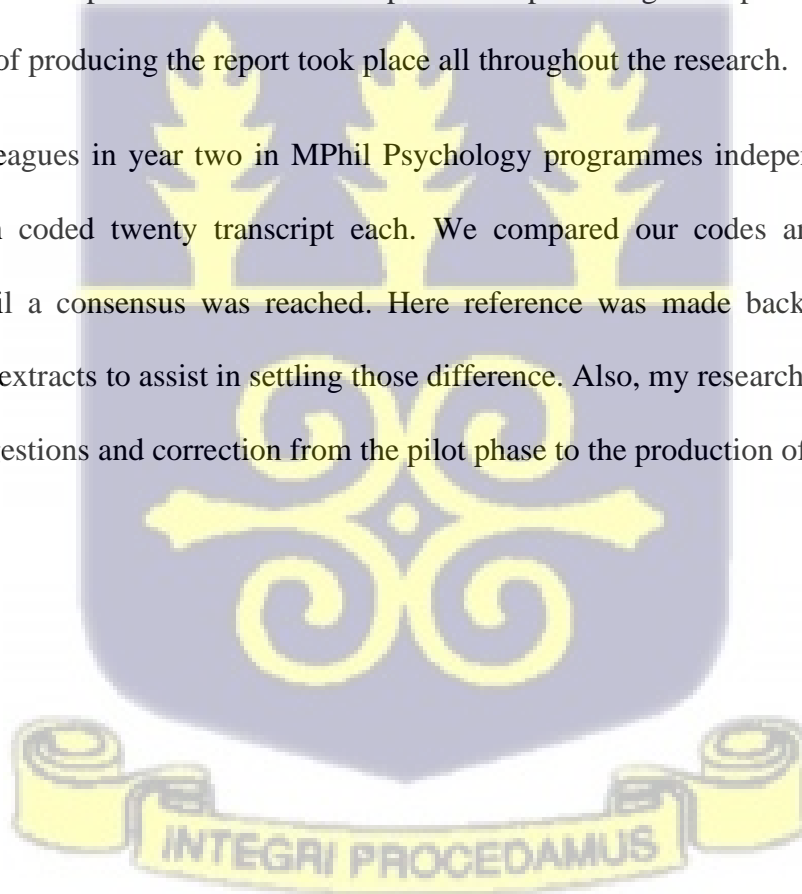
Five interviews transcript from three subcategories namely newlyweds (1-3 years), individuals married for 4 to 9 years and individuals married over 10 years and from the three denominations (Orthodox, Pentecostal and Charismatic) were selected to create an initial coding frame using excel sheet. The first column captured the participants pseudonym, the second column contained extracts while the subsequent columns captured codes vertically.

In the third phase the researcher reviewed the coded data. This helped in identifying similarities and areas that overlap with each other. Codes that had a unifying concept such as punctual counsellor, multiple facilitators and cordial counsellor were grouped together. The codes clustered around broader subjects like usefulness to relationship, content of counselling, likes

about counselling, counselor-related aspect etc. Subthemes were generated under these broader themes. Usefulness to relationship for instance had subthemes such as better handling the extended family, improve communication, improve relationship satisfaction etc.

Also, themes that were developed were reviewed repeatedly against the entire data set. Some additional themes were created at this phase whereas others were adjusted. For instance, the theme “likes about premarital counselling” was broken down into “likes about content”, “likes about process-related” aspect of programme and “likes about counselor-related” aspect of programme. In the fifth phase, each theme was defined stating what is unique about them. Here extracts were selected to support the presentation. The final phase was producing the report. It is worth noting that the process of producing the report took place all throughout the research.

Two colleagues in year two in MPhil Psychology programmes independently coded the data. They both coded twenty transcript each. We compared our codes and deliberated on discrepancy until a consensus was reached. Here reference was made back to the interview transcripts/ data extracts to assist in settling those difference. Also, my research supervisors make great input, suggestions and correction from the pilot phase to the production of the final report.



CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

5.1 Socio Demographic Characteristics of Participants

General information on participants is presented in Table 2 below. Participants include 31 women and 9 men. The average age was 33.9. Table 3 provides the list of all participants and their respective demographic details.

Table 2. Summary of gender, duration of marriage, and religious affiliation of participants

Criteria	Categories	Number	Percentages%
Gender	Women	31	77.5
	Men	9	22.5
Subgroups	Yet to be married	1	2.5
	Newlyweds	17	42.5
	Married for 4-9years	16	40
	Married over 10 years	6	15
Denomination	Orthodox	12	30
	Pentecostal	6	15
	Charismatic	22	55
Churches	Anglican Church	1	2.5
	Assemblies of God Church	2	5
	Blessed Family of God	1	2.5
	Church of Pentecost	3	7.5
	Light House Chapel International	5	12.5
	Methodist Church	3	7.5
	Presbyterian Church	3	7.5
	International Central Gospel Church	13	32.5
	Evangelical Presbyterian Church	1	2.5
	Light of Life Church	1	2.5
	Baptist Church	1	2.5
	Roman Catholic Church	6	15

5.2 Table 3 Demographic information of participants

I.D.	Age	Gender	Length of marriage	Denomination (Providers)	Level of Edu.	Occupation
PCP1	30	F	5 years	Orthodox	1 st Degree	Journalist
PCP2	36	F	7 years	Charismatic	1 st Degree	Nurse
PCP3	30	F	3 years	Charismatic	1 st Degree	Nurse
PCP4	30	F	5 years	Orthodox	1 st Degree	Midwife
PCP5	37	M	7 years	Charismatic	1 st Degree	Banker
PCP6	30	F	4 years	Charismatic	Masters	Pastor
PCP7	35	M	1 year	Pentecostal	1 st Degree	Nurse
PCP8	32	M	5 years	Orthodox	1 st Degree	Nurse
PCP9	37	F	7 years	Orthodox	Masters	Medical Doctor
PCP10	35	F	7 years	Charismatic	Masters	Teacher
PCP11	44	F	14 years	Orthodox	Masters	Teacher
PCP12	32	M	2 years	Charismatic	Masters	Engineer/Pastor
PCP13	37	F	11 years	Orthodox	1 st Degree	Dental Assistant
PCP14	31	F	Yet-to-marry	Charismatic	Post Grad. Degree	Dentist
PCP15	32	F	2 years	Charismatic	Post Grad. Degree	Lawyer
PCP16	30	F	2years	Charismatic	1 st Degree	Media Analyst
PCP17	31	F	3 years	Charismatic	1 st Degree	
PCP18	49	M	8 years	Orthodox	Diploma	Mechanical engineering technician
PCP19	32	F	2 years	Charismatic	1 st Degree	Nurse
PCP20	28	F	1 year	Charismatic	1 st Degree	Student
PCP21	35	M	7 years	Charismatic	Post Grad. Degree	Pastor/Lecturer

PCP22	34	F	7 years	Charismatic	Post. Grad Degree	Event organization
PCP23	30	F	3 years	Orthodox	1 st Degree	Teacher
PCP24	31	F	2 years	Orthodox	1 st Degree	Teacher
PCP25	32	F	3years	Pentecostal	Diploma	Teacher
PCP26	32	F	7years	Pentecostal	Post Grad	Guidance counsellor
PCP27	31	F	5years	Pentecostal	1 st Degree	Business woman
PCP28	30	F	2years	Charismatic	1 st Degree	Teacher
PCP29	29	F	3 years	Orthodox	1 st Degree	Teacher
PCP30	47	F	18 years	Charismatic	Senior High school Cert.	Business woman
PCP31	32	F	5 years	Pentecostal	1 st Degree	Teacher
PCP32	32	F	10 years	Charismatic	Sen High School Cert.	Teacher
PCP33	42	F	13 years	Charismatic	Junior High School Cert.	Caterer
PCP34	32	M	2 years	Charismatic	HND	Teacher
PCP35	35	F	6 years	Charismatic	Degree	Administrator
PCP36	25	F	1 year	Pentecostal	Senior High School Cert.	Business woman
PCP37	45	F	8 years	Orthodox	Senior High School Cert.	Business women
PCP38	40	M	12 years	Orthodox	Senior High School Cert.	Business man
PCP 39	34	F	3 years	Orthodox	Diploma	Nurse
PCP 40	35	M	3 years	Orthodox	1 st Degree	Banker

Notes. The denomination indicated in this table is that of the premarital counsellor which may or may not be the counsellee's current denomination

5.2 Summary of Findings

There were six major themes drawn from the analysis process. (1) process-related aspect of counselling, (2) counsellor-related aspect of counselling, (3) content of premarital counselling, (4) usefulness of premarital counselling, (5) desire for in-marriage counselling and (6) areas for improvement.

5.3 Process-related aspect of premarital counselling programme

The analysis showed that premarital counselling in Christian settings in Ghana differed in process-related aspect such as on-boarding, format, intensity/dosage, methodology and tools used. The format include couple alone counselling, group counselling and combination of group counselling and personal counsellor or mentor couple. Aspects such as duration of programme, sessions per week and session duration are classified under intensity/dosage. Duration of premarital counselling programmes include 3 months, 4 to 5 months, 6 months, one year and abridged programmes. Session per week included once a week, twice a week and thrice a week. Session duration ranged from 60 minutes, 60-120 minutes, 120-150 minutes and 180 minutes (See table 4 for details). Aspects classified under methodology include teaching styles (lecture, discussions and lecture with discussion) and venue (counsellor's home, church premises, both counsellor's home and church premises and virtual). Some tools used include assessment questionnaire, students' manuals/handouts and power-point slides show. The findings also suggest likes and dislikes about process-related aspect of premarital counselling. Table 4 below offers some specific details about some process-related aspect of premarital counselling programme

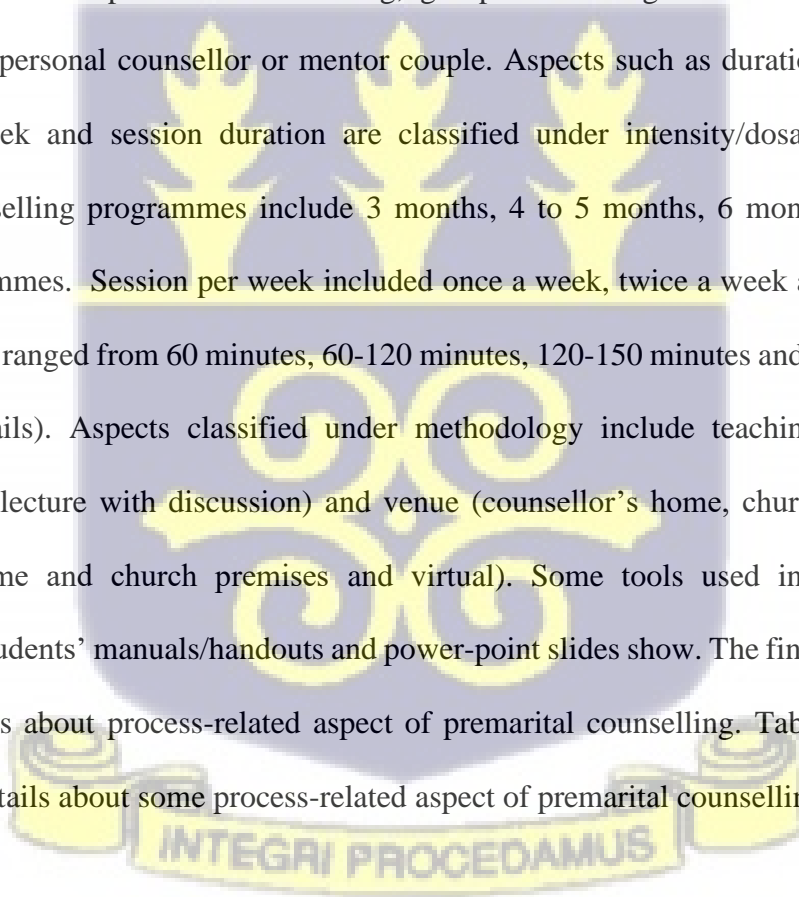


Table 4. Process-related aspect of premarital counselling

Process-related aspect	Dimension	Subcategory	Numb. of participants
Format	Couple and counsellor (27)	Couple together always	25
		Individual sessions for partners	2
	Group Counselling (13)	Small groups: 2-4 couples	2
Duration	Duration of programme	Medium groups: 9-15 Couples	9
		Large groups: 40 couples	2
		3 months	12
	Duration of sessions	4-5 Month	11
		6 Months	13
		A year	2
		Abridged programme	2
		60 minutes	10
		60-120 minutes	16
		120-150 minutes	12
180 minutes	2		
Venue	Home of Counselor only	8	
	Church premise only	22	
	Both home & Church	9	
	Virtual	1	
Tools	Assessment tools used	4	
	Student Manuals/ handout	9	
	Power Point slides	2	

5.3.1 Enrollment /Onboarding

In Ghanaian Christian settings the recruitment for premarital counselling can be said to be initiated by participants. Individuals who intend to marry may express this interest to their pastor who will in turn set a day for them to begin their counselling. In large congregations, individuals who want to marry register with the department in charge of marriages and are placed in a premarital counselling cohort.

5.3.2 Format

5.3.2.1 Couple alone counselling. The common format for premarital counselling in Ghana is for couples to meet with a counsellor alone. Generally, most premarital counselling participants met with their counsellor together with their partner all the time but on a few occasions some participants had the chance of having individual meetings with their counsellors without their partners. Participant PCP (8) stated that “Sometimes one on one session with the counsellor alone, my wife was not part”.

5.3.2.2 Group counselling. Premarital counselling was held for the couple alone or in a group format and varied from one church to the other. Often the decision is influenced by the congregational size of that assembly. Most larger congregations held their counselling in a group format.

5.3.2.3 Group size. The number of members in the counselling group varied from one assembly to the other, with a small group of two to four couples, a predominant medium group of about 9 to 15 couples and a few very large groups of over 40 couples. Participant 39 and participant 35 shared “we did it in a group, a group of nine, the two pair making eighteen” and “ours was in a group, okay. We were over hundred people and because in that church we do counselling like twice in a year” respectively.

5.3.3 Intensity

Process-related aspect of the counselling that revolve around the intensity of the programme include duration of programme, session per week and session duration.

5.3.3.1 Duration of programme

The analyses revealed varied duration of premarital counselling programme among Christian denominations. Most churches however had their counselling for either three, four or six months. In some instance some participants had their premarital counselling for as long as one year. The findings of the study revealed that some participants had special arrangement with their counsellors to have an abridge programme. Instead of going through the allocated duration, their counselling was shortened and fast-tracked for them for some unique reasons such as desiring to get married at a particular time or having wedding date already set. Such abridge programmes were as short as two weeks or a month.

PCP 23: “I understand that it should take like six months but I did mine within a month... It was my mom who requested for it. It had to be done that way because initially it wasn't a wedding. It was a traditional marriage, something small at home...my mother was like then let's make the traditional marriage a wedding. The date had already been fixed. So, she just called the priest and then begged him in a way that he should do it that short for us and he agreed.”

5.3.3.2 Sessions per week

The analysis showed that, besides participants who had special arrangements with counsellors to fast-track their premarital counselling programme, most participants predominantly had a single sessions per week. A few exceptions include some participants having meetings thrice a week.

Participant 24 said that “the programme was for three months and we were meeting on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays making it thrice a week”. Another participant also shared the following:

PCP 1: “That is how it went, so we went once every week. Whichever day was convenient for you. Be it on a weekend or a week day, I think ours was usually on the weekends because I wasn’t living in town by then. So, it was once every week.”

5.3.3.3 Session duration

The sessions lasted for either 60 minutes, 60-120 minutes, 120-150 minutes or 180 minutes. Most counselling sessions lasted for 60-120 minutes. The longest hours per session reported by participants was 180 minutes (three hours). Some counsellors stuck to their allocated time whereas most counsellors exceed their allocated time per session depending on the subject matter being discussed and response from participants. A participant had this to say:

PCP 15: “So ideally, it was supposed to be one hour but sometimes we go over that one hour. It depends maybe a lot of questions, Maybe the topic is very interesting. And so more engagements in so we tend to stretch more than an hour but then it was one hour. That was the prescribed duration for every session, an hour.”

5.3.4 Methodology

The analysis revealed methodological aspects such as teaching styles and venue for the counselling.

5.3.4.1 Teaching styles

Generally, premarital counselling was often given in a form of a lecture, discussion or both discussion and lecture. Participant 12 share that “most of the time it was in the form of the lecture...Most of the time it was a presentation, like a lecture form”. Another participant also shared the following:

PCP 8: “So, we were taking it one after the other, so maybe today we discuss about plans about making family that is how many children you want to have. Are there conflicting issues between the two answers? Are you okay with what your partner is saying? So, he tries to bring the two ideas together and we all discuss what has been brought up... for the betterment of each other’s idea.”

5.3.4.2 Venue

Majority of participants had their premarital counselling in the church premises. There were others who had their counselling at the home of their counsellor. This may be at an office in their home or in any available open space. A third group had their counselling at both the church premise and their counsellor’s home. One participant had a virtual counselling on a Zoom call. Participant 10 stated that “we were meeting in his house, he had an office there so we were meeting there. Other participants also shared the following:

PCP 25: “On all occasion I went with my husband and so we meet at the church premises but other times if the pastor cannot meet us there, we met in his house which is around that same area but all the other counsellors we met them at the church premises.”

PCP 20: “Okay usually it used to be one on one (in-person) but in our case because of the rise of the COVID (19) so we were doing it on Zoom. Every Sunday after church, our counsellor will meet us on Zoom... a booklet she was using... sometimes after everything

she'll take shots of it and put it in the group for further reading... Before she'll post it on the WhatsApp page, we discuss it on Zoom, (she'll post) for the benefit of those who were not able to join in that meeting and because Zoom mostly relies on network, sometimes you don't hear somethings said by the counsellor. If you have some questions you can go to her d.m (direct message) and ask her or you wait for the next meeting then you ask."

5.3.5 Tools

5.3.5.1 Tools used

Some participants of premarital counselling indicated their experience were facilitated by some assessment questionnaire, teaching manuals, student manuals and slides. This analysis revealed that some counsellors used the assessment tool to tap information about the couple and tackled the results in subsequent sessions or to simply assist the couple know each other better.

PCP 8: "He gave us some questionnaire. It took about forty-five minutes to one hour answering the questions. There wasn't like a result like a mark given, basically, what he (the counsellor) was looking for, was to know if we knew things about each other and if what we knew about each other were close (related) because we did not take the assessment at the same time... so based on what we wrote he continued the counselling."

PCP 10: "We had a book, which the counselling was based on. So, we were studying the book... every topic that we needed to know before entering into marriage."

PCP 12: "So, they come and then they give us materials on marriage, or whatever topic you're taking that day and there was a projector so they project what they have to project."

5.3.5.2 Needed tools.

Desire for a student manual

The following interview extract depicts how a participant indicated that she would have wished she received a premarital counselling student manual in addition to the lecture she received.

PCP 19: “I wished I had a copy of the counselling book, but unfortunately, we had no book as such...Has it not been that I read on my own, I research on my own and buy books on marriage on my own then of course I would have to feed on the tiny information I had from her.”

5.3.6. Likes about process-related aspect

Some things that stood out for participants about the process-related aspects included the use of assessment tools, having a well-structured programme, confidentiality and inputs from other group members

5.3.6.1 Use of assessment tools

Some participants did not expect to be asked to fill a questionnaire during premarital counselling. They indicated how pleased they were with that experience and indicated it offered them better knowledge of themselves and their partner.

PCP 8: “If something stood out, then maybe it will be the time we had to answer questions and because we were giving opposing answers, this is here, this is here, now we are trying to find out what we knew and what we didn’t know about our partners and trying to get things together, yeah, it was amazing, and it was interesting, let me put it that way. Things I thought I knew about my partner, not knowing I was just deceiving myself...yeah so that part was revealing enough. So, I got to know more stuffs and then it helped worked around things that I might have neglected.”

5.3.6.2 Well-structured programme

Some participants were impressed with how well structured their premarital counselling programme was. They like the fact that they had multiple facilitators who were always available and consistent and having the topic for each week communicated in advance. And also having experts from different backgrounds as well as mentor couple for a more intimate interaction.

PCP 15: “I liked the interaction. I liked the fact that there was a lot of variety. Variety in terms of the speakers, the sessions we had. Experts coming from different backgrounds telling us what they know. And the fact that we had an access to a mentor, who we could talk to on one-on-one basis. And the fact that we met other couples just like us who are just starting life. And so, we got to meet new people. And so, I just like the structure of the programme, it was good.”

5.3.6.3 Inputs from other group members

The analysis showed that most participants who had their counselling in a group format were pleased with the fact that they could connect to other groups members who graciously shared their experience, asked questions and make contribution that benefited the whole group. Participant 21 indicates that “the fact that we had different young people in the class it was fun...you get to hear different perspectives of things, we were able to laugh about things together”. Another participant shared the following.

PCP 23: “What I liked about it was that, you see, I told you that sometimes we meet other couples. We go as a group so other people ask questions that you may not be able to ask and then they give views that will help you, so it is kind of a group decision thing and then you learn something from it, from other people. The fact that there was a group that I could connect with.”

5.3.6.4 Confidentiality

The next extract shows how a process-related aspect of the premarital counselling such as the venue made a counsellee feel there was confidentiality. To them this was one thing they liked most about their premarital counselling experience since this offered them the opportunity to freely voice their opinion.

PCP 4: “I like the confidentiality in it. Because we went to a secluded place. It was our session hall. If it was in his house, maybe wives would be passing by, kids would be passing by, so you wouldn’t feel free to voice any questions you want to put out. But because it was at a secluded area, we were free to talk our mind.”

5.3.7 Dislike about process-related aspect

5.3.7.1 Dislike about duration of programme

The duration of programme was something some participants disliked about their premarital counselling experience. Whereas some had a challenge with the short duration of the programme others expressed their displeasure with how the programme was prolonged.

PCP 23: “What I didn’t like was, you see mine was just for a month. I feel it was too short because there were a lot of things that we could have talked about. And then I didn’t see how it helped. Because had it not been for your interview, I wouldn’t have remembered some things that I learned.”

PCP 35: “I don’t think I had any dislikes, if at all, I’ll say sometimes I wish it was less because I felt they were just wasting my time sometimes. The duration, I wish it was less, six good months was too long for me. And besides, I feel you learn when you are in it. Some have it less but six month I thought it was too much.”

5.3.7.2 Routine and monotonous programme

Some participants felt their counselling was consistently towing the same line and not offering variety of information. Participant 8 stated that “apart from that part (assessment) I think it was basically a routine, the routine stuff...talk about communication, talk about life, basically the routine stuffs”. Another participant shared the following.

PCP 1: “At a point it was becoming one way...yeah, she kept on repeating herself at a point, you know, and those repetition were quite a lot. So, the diversity in the talk was not that much. We kept on towing one aspect especially pertaining to the role of a woman in the house and the communication. Those aspects were more, so if there were other areas, like I mentioned earlier, the sex plus other areas she could have brought in that would have made it livelier.”

5.3.7.3 Delays and interruption in programme schedule

Some participants expressed some displeasure with the interruption in the programme schedule leading to rescheduling of meetings which affected the wedding plans of some individuals. Unduly delaying the couple also added to the stress associated with preparing for a wedding.

PCP 4: “I think there were programmes at church too, evening services, revivals and other things. So, we had to reschedule our meetings so many times and I think I remember my engagement day...the day before my engagement, he wanted us to have another class. I told him no; I am preparing for that day. Because I had to try on my dress, go to the seamstress and other things. So, we missed that day.”

PCP 19: "...they said at least three months counselling which means you can go beyond that but when young couples are planning to get married and they delay them more than six (month), over one year, it is frustrating. I don't know why they try do that, I don't know if they are trying to see if the lady is pregnant or not, it is a reason best known to them. But those delays bring frustration because the wedding itself it is a whole lot of pressure and frustration already on them and then delaying it."

5.3.7.4 Challenges with format

Some participants expressed displeasure with some challenges with the format of their premarital counselling. For some they were placed in a counselling group class where they did not get the needed attention. Others also felt their premarital counselling programme was rigid.

PCP 14: "I think in the general session (group session) sometimes it felt a bit rigid, it felt like I was back in the classroom and I was being given a lecture, that is how it felt."

PCP 19: "And I think packing so many young couples together for one counselling too I think I am also against it. Because we were all complaining at a point, we were all discouraged at a point, and we were all bitter at a point."

5.3.7.5 Not having an individual session without partner

This extract shows a clear and strong desire of a counsellee to have some individual sessions without her partner and was displeased for not getting such opportunity.

PCP 10: "I didn't like the fact that we were put together all the time, as in me and my partner because there were things I would have wanted to maybe talk about or learn about but whiles we are all together I wouldn't mention it and I am sure he also wouldn't mention

certain things with me around. It would have been nicer if on some occasions we had met separately either I with the female and he with the male.”

5.3.7.6 Not interacting with experienced couples

A counsellee indicated she would have like to have an experience couple join the counselling to share their experience in addition to what they were being taught by their priest who doesn't have a marital experience.

PCP 23: “And with my Church, let me give an example. The priest does the counselling. With other churches, just as I said you meet other couples, older people and they talk to you. They tell you what they've been through and how marriage is, they open your eyes into the marriage. But with mine, it was only the priest. You know the priest don't get married, right? I'm sure there are some experiences that if we had met an older couple, we would have learnt from their experience, but we didn't get that from him.”

5.3.7.7 Not having resource materials for participants

A counsellee was displeased with not being given a counselling manual. Such materials could be read later by counsellees.

PCP19: “When you go to some church everything is systematic, they have a book for premarital counselling but in my church, I don't think they have... I am not sure they have because if there is any book like that, they should have given it to every young couple going through counselling. At least you can read more on your own and that would have been perfect.”

5.4 Counsellor-related aspect of premarital counselling

Some aspect about the premarital counsellors highlighted by participants includes provider type, counsellors' marital status and the involvement of their spouse in the counselling process, the age range of counsellors and the number of counsellors involved in the programme. Others also evaluated their counsellors' competence and expertise, as well as suggesting the age range of counsellors.

5.4.1 Provider Types

The analyses showed that the counsellors were either priests or pastors, church leaders, church counsellors, professionals (in any relevant field e.g., legal, financial, mental health etc.) and mentor couples.

PCP 15: "So, they all had some kind of experience in whatever they were discussing. So, for example, there was one person...who is an expert in finance. And there was also a lawyer, who has been practicing for many years who came to talk about the legal aspects of marriage. And there was also a clinical psychologist who came to talk about marriage generally, relationship matters. So, there was a doctor who talked about childbirth. So, we had experts."

5.4.2 Number of counsellors

A few couple alone counselling had multiple counsellors handling the programme. Most of the couple-alone counselling had one counsellor.

PCP 25: "We had to meet three counsellors, one an associate pastor and the others are just church counsellors. So, we were supposed to meet the associate pastor for six times. And

we meet with one of the counsellors four times and with the other we were supposed to meet with her twice which we attended once.”

The number of facilitators for the group counselling varied from one assembly to the other with three variations. These are groups with one facilitator, groups with multiple facilitators and personal counsellor on call for private interactions and groups with multiple facilitators and an assigned mentor couple for each participant who shared their experience and knowledge with the couple. Those with multiple facilitators had each facilitator treat a topic or two.

PCP 12: “So, we had several should I say speakers, who took us through various aspects of counselling, and so we didn't have just one person taking us through. So, we had different people, depending on the topic. So maybe we're talking about sex, we have someone come talk to us about sex, if we have something about maybe legal issues, we have a lawyer come talk to us. So, it was departmentalized, if I should put it that way. So, and we had people coming to take us in those various sessions or topics.”

PCP 15: “Then we were (also) assigned, two couples were assigned to one mentor. Uh huh so my husband and I with one other couple were assigned to a couple, a man and his wife. And we had our own sessions at his house. So that's how it was structured.”

5.4.3 Marital status of counsellors and partner involvement

Except for the Catholic priests, majority of premarital counsellors were married. Involvement of their spouses in the counselling process differed from one church to the other. Some participants experience both spouse involvement in the counselling process whereas others only encountered their counsellor.

PCP 12: “All of them are married because almost all of them brought their spouse. Almost all of them brought their spouses, those who didn't made mention of them... they just came around to offer support...some talked, some of them did a presentation with their husband's kind of...they gave the opportunity for their spouses to also make some contributions.”

5.4.4 Age-range of counsellors

The age range for most premarital counsellors in the church settings was mid-40 to mid-50. A few churches had older couples who were over 70 years assist with the premarital counselling

PCP 24: “So, the other two counsellors were educationist. The man would be in his mid-seventies and the woman would be in her early seventies. The woman is a widow now but the wife of the man is still alive. This are older individuals who help the reverend father with the counselling.”

5.4.5 Counsellor expertise

Most participants were of the view that their premarital counsellors were experienced and competent. They indicated the counsellors handled the programme skillfully. Some counsellors were seen to be experienced as a result of the number of years they have counselled would-be couples and also the likelihood that they have received some training.

PCP 1: “From the way the marriage counsellor went about the whole education you could tell that she is very experience and so there were instance she used her marriage as an example and I believe this marriage counsellors are not just selected... they look at their background their experience in their marriage and they set those people aside to engage the up and coming... the youth when they are coming to get married, so they advise them. So, she gave us really good advice.”

PCP 17: “Let me be bias and say that maybe it is the kind of counsellors and tuition I had, I can’t speak for others. Because sometimes the material is there but how it is presented to you can be the challenge.”

5.4.6 Likes about counsellor

5.4.6.1 Interactive and open counsellors

The analysis showed that some behaviour of the counsellors such as being interactive, being open to sharing their personal experience and having a cordial relationship with counselees were seen by some counselees as what they like the most about their premarital counselling experience. Participant 4 stated that “The interaction!! He allowed us to ask questions, he allowed us to talk our minds. He was free with us, so there was no need to hide anything from ourselves (him)”. Another participant shared the following:

PCP 17: “I think what I liked was our counsellors sharing their experiences with us and not just teaching us from the book and just going through lessons by lessons. It was more practical, when we face challenges, the little we learnt from them we have been able to apply. It was more practical, it was husband and wife telling us their life story, how they have applied God’s word in their life, how they have risen above some challenges and how we can also do same, so how to solve conflicts and in our sexual life what to do and all that so it was quite helpful. I mean it is not every day that you would have an older person, a counsellor in church who would be quite open about sex, giving sex tips and all but it was quite open to that extent.”

5.4.7 Dislike about counsellor-related-aspects

Some participants expressed displeasure with some challenges with the counsellor assigned to them. An individual whose group counselling had one group counsellor felt the counsellor did not have enough time for the group. Others also felt their premarital counsellor was rigid and not opened enough.

PCP 19: “Because we were all working, we will close church and will have to go to work, but we will still be waiting to have a counselling and she will come and say it will not come on, I am doing this. It made us feel as if we are playing or we are joking. We see that a lot of young Christian marriage are getting broken and so if we are doing premarital counselling then we should do it well... you see if we were to have more contact with our counsellor, we would have heard more information and that would have been very good.”

PCP 10: “So, like I said he reads to us, depending on whatever he wants to talk about he reads from a book to us. I think it was too shallow it wasn't deep. Looking at that time and now that I am married, I think if there is any teaching to be done it wasn't done, it is just shallow, it is just the surface. You don't really dive into issues so basically that was it. He wasn't also open enough, he was just doing the reading, it wasn't deep enough that is what I will say.”

5.5 Content of premarital counselling

5.5.1 Content currently offered

The topics taught during premarital counselling include, communication, financial management, sexual intimacy, conflict resolution, personality and temperaments, family planning, and parenting, biblical basis for marriage, dealing with the unexpected, extended family, roles and responsibilities, legal aspect of marriage, preparation for marriage and mental health in marriage.

5.5.1.1 Communication

The findings indicates that participants learn about communication during premarital counselling. Counselees were taught the importance of being open and transparent with one another, listening to each other and how communication can be used in reaching a compromise and coming into an agreement. Participant 4 stated that “communication he taught us that, anything you do your partner should know. No matter how good or bad it is, even if you want to surprise your partner he must know”. Another participant also shared the following:

PCP28: “It was one of the key things that the bishop spoke about, because if you don’t communicate then it means the relationship is not working. For a relationship to work it takes two...There were instances that he asked us practically what do we communicate about, what we communicate about during the week.”

5.5.1.2 Financial management

A common topic treated during premarital counselling in Christian setting is finance. The teaching on financial management revolved around being open about one’s finance, being supportive of each other, frugality, having either a joint or a separate account, preparing monthly budget and savings.

With regards to managing the couple’s finances most counsellors did not dictate to their counselees but rather presented to them the various options and modalities available and encourage them to choose the path that best suits them. The couples had the prerogative to choose whether they want to have a joint or individual accounts. However, most participants were encouraged to have a joint account.

PCP 9: “We spoke about money, having either joint account you know. We spoke about contribution of the couple to a family fund, that is if you decide to go with that. I think

essentially what she was teaching us was, it depends on what will work for you. So, for the finance, I remember her saying that finance is one of the things that can sometimes negatively affect marriages so if we don't want our marriage to have issues one of the things we should talk about is how to manage money in the family or in the marriage. So that was when she now took us through how some people would contribute equally or some people would say, one person would handle this and the other would handle this. We just looked at the various modalities that she knows. But at the end of it all, it's what you people would want."

Some participants were educated on how to prepare budgets, importance of saving and ways to better manage their finances

PCP17: "One thing we were taught was to prepare our monthly finances or have a budget for everything that you do. We all know how much we earn in a month; you know that each partner is bringing this and we are using this for that. It helps in the marriage. Also, another thing we learnt on the finances is trying to get things in bulk rather than buying as and when you see something. Obviously buying in bulk helps you to save some of the money for things you would need later on."

PCP 21: "One of the things he talked about was saving, developing a very good habit of saving and then another thing he talked about was expenditure. Trying to keep your expenditure at every level. He set an example that starting life as a marriage don't try to buy a car that will consume fuel like someone who is already established in life, because you are now starting so you don't try to compare your present state with someone who has really gone ahead otherwise you might end up in a lot of debt and having your expenditure

exceed your income. So, he talked about the moderation of your expenditure and then income and trying to save.”

The following transcript extracts show how some counselees were encouraged to be open about their finances and not to hide their income from their partners. Some participants were also taught on being supportive of each other to embark on projects and through difficult financial challenges and how to support the extended family members so they don't consistently depend on the couple.

PCP 40: “We should be able to be open with our finances not to hide stuffs, it is not bad I mean some people have different views like they would not let their partner know how much they take, on their finances, what they have and all that but I think they advise us that it is okay for you to, for the two of you to know how much you are getting.”

PCP4: “He said, if families are always worrying you and coming in the marriage with money and other issues. He cited an example that is your husband's brother is well equipped or at least he can't do something beneficial and is always worrying you with money issues, you can set up business for him so that he leaves your husband and family alone. He taught us a lot; he taught us a lot about finances.”

5.5.1.3 Sexual intimacy

Participants indicated treating the subject of sexual intimacy with a few indicating not receiving any tuition on sex. Most of the participants indicated they received inadequate information on sexual intimacy with most of the sparse information participants received revolving around not denying a partner sexual pleasure and sexual intimacy helping resolve conflict and reducing tension. Participant 13 indicated “I learnt that when you get married the body is no longer

yours even if you're sick or when you are quarreling you shouldn't deny each other". Other participants also shared the following:

PCP 21: "I think one of the things we laughed about that day and we continued to laugh about was his suggestion that he wished every couple would have the student bed, the single sized bed for every couple for the initial stages so that both of you would be on that bed. And I think that also comes into the conflict resolution part so that when you go and sleep, even when you are fighting your bodies would still touch each other, you still end up communicating."

Other issues highlighted about sexual intimacy includes what the couple would do if they realized their partners were impotent and the importance of women initiating sexual intimacy.

PCP 23: "He made mention of always the men being the ones to make the move and it shouldn't always be so. It could be the other way round. I remember one lady asked a question that, you see with the kind of society that we're in if you're a lady that you're always doing that you are seen as spoilt or naughty. And the priest was like no, it's a marriage, you and your husband and there's nothing naughty about it. So, the lady can also do that."

5.5.1.4 Extended family relationship

The following extracts are interesting examples of how participants were taught the important role the extended family places in the marriage, how to love your partners family and seeing the extended families of both partners as a single unit.

PCP4: "I think with the family too he said, if you love your wife, you must love her family. Once he wanted to marry you, he went to your family."

PCP 40: “The family... you and your partner that is your immediate family, both sides family ...the extended family, your family from your wife side and your own family now all of you are going to be like a family.”

Some couples were encouraged not to involve the extended family in every minute details of their marriage.

PCP 10: “With extended family we talked about the fact that we are not supposed to allow our parents to be too involved in our marriages and then too we were living... he had built his own house on his parent’s land and they were also close by, so we talked about that issue, as to whether to remain there or to move, that is to rent that house out and go and rent another one, I remember that very well. So that was also discussed.”

5.5.1.5 Personality traits and temperaments

Majority of counselees indicated treating personality traits and temperament. The analysis showed that the subject of personality traits helped couples to know themselves better as well as have better knowledge of their partner. This knowledge of their strengths and weakness helps them to know how to better live with each other by accepting their individual differences.

PCP 12: “We were taken through personality...identifying our various personalities, and how to live with those personalities, because we're all coming from different backgrounds, and we all have different personalities. Sometimes we don't even know ourselves and we tend to bump heads when we enter into the marriage. But then we were taken through this session where you will know yourself, know your personality traits, know your weaknesses, know your strengths, understand yourself and then you need to understand your partner also. And then we come together with our findings, we go through them, and

then we try to know ourselves better. So, my findings I give to my wife, or my partner at that time, and she also gives hers to me. And so, I know what her personality traits are, what are her strengths, what her weaknesses are and all that.”

PCP 40: “So, the temperament will let you know that each and every one of you have a certain way of responding to something. It would be that your partner would like to be indoors to read books, to listen to music, you will see that that the other person may also love to watch movies, not so open with people but that is how he is, when you are outside, he will not talk too much, he likes to... he is kind of reserved, they talked about introvert and extrovert and all that. So, you would get to know who the person is and how you get to relate to the person, so basically that was how the temperament topic went about.”

5.5.1.6 Conflict Resolution

The analysis showed that the counsellors highlighted the inevitability of anger, conflicts, arguments and frustration in marriage and instructed the couple on how to resolve conflicts. Some of the conflict resolution skills taught were not holding on to grudges, identifying appropriate time to bring up issues and acceptance

PCP 35: “One thing they said about conflict resolution was that you shouldn’t really sleep over our anger, like you must try and resolve it before the following day. Before you even go to bed, try and resolve it. So, they were also encouraging us to pray together, at least if we did that and it became a norm or a custom it became easier with conflict resolution. If you do things togetherin terms of if you are going to God you have to ensure that you have a clean heart so that will push you to resolve the conflict before you go to God together.”

PCP 16: “It got to a point I noticed my fiancé then had mood swings at odd times, I was made to understand that as human as he is he would have mood swings because he is not a superman. And when he is having a mood swing that might not be the appropriate time to come up with a problem or something he has actually done. So, you want to resolve a conflict maybe after a heated argument, you should be able to study your partners mood. So, conflict resolution would have to be based on the mood of your partner, you will consider your partners mood, when to say it, how to say it and then coming up with a solution.”

5.5.1.7 Family planning and parenting

Counsellors indicated being taught on family planning, childbearing and parenting. The next two transcript extract shows that some couples were instructed on issues of childbearing, family planning and parenting.

PCP 9: “Yeah, and we spoke about children. Talking about the number of children we want to have before we even start out and when we want to start having children.”

PCP 35: “Oh, we spoke about a lot of things but I remember we did family planning, we went through all the various categories of family planning. We also did parenting.”

5.5.1.8 Roles and responsibility

The analysis shows that the focus of premarital counselling on roles and responsibilities revolve around role expectations and the culturally and biblically assigned roles for men and women in marriage. Some counsellors also inquire about the expectations of responsibilities the partners had of each other.

PCP 10: “So, with the responsibilities for example he asked each of us what you were expecting from each other. So, when I mentioned what I'm expecting from him as a

husband that you provide shelter and then inside the house he will do the manly things like fixing bulbs and those kinds of things. Then he also said he expects me to do the domestic chores, cooking, cleaning, keeping the home, taking care of the children.”

5.5.1.9 Biblical basis

Some participants indicated their premarital counselling included biblical teaching on marriage, using some bible characters and some church doctrines.

PCP 1: “Then we proceed with a bible text, a text from the bible pertaining to marriage and then based on that text she begins to do her explanation and goes on and on and on. So, after that the following week when we come back, she will ask a few questions about the previous meeting...what we remember and all of that. So, after that, she gave us a whole lot of examples from the bible that we can relate to our marriage life when you are into the marriage. She would take instances in bible pertaining to Rachael, Jacob a lot of examples that she used from the bible. She will quote the verse and based on that she will do the explanation.”

PCP 40: “We treated a lot, because we had it in the catholic church at a point, they had to introduce some of the Catholic stuffs, we had to say ‘hail Mary’ and all those things. And at a point we had to break, October is a rosary month for Catholics and so for that whole period when you go for the premarital counselling, they would break for you to join the Catholic church (service), they had some rosary something they do, yeah so it was part of it, so it was a nice experience.”

5.5.1.10 Legal aspect of marriage

The findings revealed two churches who treat the legal aspect of marriage. They consider what made marriages legally binding and what made a marriage null and void. Participant 15 stated that a counsellor “talk about the legal aspects of marriage”. Another participant shared the following:

PCP 12: “We had the legal aspect of marriage...what makes, what defines marriage in the context of our constitution and all that, so we were taken through the customary, the ordinance, the Islamic marriage and all that, and what institutes marriage, what makes it legal, it's not as if you just go...go to any church, and you get together on a Sunday, if the person (officiating minister) is not gazetted, if the place (church premises) is not gazetted in our laws you've not had marriage. And there are other things, other nuances to it. Yeah, if you are already married traditionally or even ordinance and you go and marry again, that marriage is null and void... the second one is null and void because you already married.”

5.5.1.11 Mental health in marriage

Three counsellors from the same branch/assembly of a particular charismatic church indicated having a mental health professional who addressed the importance of mental health in marriage.

PCP 12: “Yes, we had someone who was like in that field also come talk to us about it and mental health issues in marriages and all...So we were taken through those things also. Mental health, and how to maintain a good mental health in a marriage.”

5.5.2 Desired topics

Although participants indicated treating a myriad of subjects some participants shared some topics, they wished they had received more information on. Some of these subjects include sexual intimacy, parenting, communication, marital expectations, cooperation in marriage, transparency in marriage, the “realities of marriage”, conflict resolution, dealing with family and friends and the legal aspect of marriage. These participants see these subjects as important themes which might not have been treated at all during their premarital counselling or they may have received some information on them but feel what they were taught was inadequate which makes them ill prepared for some current issues they are facing in their relationship.

5.5.2.1 Sex

Some participants indicated they wished they had received information on sexual intimacy. Specifically, they wished they discussed sexual expectations, sexual skills and providing some form of bibliotherapy.

PCP 9: “One thing I know we didn’t really talk about is sex. It wasn’t really part of the discussion, well, I really wished that we had spoken about sex. I don’t know why we didn’t speak about it, maybe because she is old and shy (laughs)...What I would expect them to talk about is the couple’s expectations of sex. Because looking back I’m thinking that if I knew that maybe my husband is someone who likes sex or does not like sex, then you the woman coming into the marriage you know where you are standing, maybe your sexual preferences, you know those kinds of things. But not having the discussion openly either between yourself or during counselling. You know counseling is supposed to help you at least cement some of these things or at least that’s what I think, ahahn , but if the topic does not come up you really probably would not also talk about it.”

PCP 14: “For the session on sexual intimacy, I felt like I needed more details because as some who that time is going to be her first time, I don’t know what to expect, I don’t want to go there with unrealistic expectation, because I have friends who also recently got married and they were like no it wasn’t a joke... So, for my counselling just speaking on sexual health, I was like okay so what next (laughs). You have given me information about how to keep myself but I think I need a bit more details on how to please my partner. Because I have heard a lot of things out there from the world so I was hoping that the church would provide me with something a bit more so that I don’t go out of bounds.”

5.5.2.2 Parenting

Some participants indicated that considering their current marital situation they wish they had heard more on parenting or paid much attention during their discussion on parenting. Some participants expressed their openness to receive additional information on parenting while they are married. Participant 22 when asked about topics she wished she had more information on had this to say, “ haii!! that parenting is not easy! having a baby is not easy! pregnancy changes (everything)...when we married and I got pregnant, I was like, what!!! what is this”. Other participants also shared the following:

PCP 40: “Parenting, yes!! Parenting, you know honestly when it got to that topic I was not so much interested, I was like ahh we want to get married why are they talking about parenting but until we got into the marriage then I realized that charley this people they have seen something and they were telling us but at that time you would want to get married and go and enjoy your wife, so parenting I was like, but now I can feel it , if I had the opportunity now I would go back and listen to the parenting side.”

PCP 21: “My wife keeps on saying and especially when the kids came “they didn’t tell you that the kids will disrupt your life” (laughs). I mean they talked about parenting but there wasn’t an in-depth session into parenting. So possibly if we had the opportunity of getting to know more about the dynamics of raising children, maybe we would have had more shock absorbers compared to now because they are so many things, like even your sexual life is greatly affected by the introduction of the kids because you can get very busy and when both of you think, oh this is the right time to relax and be together you will hear the baby crying. Like life changes.”

5.5.2.3 Communication

Communication was also a subject some individuals wished they had learnt during premarital counselling. Learning more on communication would have made it easier for couples to resolve some issues they face.

PCP 35: “Personally, right now I will say communication because I really don't remember what we spoke about communication. I don't know whether that class I missed it or what because it's one of the major issues we are having in our relationship right now. Even though we try to look for ways of resolving it. I think if we had a better understanding of how communication works it would have been easier.”

5.5.2.4 The “realities of marriage”

Some counsellees wished their premarital counselling was down to earth and practical, focusing on some pragmatic issues couples face in marriage.

PCP 10: “I think I would have loved to really know what marriage entails. I mean, the real issues in the marriage. I was thinking he would be with his partner and they will talk about

real things that happens in marriage. Not that they should come and tell us everything but at least you are there with your partner and then we will know that this is real, not from the book. Okay so for instance sex, this is how it is, this is how it goes, you try different ...like I just wanted something practical instead of the book thing. So, it will have been nicer if he had come with his wife, his wife would have shared something. That one is real. Or other couples could have come in and then really talk about the real issues happening.”

PCP 8: “That’s why I am saying the reality. People should be informed on the reality on the ground. You don’t get married and you expect that you will get...okay, you let’s take it that after a year you are not getting pregnant then what? You were not sensitized enough, you were not given much information about the unforeseen future, so you are desperate...If you are told that when you get married there is a possibility that you won’t give birth, but you have to keep calm and explore all avenue such as going to the hospital, go and see the doctor. It is a gradual process. You pray but you don’t focus all the thing on prayers-prayers...God-will-do... Some things are medical stuffs.”

5.5.2.5 Marital expectations

A few counselees wished their counselling addressed marital expectations. The next transcript extract depicts a participants wish that the premarital counselling platform was used to discussed some marital expectations.

PCP 9: “I wish we had spoken about some of the expectations, early expectations. You know about the very first months and weeks of marriage was very difficult because it was not something that I ever thought about or you know, staying with somebody from a different background. I was thinking, I am thinking from where I sit now that, during premarital counseling some of these expectations should be discussed. You know, like the

couple should be asked to talk about the expectations they have of their spouses when they get married in terms of maybe, housekeeping, that is keeping the house, caring for certain things. Yes, because we didn't really have the conversation and suddenly it's being dropped on you and it was a bit of confusion that we faced.”

5.5.2.6 Corporation in marriage

Corporation in marriage is one subject a participant wished was treated during premarital counselling. Having this understanding is likely to reduce some conflicts in marriage.

PCP 23: “I think they should talk about marriages too. In a marriage, like helping each other to achieve what, we all have our achievements but we have to work towards one goal. Yea, because what they say is “the two shall be one”. You help me grow as I help you grow. There shouldn't be selfishness in marriage. They should talk about that one too. Because when we talked about let's say if, as I said earlier, I said if having babies is one's priority, and another's priority may be another thing and it may cause some kind of conflict in the marriage. Because everybody is pursuing their own interests without thinking about what the other person feels.”

5.5.2.7 Transparency in marriage

Transparency was a theme some participants wished was treated during premarital counselling. Being taught and practicing this would foster trust and reduces suspicions in the marriage relationship.

PCP 4: “Transparency because there are certain things when your partner is doing you will think he is trying to hide things from you. So, when there is transparency, you clear your mind off those things. Especially when your husband is secretive and he is not the talking

type, you are always suspicious. But when there is transparency, you know that he is going here, he is going to do this, he is going to do that. So, I think the counsellors should hit on transparency in marriage, that no matter how bad the issue is they should confide in their partners.”

5.5.2.8 Conflict resolution

It is essential premarital counsellors teach on conflict resolution due to the likelihood of the couple’s individual differences bringing about some friction in the relationship.

PCP 10: “Yeah, something like conflict resolution I think I would have loved to hear something on that because two people from different places coming together it's not going to be smooth by all means there would be hitches some way. I think I would have loved to hear something on that topic.”

5.5.2.9 Dealing with family and friends

Some participants wished they were informed on how to deal with friends and family when they are married. Some participants emphasized the need to know how to make ones partner their best friend and also knowing how well to deal with the extended family when it comes to issues with their marriage.

PCP 23: “I wish he talked about friendship in marriage. Like, after marriage how you deal with your friends. Like after marriage you cut off some friendships, for example you’re married and you still have this boys-boys kind of thing I think counsellors in general should talk about that because it’s really worrying ...And dealing with family in marriage. Like maybe your spouse’s family, how you relate to them in their marriage. For example, if my husband likes my family, fine. But if everything we talk about, he would have to call my

mom or maybe my grand mum to discuss with him or her without me knowing about it, I feel it's wrong. Because when the family comes in, one person becomes the bad one and it doesn't help the marriage.”

5.5.2.10 Legal aspect of marriage

The next extract reveals a counsellee's desire to know more about the legal aspect of marriage and in relation to divorce.

PCP 7: “I think the legal aspect of marriage, he was not good in that. He didn't explain it, that assuming there is divorce what will happened. So maybe I think the legal aspect of marriage.”

5.5.3 Likes about content

The findings showed some counsellees like of their premarital counselling experience revolves around the content of the programme. Such likes include offering biblical support for claims made, offering rich content, instruction on financial management, instruction on acceptance and instructions on property acquisition.

5.5.3.1 Rich content

The analysis showed that some participants were pleased with the fact that the content of their premarital counselling programme covered a wide range of subjects and was presented in a practical and down to earth manner.

PCP 12: “The content was very rich. It wasn't just one way...people just coming to say that... dump a bunch of scriptures on you and say that eii this and this and this....it was very practical. Even though it was a church, it wasn't just the normal, how do we say,

church kind of (pause) people come and just dump scriptures on you and just leave. It was very rich, the contents. And we covered a lot of areas. So, it was very rich for me, the content.”

5.5.3.2 Biblical support

The findings suggests that some participants were pleased that their premarital counsellors supported their claims with biblical text indicating that such examples serve as reference materials they can go back to in future.

PCP 1: “I liked the fact that she was able to always buttress a point with instances in the bible, which you know you can always go back and make reference to. Many a times we jotted down a few points and some bible quotation that you could always go back and read in case you have forgotten. Because I know a lot of people go through this premarital counselling and they turn to forget everything they are being told, so if you are able to buttress your points with these quotations and you write them down, you can always make reference to it. And that was what she did and I liked it.”

5.5.3.3 Instruction on finance

What stood out for some participants is the instruction they received on how to manage their finances through a monthly budget and also having a joint account.

PCP 12: “My stand out session was the financial management. That's what for me, was my, I think that will be one of my, if I will say saving graces. Especially with our mentor because he taught us was... if we can keep our finances together, we know what we all have, it helps to solve the major part of our marital issues. I think that was a divine instruction that was given to us.... How to budget...he gave us an assignment to come together as a to-be-couple... and draw a monthly budget. Our expenditure and our income,

and then find whether there's a surplus, or there's a deficit and how to tweak...so that there will be a surplus.... you realized that it would have been a huge issue in our marriage if we hadn't confronted it. Because she was earning more than I was... when we drew the budget, (laughs), basically it was her money going more into it.”

5.5.3.4 Instruction on acceptance

A participant was pleased with the guidance they receive on accepting each other. Participant 7 stated that “one thing I liked is that we were told that sometimes we should be able to accept each other’s fault and cope”.

5.5.3.5 Instruction on property acquisition

Treating how to safely and properly acquire properties was seen by a counsellee as something that was exceptional about their premarital counselling experience.

PCP 9: “The whole process that stood out for me was the sessions we had with the lawyer, on property acquisition, because it is very important. It made us start thinking very early in the marriage, how to set ourselves apart at least to acquire something and doing it in the right way so that people don’t take advantage and then just take your money and then you don’t see them again.”

5.6 Usefulness of Premarital Counselling Programme

The analysis showed that most participants felt their premarital counselling has been of great help to their marriage. Counsellees indicated that premarital counselling is seen as helpful in some specific areas of their marriage. Also, participants indicated that their premarital counselling experience helps them generally deal with some common and recurrent challenges they experience

in their relationship. In addition, premarital counselling offers some key benefits such as contributing towards the couple's marriage satisfaction, help improve their help-seeking behaviour and reducing the odds of divorce. Contrary to some public opinion and some participants preconceived perception about premarital counselling, their experience proves to them that premarital counselling is an important foundation for marriage.

PCP 16: "Before I even got married, before I even started premarital counselling a lot of people said this thing, you go there, it is not really important and maybe I think, it was how theirs was handled. But for me, I think it's important for you to go through premarital counselling. It's key, I dare say that it is key to the success of every marriage. If you don't have proper premarital counselling your marriage will suffer."

5.6.1 Specific areas of helpfulness

Results showed that premarital counselling has helped counselees in better handling their finances, improved communication, help in resolving conflicts, help in dealing with major issues before marriage, improve sexual intimacy, knowing and accepting each other, mentally prepare couple for some issues in marriage, better handling the extended family, helpful in property acquisition, helpful in managing expectations, help serve as a check on each other, help have periodic evaluation of the marriage, helped in knowing parental roles and learning how to get information from one's partner.

5.6.1.1 Dealing with major issues before marriage

Some participants indicated their premarital counselling helped them overcome some huddles even before their marriage begun. This helped them to start the marriage on the right footing and foundation. Some of the issues couples had to deal with before entering into marriage

included dealing with finances and opening up about past life events. Themes from the premarital counselling also served as talking point for some couple which helped in dealing with some issues before marriage.

PCP 12: “So, I think yeah, that's how it's benefited me in the sense that the major huddles were overcame, yeah. Before the marriage itself we went over those huddles before the marriage. And so, it was smooth, it was smooth. We didn't have to fight any demon in the marriage. We already dealt with that issue. We've gone through the emotions. We've gone through the psyching up and all that so now you know that this is what you have.”

PCP 15: “So, I think yeah and that's one thing that the counselling also helped, the fact that we were able to disclose to each other weaknesses or past and all that. It helped each other to go through that healing process to be able to make an informed position, informed decision as to whether to go ahead with a marriage. So, you know, as Christians, we don't advocate for divorce so it's better you end the relationship than to divorce. And so, I think that opportunity also, given to that partner, would inform the person whether to pull the plugs, right there, as for that one you haven't married, so that one there is no issue. So, I think that's the help.”

5.6.1.2 Mentally prepare couple for some issues in marriage

The following transcript extract shows how a participant expressed the help premarital counselling gave them by exposing and mentally preparing them for some issues they were bound to face in marriage. These issues included parenting and family planning. This information helped take away any shock that they would have experienced.

PCP 35: “Oh, it opens your eyes to your expectations because marriage is something you haven't really entered into before. So at least it makes you get to know certain things you ought to expect and know...Basically, I think it just opens your eyes to certain things you have to know. Because before you get married, you're so young, you don't know what is in it. So, at least when they bring you the topics... you discuss, you become aware like for instance family planning, already you haven't even started having sex and they are talking about pregnancy and all those things. So at least it makes you know certain things that you would see, expect and engage then you are informed and you know what to do.”

5.6.1.3 Helpful in handling finances

Some counselees indicated they have received immense benefit in the area of their finances as a result of the information they received from premarital counselling. The counselling on finance has helped couples with issues regarding budgeting and planning their expenditure, supporting each other, savings and being open about their finances. Participant 40 stated that “finances, my wife is very supportive, she has been very supportive... during the counselling process we learnt about all these things, how to support your husband”. Other participants shared the following:

PCP 17: “It has helped us in the area of our finances, like buying things in bulk, we have a budget for each month, and we have agreed on who is contributing what, so basically every month we have a contribution each person makes to the house, it is not as and when you need something that you try to put things together. So, planning and it has been helpful because they made us understand that yes the money would come but just come into an agreement on how much you are putting aside each month, so specifically what is going for this, what is doing what, are we saving some, what exactly are we doing.”

PCP14: “I know men they don’t always want to open about their finances...maybe it is because one person earns more than the other so talking about your finance will be like ‘oh my God, my girlfriend earns more than me”, so I feel it was a bit of a touchy subject we did speak about it .So the premarital counselling helped it, made it easier for us to talk about it because I think initially I tried to bring up that subject and it didn’t end well but after that session I think he also understood that it is important that we speak about it, and we address it, and figure out how to go about it.”

5.6.1.4 Helps in resolving conflict

The analysis shows that some couples held the view that their premarital counselling helps them in resolving conflicts in their marriage by teaching them not to hold grudges, learning the importance of apologizing, teaching them proper and respectful ways of dealing with disputes such as not using abusive words, listening to each other and not raising one’s voices. PCP 7 stated that “sometimes we do offend each other but we do apologize, so we apply that thing”. Other participants shared the following:

PCP 12: “So, conflict resolution has really helped us in the sense that throughout our issues, there are certain boundaries you don't cross and even when you're crossing you are checked. So, we've come into contact with other people where arguments were like, war scenarios, nobody is listening to anybody, everyone is saying their thing. It's not civil. But for us, we have a very civil way of arguing. We might be in the same house, but you might not even see that we are arguing...we don't raise our voice. And so, when your voice is going above a certain point your partner will prompt you then you response “okay, okay, fine” ...and no abusive words and there's no disrespect. So even though you feel like this is the

appropriate word to use, no. As long as it's going to be disrespectful, you have to find a way of using a better word.”

PCP 17: “It’s been helpful. Every now and then you would remember lessons you have learnt and how usually you can solve it and then you apply it. So, there are times that conflicts arise and we go like okay how are we going to go about it, okay you cool off a bit, after you cool off we would discuss it. So, we later come together and discuss then we ask what didn’t we like and each party might say I didn’t like this, I didn’t like that, so what is the way forward.”

5.6.1.5 Improved communication

Participants noted that the premarital counselling on communication has helped them to better communicate with their partners. Some individuals were taught the importance of being open to each whereas others learnt how to understand themselves and their partner well. This helped in how they communicate with each other. Participant 7 stated that “I am naturally the quiet type and my wife disturbs a lot and sometimes I feel like being quiet but so far as she starts talking, I have to engage her, so it has been useful to us, it made me understand her that, that is her behaviour”. Another counsellee shared the following:

PCP14: “I think communication again was another topic that has helped us, because I might talk a lot but when I have to communicate effectively about a particular thing, I realize that I struggle a bit, or I will just be like “you forget it”. But after that session we understood the importance of it, the right attitude to have during that time. So, when I have a problem or I don’t understand something, instead of shying away I have learnt to...maybe not in the moment but later on address the topic and be like “okay I don’t get this, please explain it a

bit better”. So that has helped us a lot till now, because we are not too good at it, that has really been helpful.”

5.6.1.6 Improved sexual intimacy

The analysis showed that addressing the subject of sexual intimacy helped some participants have much information on how to be sexually expressive. Others also indicated that premarital counselling showed them the role of sexual relationship in reducing tension.

PCP 12: “Sexual intimacy, it helped. As Christians sometimes we feel like oh sex is not an area we should go there and sometimes we are a bit moderate in our sexual expressions. But the counselling taught us to go all out, sex is sex, God created it, it is a nice thing. And so, if God created it, it is good. And so be expressive, whatever you want to do in the bedroom to spice up your sex life is allowed, it is something that you need to do, you shouldn't hold back, you shouldn't feel guilty about anything in the bedroom. So that awareness also helped, it gave us more confidence to go all out. And then try everything, as long as it is not perverse and it is not dangerous...as Christians, we should be expressive sexually also. It's not carnal, it's also spiritual. And it helps to enrich the relationship.”

PCP 40: “For sex whatever we got from the program kind of buttress whatever we experience (in marriage) and it is true because you know when tensions are high sometimes some issues you would talk over and over but to no avail but after you have sex you will feel that the communication is flowing and things that were too hard and difficult before now you flow, it brings tempers down.”

5.6.1.7 Knowing and accepting each other

Some participants indicated that some usefulness of their premarital counselling programme was helping them learn about their partners better and learning how to cope with one another. Past experience, individual traits and uniqueness were brought to the fore and partners learnt to grow to accept each other. Having the understanding that they are from different backgrounds also helps foster acceptance.

PCP 14: “Love languages because we spoke about that during our counselling, so love languages, that has really helped us in our relationships a lot, so I think initially, right now it is much better, initially I didn’t really understand his character and his love language but after the counselling we both realized how important that was, so I understand him much better now so that has reduced the arguments considerably.”

PCP 23: “I would say I learned from it was where I was told that we are from different backgrounds and that we should be able to cope with certain behaviors. I think I learned something from that side. It helped me and it’s still helping me because whenever something happens and I have to react that particular statement that we are from different backgrounds and so we have to learn to cope comes in mind and I behave myself.”

5.6.1.8 Better handling the extended family

The findings highlighted the fact that the premarital counselling helps some participants to better relate with the extended family. Couples were taught to be accommodating of relatives of each partner and relate with them with tact. They also encourage couples to learn to be independent and make their own decisions rather than relying on the extended family.

PCP 40: “Like your wife family becomes your family those things I didn’t know... You know this side where we are, we are Africans... you marry into a family, their family

becomes part of you, so your wife's brother would love to come and visit, your other people would come and visit, they talked about all these things, your other family would come, your wife's relatives would also come. So, when they come you should know how to stay with them and manage them because marrying your wife is like you have married the whole family. For examples, when your mother in-law comes there should be some kind of respect for your mother in-law. Even if she is doing something you don't like you can't just go say it straight to her face, you have to pass it through your wife...so I learnt that thing from the premarital counselling and it has really helped me.”

PCP 17: “One thing we learnt is that the marriage is mainly the two of you...I think there are instances my husband and I had agreed to do something and the external family thinks that we should do otherwise but we have been firm because it is the two of us, we are making decisions for our family and we had to be firm and not let external family sway our decisions. We both wanted our girl to start school early but the family thought otherwise, but we knew the benefit, so we were firm. They said we should “leave to cleave” (laugh) so we are making our own decisions. Now looking back, they are all saying it was good you made her start early. We learnt that we have to learn to trust each other and make decisions for our family and not always have external family give us input as to what they think is best for us.”

5.6.1.9 Helpful in managing expectation

Premarital counselling helps couple manage as well as better communicate their expectations. Participant 17 stated that “my counselling helped with how to manage my expectations and communicate my expectations”. Another participant also shared the following:

PCP 15: “So, one, it helped my partner and I to manage our expectations such that. Like I told you earlier on we were told to write down our expectations. What do you expect of me, what do I expect of you and are we able to meet those expectations? I know, what can we do to make it better.”

5.6.1.10 Helpful in property acquisition

The next transcript extract shows how a counsellee emphasized how she has benefited greatly from the teaching she received on property acquisition.

PCP 9: “But she did give us some good input...I remember she had a session with us with an old lawyer to help us with property acquisition and issues around that. Yeah, so we discussed something like that yeah. That was one of the very beneficial sessions we had with her... one of the things that has helped very much is that session we had with her with the lawyer, it was good, it was about property acquisition, land. It was mostly land. Because I think the lawyer is a land lawyer.”

5.6.1.11 How to get information from your partner

Results suggest that premarital counselling was helpful in assisting a counsellee learn how to get information from their partners.

PCP 4: “So, he taught my husband how to get information from your wife and when to get vital information from your wife, not when your wife is stressed, not when your wife is busy in the kitchen, not when your wife is moody that is where you are you coming to ask, “yesterday a friend said she saw you”. NO!! you should know the mood the person is in before if you want to get any information from him you can get from him or her.”

5.6.1.12 A check on each other

The analysis showed that partners reminded each other of what they had learnt during their premarital counselling. Also, some information they got from their premarital counselling programme became rules they live by which served as a check on their marriage.

PCP 10: “I think since both of us were there once a while...because we went together, we remind each other that “this is what they said ooh and look at what we are doing” or “look at what you are doing, is that what they taught you”. So, in a way he was there when the counsellor was telling me something and I was also there when they were telling him something so at least I can remind him that “this is what was said ow, but why are you doing something different’. So, in a way it helped us check each other, when we are going off, we tell ourselves this is what they taught you.”

PCP 11: “The premarital counselling served as a check and then some of the things that we learnt became part of our rules in marriage, for instance “as for us we don’t hold on to grudges, when the issue comes and we talk about it that is it then we let go”, “I have to respect my partner” etc. it became a check and it trained me.”

5.6.1.13 Parental roles

This extract shows how a lady who grew up in a single parent household learnt about the role of a father and husband in marriage.

PCP 4: “It has been really helpful. Because me for instance personally I didn’t stay with my father. I stayed with my grandmother so knowing how to leave with a man as the head of the family I didn’t enjoy that opportunity. Because my mom was a single mother so I didn’t enjoy that opportunity. But he (the counsellor) highlighted a lot of things to me, the role of the father in marriage, the role of the of the husband in marriage, a lot. So, I think

this premarital counselling has helped me so much, in my circumstance it has really helped me.”

5.6.1.14 Helped have periodic evaluation of the marriage

Premarital counselling guided a couple to engage in periodic evaluation of their marriage. This periodic evaluation has helped their marriage greatly.

PCP 17: “We use to do this thing where we sort of had an evaluation for our marriage. Okay so six months how has it been so far, what did we do wrong. We use to do that because we learnt that it is good to do evaluation session, because it is marriage and you are trying to make it work, so what didn’t work let’s say in the last six month what can we do better, how can we change things. So, it has been helpful.”

5.6.2 Help in handling common challenges in marriage

The analysis showed some common challenges couples face and how their premarital counselling helps them deal with those challenges. Every relationship may encounter one challenge or the other and participant of premarital counselling in Christian settings are no exception. However, some participants indicated that their premarital counselling assisted them in dealing with some common challenges they faced in their marriage. This can be seen as key usefulness of premarital counselling in Christian settings in Ghana.

5.6.2.1 Common challenges in marriage

Some common challenges experienced by the couples include, raising children, issues on expenditure, personality and individual differences, mundane activities, phone and social media usage, temper issues, relating to the opposite sex, childbearing and expectations. Paying attention to some of these common issues couple face during premarital counselling could lead to a much

greater benefit. Raising children was a source of some common challenges couples faced. Making decision for the children often comes with its own disagreements and challenges. Participant 9 states that “as for disagreements, you know they are a lot, we've had disagreements about which schools the children should attend”. The findings also suggest that some mundane activities and decisions such as what food to eat or how best to use the toothpaste can be a source of conflict and disagreement among couples. The following are sample quotes of some common challenges:

PCP7: “I have two kids and sometimes I feel that we should give them some hard training small, but she doesn't like that. Sometime you feel that this thing, they should be beaten, she will say no, no. These are some of the things, sometimes I don't get it, it makes me annoyed but at the end of the day I will overlook or relax and allow her to deal with it her own way.”

PCP 12: “I think it's basically how we do our things. The way we think, and the way we process information, the way we do our things...also it's all about interests. Some of the places, some of the issues that have come up... the reasons why we have argued basically interests and gender also plays a very huge part. Women want to do their thing this way you also want to do yours that way. So, I think that's it, the arguments we've had been has been on those lines. Yeah. gender differences and personality traits. Yeah, you want it done this way she wants it done this way.”

PCP 9: “We've had disagreements about...even how somebody is misusing the toothpaste, we've had disagreements about that (laughs), even this morning we've had disagreements about toothpaste, I used it and I didn't cover it, “why didn't you cover it” you know, as for disagreements, they are common and they come almost every day.”

5.6.2.2 Ways premarital counselling help in dealing with some common marital challenges

Most participants indicated their premarital counselling has helped them handle the challenges they face in their marriage. These include helping the couple effectively address issues, learning to apologize, learning to communicate, being patient with one another, learning to adjust and accommodate one another, managing and communicating expectations, better knowledge of partner and handling household chores.

Learning how to effectively deal with issues during premarital counselling helps couples to deal with some of the common marital challenges they face. Learning communication is essential in helping couples deal with some disagreement and better handle some daily issues and responsibilities such as household chores. It helps couples to learn how to talk to each other with respect. Learning how to apologize was a tool some participants received that helps them deal with some challenges they face in their marriage. The following are sample quotes:

PCP 8: “But the premarital counselling comes in bits and pieces because for instance we were told to relax and deal with every situation as and when it come, you shouldn’t flare-up, when you are having difficulty sit down and discuss. So, these bits and pieces comes together somehow. And you try to control...if it is temper control and try and think and make sure you deal with the situation at hand.”

PCP 7: “That is communication, that is key. So far us you are able to talk to your wife and maybe she giving the reason why this particular time she wants to cook this food and maybe you just adjust to it, so communication is key.”

It was shown that premarital counselling helps some couple to deal with common challenges revolving around their individual differences and clash by learning to anticipate for the

worse as well as helping couples have a better knowledge of each other and learning to adjust and accept each other. The findings shows that some participants learnt to deal with some common challenges in their marriage by learning how to deal with their expectation. They learnt the importance of communicating one's expectation and managing their expectation. The following are sample quotes:

PCP 40: "So, I know how she is, I know who she is, I know her temperament, I know how she will react to stuffs so I know how to communicate certain things to her. I know how to resolve some issues with her, I know how to start certain conversations with her, I know what not to tell her. So, because of that I am able to know what not to tell her instantly. There is some information when you break it a week or two it will not be as sharp as breaking it instantly. So, I am able to know because of the temperament and what I have learnt about her and what I have gotten to know about her, I know when, how and what discuss with her."

PCP 17: "So, I learnt from counselling to let my expectations be known and not just imagine things. Because sometimes I imagine that when I wake up my husband will cook for me and bring it to me (laughs), "no I am imagining it but have I let him know this is my expectation". So, I think that was one challenge, letting him know my expectations. I always thought that he should know, automatically. So that was one conflict we had, I was always having expectation and not telling him about my expectation. So, I learnt to voice it out, so this is what I expect from you, what are your expectations of me as well so that we come to an understanding, so that it is not like you are imagining things and I do not know what you are imagining."

5.6.3 Global usefulness of premarital counselling

Participants highlighted some general and key benefits premarital counselling offers their marriage. These include marriage satisfaction, help promoting help-seeking and reducing the odds of divorce.

5.6.3.1 Marriage satisfaction

Most participants indicated that their premarital counselling contributed to them having a satisfying relationship by helping them manage and communicate their expectations, become patient with one another, help couples to better communicate and learning to involve God in everything among others. Some participants asserted that their premarital counselling experience leads to marriage satisfaction especially in the early stages of the marriage.

PCP 12: “I think in fact marital satisfaction, premarital counselling has really contributed a lot. If you ask me if I am satisfied with my relationship? like yeah. If I want to do it again with the same woman? like yeah. And it is really something that I am grateful for. If there is something I always thank God for it is my marriage. People are like I thank God for your life oh, yeah. And my counselling...we all believe in the grace of God so, it is by the grace of God that we are here, we also need to acknowledge other factors that have played a role in the success and counselling...I think counselling also played a huge role, plays a huge part in the success of my marriage now and my satisfaction.”

PCP 8: “The premarital counselling, yeah, it sets some pace, especially in the beginning of the marriage, when there are no children and stuffs, it is enjoyable. But when children come in and things turn around, then you feel the real marriage and you feel the real world and

you have to deal with it. sometimes we do breakdown because we are not prepared for those things.”

5.6.3.2 Help promote help-seeking

Premarital counselling in Christian settings help promote help-seeking behavior among counselees. Participants highlighted how premarital counselling expose them to the idea of help-seeking. Whereas some have engaged in help-seeking, others expressed help-seeking intentions although they have not seen another person for help yet. The findings revealed that premarital counselling experience influence help-seeking among couples. The findings suggest that most counselees are of the view that the doors of their premarital counsellors are still opened to them.

The analysis showed that premarital counselling serves as an avenue where participants are made aware of channels they can seek-help from later in marriage. In general, premarital counselling expose them to the idea of help-seeking by serving as the first form of getting help. This experience often makes it easier to approach others for help after the marriage.

PCP 23: “I will say it has helped in a way because the idea that you'd have to go for counselling before marriage, that means it's in a way, it's telling us that even after marriage we need that counselling to help us straighten things when we meet challenges. So, going for the premarital counselling made it easier for me to approach other people or counsellors or priests to talk to them about the challenges facing the marriage and how to go about it so I think it helped.”

Although most participants have not sought for help concerning any marital issue yet they expressed the intention to do so in time of difficulty. Most participants indicated their openness to

seek help from third parties including friends and family, pastors and professionals and their premarital counselling experience played a vital role in this desire.

PCP 14: “Me personally I wasn’t told that you shouldn’t come to us, keep your business to yourself, but we have heard it generally everywhere. Personally, I feel like you just need to choose who to speak to well, I think one time we had an issue and he was very upset (laughs). And he was like “let’s go and talk to our counsellors’ and I was a bit surprised, like ahh what is this coming from because I didn’t think the issue was that serious. But I was glad that he was able to say that, let’s go talk to someone rather than saying this is it and we are done!!! But in the end, we managed to sort it out without having to go to that extent but it was good to know that we could go to someone for help.”

Some counselees had already sought help from someone after their premarital counselling. Such help-seeking has been from older couples, pastors or priest and other counsellors in the church.

PCP 23: “I won’t say a counsellor but we have this couple who have adopted us like their children, so we’ve had sessions with them where we settle issues concerning our marriage. And then my husband’s priest. About this childbearing issue too, we’ve had sessions with them where they try to console us and encourage us.”

The kind of experience participants have during their premarital counselling has a great impact on their desire to engage in help-seeking after marriage. A positive evaluation of their premarital counselling programme correlates with a greater desire to later seek help and support from their counsellors. Whereas a negative experience of premarital counselling leads to lesser desire to seek for help from the premarital counsellor. Bonding, trust and the individual’s perception of the

availability of the counsellor are some factors that would influence participants desire to open up to a counsellor for support.

PCP1: “I will say that with the experience I gained from the premarital counselling I would seek for professional help if the need arises, I will seek for help. Sometimes the two of you may have gotten to a point where there is a dead-end. You have said it all, you have seen it all, whatever, you have been through quite a number of processes in trying to solve your own issues but it is not working. So, if it is not working then why not, you need to seek professional help.”

PCP 19: “I would rather speak to my younger sister, because she is internal. I don’t know which marriage counsellor I am supposed to go and talk to, because there should be trust. You have to trust someone before you send your information to him or her. That is why I am saying the premarital counsellor that was assigned to us she should have develop the trust from the beginning so that you would have her as a family member, anytime you have an issue you can discuss. But there was no trust, there was no relationship that was developed. You know there was no cordial relationship between us and our counsellor so of course we can’t pick our phone and call her and tell her this or that. And also, because she doesn’t have time, during our premarital counselling she didn’t have time and I don’t think she would have time for us (now).”

Results revealed that most counselees believe that the doors of their premarital counsellors are still opened to them even after their premarital counselling experience. Most counsellors made their counselees feel that they are available to assist them later in their relationship.

PCP 14: “So generally, I think we are open to seek help but we are careful about who we go to. And I feel like the counsellors are people we can go to for help. I feel like their doors are open, so even till now if we have any issue, we can still go to them and ask them and speak to them.”

PCP 11: “The priest became part of us, we took him as friend. Even though we never went to him for any issue to be addressed, we haven’t been to anybody with our marital issues yet, but we see him as one of us, someone who really knows us ...with our experience with him if there is a need we would gladly go to him. He is not in town now but when he comes down and he sees us he asks how is marriage, he will ask you something.”

Relatives and friends are seen by some participants as the first point of call when it comes to help-seeking. They will talk to a friend or a family member simply because they just want someone to listen to them or they don’t think the issue they are dealing with is big enough to be sent to a professional. However, such individuals indicated they would not hesitate to go to a professional in a person of a counsellor or priest when the need arises.

PCP 1: “That I will say is quite the reality on the ground that before you go seek for any professional help from a counsellor you will speak to a relative first. So, the relative here might probably be a sister you are close to or your parent. So, you speak to your parents first and they will advise you here and there, trying to see if the advice will help you in resolving your issues but if it still doesn’t work that is when I will go seek help from someone else, a third party, to see if that person can also help me in solving my issues.”

PCP10: “I will talk to a friend, rarely would I want to talk to a family member but a friend but the professional no because I don’t think the issues are that huge to go there, I think it

is something we can solve so and sometimes if I am talking to a friend it is not because I want a solution, I just want to talk...with my counsellor we didn't talk much we were listening (laughs) and they will try to give you solutions, but sometimes you just want to talk, you want someone to listen to you that is all. But when it gets extreme and I think I want a solution I think I might go there but if it is just wanting to talk, that one, I would talk with a friend.”

Premarital counselling may also empower couples to independently deal with their issues. The idea that the couple should first try to resolve their issues personally rather than always running to a third party was greatly emphasized. Participants however indicated they will seek help from a third-party when their internal resource is not enough to handle the issue at hand. Participant 4 stated that “when we all go for counselling, they tell us when you have any marital issue keep it to yourself, keep it to yourself”. Another participant shared the following:

PCP 1: “And usually, they will tell you that marriage is the two of you until the two of you are not able to solve your issues then you seek a third opinion, be it your mom or pastor, you see the person.”

5.6.3.3 Help in reducing the odds of divorce

Premarital counselling is seen to contribute to the sustenance of most marriages. The findings suggest that premarital counselling help sustain marriages by helping participants know and accept each other despite their differences, by helping them cross major huddles before the marriage, by applying the information received, helping couples make informed decision, by helping couples better handle conflicts and offering some spiritual basis.

Premarital counselling helps sustain marriages by helping couples have a better understanding and accepting each other's personality, difference and weakness.

PCP 23: "Well, without the premarital counselling, I'm sure I would have been divorced by now because sometimes my husband is very annoying. There are certain things that I wouldn't do that he will do and I won't understand why he should do it. Because from where I'm coming from, it's not right. It is not done that way. But he's okay doing it because he was never corrected whenever he did that. And if I don't understand, we'll always argue and it will end in whatever. That part, that knowing the background of each other, like knowing each other being different has really helped me. So, I can say that has especially helped to hold the marriage."

The analysis showed that some couples were of the view that their premarital counselling helped in sustaining their marriage by giving them the opportunity to cross major challenges before the marriage begun. Counsellees applying what they learnt during premarital counselling helps in reducing their odds of divorce.

PCP 12: "Because without it, I think we would have...even that night we had that talk, I had that talk with my wife when we were dating then, it was a very tensed discussion. So, you realized that it was, it would have been a huge, how do I call it a huge issue in our marriage if we hadn't confronted it. So, sustenance, it has really helped us to sustain that part of us. That thing could have easily collapsed the marriage, yeah, but yeah, because we were taken through that training it is not an issue now. We don't see it as an issue now, but it could have, it had the potential of disrupting the marriage."

PCP 17: “I can say it has help in sustaining my marriage. I think it is just a constant reminder of what you have learnt and how to apply what you have learnt. So, you never finish learning, like you have learnt ABCD and you’ve used it quite a number of times and you know how annoying it was. So just applying the practices and the things you learnt.”

Premarital counselling helps sustain marriages by giving some counsellees the opportunity to make an informed decision. It made them informed about what they are getting themselves into and offered them the opportunity to re-evaluate their decision.

PCP 12: “The financial management talk I think if not for that my marriage would have struggled a lot. Because it helped my wife make an informed decision that this is what I'm going to be living with for some time, because I'm going to marry a pastor. Then, you know he is a young pastor and he is starting his young ministry and so you are not expecting a Lamborghini in the first month of marriage. It is going to be hard because it is a fresh and a new ministry and pastors...it is not like they are high earners, no. So, it helped her to psych her mind. That's what it entails. And it's given us some kind of peace. We don't have issues with our finances. We don't... it's not something we quarrel over. No, if there's money, there's money, if there's no money, there's no money.”

The analysis revealed that the spiritual and doctrinal component of premarital counselling in Christian settings were seen by counsellees as something that help sustain their marriage. Some marriages are sustained as a result of premarital counselling helping the couple learn healthy ways of dealing with conflicts

PCP 40: "...and we pray. Because during the premarital counselling they told us to pray, we are Christians, anytime we have challenges we pray, so we have not taken prayer too out of it. So, with sustenance, it is our mindset and prayer."

PCP 12: "So, for my wife and I when we are arguing we all have turns. Make your point, I make my point. When we are done, we try to analyze the issue. We try to weigh it logically ...we apply more logic than emotions... So yeah, it helped. Those things helped or else our marriage would have been on rocks by now."

5.7 Need for In-marriage Counselling

Beyond the help premarital counselling offers, most counselees expressed the need for continuous learning and counselling in a form of in-marriage counselling. They highlighted the relationship between premarital counselling and in-marriage counselling, the importance of having in-marriage counselling and also made suggestions on the focus and how such counselling can be conducted.

PCP 30: "I always wish that maybe some of the things they taught us, that they will teach us after marriage rather ...What I have realized is that after marriage they think we know, we are okay, and the pastors don't really pay attention to the marriage people. Ow they are married and that is it."

PCP 1: "If I would just jump to something else, I think it is the post marital counselling that is what is really-really important."

5.7.1 Connection between premarital counselling and in-marriage counselling.

5.7.1.1 Premarital offering information about in-marriage counselling

Some participants indicated they got to know about in-marriage (post-marital) counselling during their premarital counselling. Premarital counselling may also serve as a foundation for any in-marriage counselling.

PCP4: “Yeah, I think it's something they even advised, post marital counselling. it is also very important. It's something that in our side of the world, I don't know for the others but I think in our side of the world, it's not something that we've come to really understand and know as in a post marital counselling. We only hear of premarital counselling so we got to hear of post marital counselling when we were doing our premarital counselling.”

PCP 40: “When you enter you realized that you need more especially most of the things after marriage, the post it is very important. You see the pre will help you to enter because some of the things you will enter before you get it, and during the pre they would open your eyes to some of the post, you will get to know some of the things.”

5.7.1.2 Counselees posture and receptivity during premarital counselling

To some, the excitement associated with getting married often make young couples not pay attention during their premarital counselling and thereby do not get the full benefit of the programme. Also, couples are likely to appreciate in-marriage counselling more when they are confronted with the realities of marriage.

PCP 9: “I really think that post marital counselling is very important .I think it’s important because in premarital counselling ,maybe some of the things were even discussed but we were not paying attention ,all we want is the time should just pass, because it’s mandatory and if you don’t do it, the church will not give you a date or they will not accept your date, but after getting married, I think that the churches should think more of doing post marital

counselling, it helps because now scales are falling off your eyes , you are now thinking or seeing, at least they should make it mandatory in the first year of marriage or something, you should have some sessions.”

PCP 1: “Post marital counselling that is what is really important...But here is the case that during premarital counselling I am only new to this marriage thing, what you are telling me I haven't experience before, I am only trying to imagine that should a problem arise this is how I am supposed to go by it. I haven't faced the problem so when it comes the possibility that I wouldn't even remember it is high, I won't even know how to apply it too is another issue altogether. But if you have been through (marriage) and you are being told what to do you are able to appreciate it better.”

5.8.1.3 Premarital counselling alone not enough

Regardless of how rich and helpful participants experience of premarital counselling are they indicate the need for an in-marriage (post marital) counselling. They indicate that beyond premarital counselling there is still more that can be learnt.

PCP12: “I think it is important that you do it, post marital...It's very important for you to... when you have a structured post marital counselling, I think it will really help. Because there is more information. When we speak to people who are already married for like twenty or thirty years and you are speaking to them and you are like wow, so much information!!! you realize that charley you just started. There's so much to learn, there's so much to learn. And so, for me, I think post marital is very, very important. It's something that we need to explore.”

PCP 9: “It was not a priest; it was another couple or something. In the beginning when we were having our small-small issues, they are also counsellors so it’s like post marital counselling... We just felt we needed more information and we just went to a couple that we are comfortable with and then we discuss that issues with them, they were not the one the church had given us. We just went to another couple in the church who were also counsellors.”

5.7.1.4 Reminding couples of what they learnt during premarital counselling

Participants suggested that in-marriage counselling can be used as an avenue for couples to remind themselves of what they learnt during premarital counselling. Such an experience would help rekindle the marriage relationship of older couples by helping them do what they use to do in the early stages of marriage and also refresh their minds on some things they learnt during premarital counselling.

PCP 1: “Post marital counselling, I think that is very-very necessary, because remember I mentioned that sometimes even the premarital counselling in the marriage itself you turn to forget. So, as human beings as we are we need to be reminded constantly so that it won’t leave our memory. So, post marital counselling would help, so that all the time it is on your mind... you have it on your lips. Whatever you are being taught it is in your mind you won’t forget it easily. But once we are glued with the first one which is premarital counselling and we leave it there, it really-really worries. I think that is one of the reasons why a lot of marriages are suffering because after the marriage you don’t really have anybody to communicate to.”

PCP 11: “We have to organize post marital counselling. We have couples club even in my current church and I know what my pastor was doing I can say it is a form of post marital counselling, because he was meeting married couples and some of the topics he was treating was very nice. One day I remember we went and he told us how men should support their wives at home. Although I am having an amazing husband anyone could ever wish for, some of the topics pastor was treating when we come home it is as though we just got married, we were just practicing the topics he was treating. And some of the things he said maybe we use to do and we have stopped over time we just try and go back and start doing it all over again.”

Just as it was highlighted that participants experience of premarital counselling influence their help-seeking behaviour; participants also expressed the important role premarital counselling places in fostering an effective in-marriage counselling. Some issues highlighted include believe in one’s premarital counsellor and having a one-on-one contact with a premarital counsellor. Some counselees believed that in-marriage counselling would reduce the incidence of divorce.

PCP 19: “There should be session after marriage, because young people who have gone into marriage knows nothing. And maturity doesn’t not depend on age alone, no matter how matured you are sometimes you feel like voicing out something to somebody. So, if there is that consistency, if there is that connection between the counsellor and the counselees. This will only happen if the counsellor is not too occupied, she would have enough time for the counselees. It all boils down to the fact that there should be one on one counselling, once a while there can be group counselling but one on one matters and there should be a follow-up.”

PCP 11: “Because the system now is very serious, if we don’t do post marital counselling, we will continue seeing divorce...The reality is that when you organize these things if there are issues the pastor would get to know early then it will not get out of hand to the level where it will lead to divorce.”

5.7.2 Content and focus of in-marriage counselling

Counselees suggested some content area and focus for in-marriage counselling. This include rehashing what was taught during premarital counselling, offering proactive support for marriages and addressing current marital issues. According to the counselees, in-marriage counselling can be used as an avenue to simply rehash what was learnt during premarital counselling. Participant 35 stated that, “for the issues, I think the things they spoke about during the pre-marital counselling should be repeated”. Another, PCP 23, stated, “Yeah, aside that if there's a time when we can meet the priest alone. The priest can remind us of what he taught during the premarital counselling.”

5.7.2.2 Proactive support for marriages

Some participants were of the view that in-marriage counselling can be a proactive way of supporting marriages. Here the marriage should not be in trouble before the couple are made to see the counsellor. It can be an avenue where pre-marital counsellors check on the progress of the marriages through an open conversation or discussion with their counselees and also undertaking some form of evaluation to help improve the marriage.

PCP 17: “Not that you are going to talk about your issues and all that. But progress report where you all analyze and see how far you have come. I think it will be cool to have that, where once in a while you and your partner go sit down with your counsellors and discuss,

“when we came to you, we didn’t know anything, now we have done three years we know something, how do you think it should be. Discussions like that, not just running to them to rant about your issues but you discuss the good and the bad and how to make them better. I think it will be good to have sessions like that once in a while. Every year might be too much, but two years going back, “we started the journey with you” so just bringing them along the journey to share insight for the next phase.”

PCP 12: “There is something (saying) that even after getting married you still need to work on it. It is not as if you need to wait for there to be an issue before ... It's like walking into a hospital and doing a general checkup. You don't need to be sick before we go and do general checkup and all that. So, we are even advised to even do post marital counselling. You just go there and just assess the health of your marriage and try and look at things you can do to better, issues and all those things, not just because you have issues. We are just going there to learn more and to better your marriage.”

5.7.2.3 Addressing current marital issues

Some participants also highlighted an important role in-marriage counselling can play in marriages. They indicated it can offer a platform where current issues couples are facing could be addressed. Making the programme practical and addressing current issues would help in better handling similar issues by the couple in future.

PCP 1: “So that is when you will address real time issues, the current issues that they are facing. Because the “pre”, I am going into it, I am not anticipating, even though issues would come but I won’t put that in my mind that “eii I am going to face this”. You tell me, I am like, “okay I have heard you” ...but now I am into it, I am facing those problem, what

should I do? So that is where the post marital counselling would come in to teach us what to do. And then we will use our experience as examples... so this is what I am facing, my husband is a drunk, he comes home late, what should I do? At the post-marital classes, they will take that issue up, address it... and then I would be able to apply it in my home. So, post marital counselling would “really-really-really” help.”

PCP 35: “Then because you are in it (the marriage) you can bring up the issues you may have encountered, which you may not have had solutions for, so that when it is discussed you can get better ways of looking at them in the future. So, let's be practical, as we are in it now, the post marital counselling should be practical so that at least it will help in future times.”

5.7.2.4 Serve as a check on partners

Also, counselees knowing that there would be periodic evaluation through in-marriage counselling may serve as a check on some couples. This can be a subtle focus and influence in-marriage counselling may have on marriages.

PCP 11: “As a human being when you know there are some checks there for you sometimes it makes you behave well. So, knowing that after marriage definitely after three months I would be called and ask what is going on, maybe if I don't treat my partner well, he or she will go and say it. So even that one would serve as a check to some of us.”

5.7.3 Process-related aspect of in-marriage counselling

5.7.3.1 Preferred formats for in-marriage

The analysis showed some format participants suggest in-marriage counselling should take. These include couples retreats and workshop, in-house couple groups and clubs and one-on-one with counsellor.

5.7.3.1.1 Couples retreat and workshops

Some participants suggested that the in-marriage counselling should take the form of couples retreats and workshops. Here an emphasis is laid on group interaction and learning. Some participants also indicated that the focus is to create a fun atmosphere for the couple.

PCP 35: “At this point they are married so it's for couples...So, they look for a time which will favour them or maybe if they could have like a union for couples in the church...which has all couples and then encouraged all couples to join. And then occasionally they have programmes. I know some of the churches occasionally go out on retreats, and then stay there just for couples, have fun together whiles discussing (issues). It helps, it makes it nicer.”

PCP 40: “I think that one too is good because when you organize some kind of workshop or something for experts...you know in everything we have people who have learnt very well to share. You might think you have been in the marriage for ten to twenty years but it will surprise you that there would be somethings you wouldn't know. You will also get the opportunity to learn from other people, what other people are going through how they have been able to handle it, how they have been able to overcome it and all that. So, workshops and those things I think it helps for marriage people.”

5.7.3.1.2 In-house couple groups and clubs

As an alternative for a more costly couple retreat some participants suggested in-church couple group meetings and couples club. Here older couples may serve as mentor couples in these clubs and groups where younger couples can glean from their experience. These couples can be categorized based on the length of their marriage.

PCP 23: “In a situation where the couple, like, attends the same church, it can be done maybe once a month, where you won't meet only the pastor or his wife or the parish priest or anything but you would meet other people who are married for years. You get it? And then you share your experience of what you're going through at that early stage of marriage so that how they were able to fixed theirs they can advise you on it, to do it if it's going to work for you.”

PCP 35: “Maybe they can do church ones. If it is a regular meeting like we have in the women’s followship where the women, the older ones teach we the younger ones how to be better women, maybe for couples it will help. Men and women then we discuss ...yes, for such programmes and then mentor couples in the church setting. That way is cheaper, it will be less costly.”

5.7.3.1.3 One-on-one with counsellor

Some participants suggested that there should be one-on-one meeting of couples with the counsellor. Some participants were of the view that the in-marriage counselling should be done solely on couple-by-couple basis whereas most participants suggested a one-on-one session in addition to the group counselling. Having a couple alone in-marriage session would offer couples the chance to share things with the counsellor they would not be able to share in the group. Participant 23 stated that “they can also have sessions where it’ll be you and your partner alone. I

think even with that it will make you feel free to talk about a lot of things because it is more private”. Other participants also shared the following:

PCP 12: “And if some people want some one on one, we give it to them on a one-on-one basis...maybe some people too because of time constraint might want to come and see you in the office, that avenue should also be provided.”

PCP 40: “I think the same procedure as the pre, but as I said, ours we had it in a group but I would not advice the group thing with the post because it is not everyone who would want their issues to be heard by third parties. If it is just between the married couple and the counsellor it is fine and it should be an agreement between both partners. Just as the two came for the pre the two should do the post as well because at times when stories are shared from one side you would not get the full picture of the whole thing.”

5.7.3.2 Start time for in-marriage counselling

The findings showed that participants had varying views on when in-married counselling should commence. Some suggest the churches should start this counselling as early as three months whereas most participants suggest two to three years into the marriage, when couples have passed the fantasy stage experienced earlier in the marriage.

PCP 11: “You call together those who got married in their three months they would come for post marriage counselling and maybe the last quarter of the year.”

PCP 23: “After a year or two. Honestly, after two years, within a year you’re still in the lovey-dovey thing so you ignore a lot of things because you’re trying to adjust. After two years, you get to know the real person you’re living with. After two years there will be

some challenges that have come your way and you will know how, if were able to handle it well or not. Or if it's created a problem or not, so I think after two years is fine.”

5.7.3.3 Frequency of in-marriage counselling.

Some participants indicated that in-marriage counselling should not be held too often whereas others suggested a more frequent programme with some suggesting a monthly programme. PCP 24 stated that “even if it’s not as frequent as the pre marriage counselling. At least once in a while there should be something about that because it would rather make marriages work”. Other participants also shared the following.

PCP 30: “But I think that maybe once in a while there should be something like that. I think if twice a year or four times in a year we can have intensive marriage counselling for marriage people, I think it will be good. To hit some of the problems we go through.”

PCP 1: “It is very important but to me I believe the focus should be on the post. After the marriage we should still have counselling sessions probably once every month or two. Yeah, that would be more helpful but the premarital counselling too is important.”

5.8 Areas of improvement in premarital counselling

Some participants highlighted some areas of improvement that can be adopted by the providers of premarital counselling. These include recruiting professionals and training church lay counsellors, ensuring availability of premarital counsellors, not having a very short duration, providing students manual for the participants of the programme and taking out the traditional roles assigned to couples.

5.8.1 Recruiting professionals and training church lay counsellors

Some participants suggested that the churches should include professional counsellors as facilitators of their premarital counselling programme. They also recommended that in addition to this, training should be offered for the churches lay counsellors.

PCP 1: “But what they can do going forward is to take actual marriage counsellors because we know we have counsellors who have studied the course and we have those who per their experience and other peoples experience are able to give good advice. So, if you have the actual ones, they would not really do a religious side, they will tell you what it is...so that we know the reality. Because so many times, the bible, the bible, prayers, prayers, it is not everything the bible and prayers would solve... So, if you have those marriage counsellors who are not into the church, they are very open minded. Not to say the others are not open minded...Maybe the church people would be a bit shy “eiii, we are holy-holy” so even the sex they will tell you but they would not go into details. So that aspect too can be considered.”

PCP 11: “The counsellors, I would wish that every church would train, they will have professionals who will train... who will be the counsellors. Because I have seen instances where people are just appointed to handle the premarital counselling, but the institution of marriage is a big something, look at the issues out there now, divorces here and there, just after a month there is a divorce, what happened? But when you have the professionals...it would be better if we train professionals to handle that in our churches.”

5.8.2 Ensure availability of counsellors

Some counsellees suggests that counsellors should be free and not tied with other responsibilities in the church. This will ensure counsellors have ample time which will assist them

in building a relationship with the couple for future counselling interaction. Also, in a group counselling format it will be essential for couples to be assigned to individual counsellors or mentor couples for a more personal encounter.

PCP 19: “If you ask me, I will say that I wish they could have time for the young couples. And every counselor should be someone who will have time for the young couple. It shouldn’t be... So, we should get somebody who has the time. There should be seriousness and consistency, my counsellor was serious but she has no time. She had a lot of roles to play in the church and she does the counselling at her own convenience. Of course, she is a mother, she is a wife, she is a church worker, she works outside the church and then she does the counselling and of course she will not have time. If we are doing the counselling then it should be handled by people who are counsellors alone without any other responsibility in the church.”

5.8.3 Appropriate duration

Counselees who had a very short premarital (abridged) counselling programme felt they did not get the optimal benefit due to the shortness of programme. Such participants may feel rushed and unable to retain what is taught due to duration of the premarital counselling programme.

PCP 23: “I am sure if we had done it for the normal three months or six months, it would have really helped. But as I said, I did mine within a month. It was a rush and I’m sure the priest was even in a rush because he knew the date was set before the counselling so he had to meet that date and there were a lot of things he didn’t talk about.”

PCP 8: “You know people can do counselling for two weeks and they say they are getting married, it is not good, it is too short. That is why I am saying they feel it is a formality so they just have to go through it.”

5.8.4 Taking out the traditional roles of couples

The traditional role expectation of married individuals is a subject that a counsellor suggest should be taken out of the Christian premarital counselling programme.

PCP 17: “I think one thing that should be taken out of the premarital counselling is the traditional roles of couples in the family. I don’t know but as a wife they expect too much from you but marriage is a partnership it has to be a two-way thing, not one being a mother, being a wife and doing everything in the house, always being a superwoman. I think it is not ideal for one person to be everything to everybody. So, you realize that people still keep to this traditional-traditional things, like as a wife you have to do this and that, in the house you have to cook, you have to clean. Yes! I have to but I have a partner too who can help me so that it is easier, it is a shared sort of effort and is not one sided.”

5.8.5 Providing manuals for students

Some participants wished their church provided them with a student manual for their premarital counselling.

PCP 19: “And at least there should be a handout for young couples because for a counsellor to tell me that I would not understand a pamphlet, it baffles my understanding why I cannot read and understand a pamphlet.”

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This study was designed to examine the experience of participants of premarital counselling programmes in Christian's settings in Ghana. It also sought to explore counsellees perception of how helpful their premarital counselling has been to them in general. Further the study sought to investigate whether counsellees perceive their experience of premarital counselling as beneficial to (a) their relationship satisfaction, (b) promoting help-seeking behaviour and (c) reducing the odds of divorce. Lastly, it examined how content, counsellor-related and process-related aspects of the premarital counselling influence participants experience as well as how they perceive their counselling as helpful.

The findings revealed six major themes. These are process-related aspect of premarital counselling, counsellor-related aspect of premarital counselling, content of premarital counselling, usefulness of premarital counselling, areas for improvement for premarital counselling and the need for in-marriage counselling.

The discussion is organized around four major areas. The first objective of this research is addressed under the discussion on the experience of counsellees during premarital counselling. The second subheading considers objectives 2 and 3 by discussing the usefulness of premarital counselling to participants. The third subheading focuses on objective 4 by discussing how content, counsellor-and process-related aspects of premarital counselling influence on counsellees experience and how they perceive their counselling to be helpful or not. The next subheading considers some suggestion brought up by participants regarding in-marriage counselling. The

chapter also outlines the limitations of the study and offers recommendation for future studies and practices. The implications of the findings are also discussed.

6.2 Counselees' experience of premarital counselling

What counselees experience during premarital counselling in Ghana among Christians can be group under three areas. These are the content of the counselling, process-related aspect of the counselling and counsellor-related aspect of the counselling

6.2.1 Content of counselling

The findings revealed that the content of premarital counselling provided by Christian denominations in Ghana included communication, financial management, sexual intimacy, conflict resolution, personality traits and temperaments, family planning and parenting, roles and responsibilities, Biblical basis, extended family relationship, legal aspect of marriage and mental health in marriage. These findings are broadly in line with previous studies (Osei-Tutu, et al., 2020). Ansah-Hughes et al. (2015) identified sex in marriage, financial management, communication, the purpose of the marriage, dealing with conflict, coping with each other's differences, couples' expectations, divorce prevention, extended family relationships, partners' future aspirations, religious differences and children and parenthood as premarital counselling topics treated in Ghana.

The presents study however revealed some additional topics such as personality traits and temperament, mental health in marriage and legal aspect of marriage which were not found by Osei-Tutu et al. (2020) and Ansah-Hughes et al. (2015). Also, Osei-Tutu et al. (2020) highlights what counsellors indicate they teach whereas the present study offers contents recipient of premarital counselling indicate receiving information on.

The findings revealed the top four content mostly experience by counselees are communication, financial management, sexual intimacy and conflict resolution. These findings are similar to that of Adzovie and Dabone (2021) who found communication, roles and responsibilities and sex as topics most premarital counselling participants indicated having received information on and Cobbinah & Osei-Tutu (2019) who identified communication and finance as the most common topics treated during premarital counselling with 87% and 80% of their respondents respectively indicating treating these topics.

The findings suggests that beyond the wide range of subjects treated during premarital counselling, some participants wished they had received more information on themes such as sexual intimacy, parenting, communication, marital expectations, cooperation in marriage, transparency in marriage, the realities of marriage, conflict resolution, dealing with family and friends and the legal aspect of marriage. In line with couple's current need, some topics participant expressed the desire for more in-depth instruction in is sexual intimacy and parenting. This finding supports other researchers such as Harley et al. (2021) who indicate that the top three topics premarital counselling participants indicated having insufficient training on were sex/intimacy, finances and parenting difficulties. They also indicated values in marriage, finances and sex/intimacy as topics proposed for in-depth information during premarital counselling by married couples.

The current study differs slightly when it comes to finances. Whereas Harley et al. (2021) saw finance as a topic participants indicated receiving insufficient information on and also proposing for in-depth information on, participants of the current study reported that they had sufficient training in finance with most participants seeing it as a topic which stood out for them.

Also, no participants proposed finance as a topic in need of in-depth training during premarital counselling.

The findings suggest that there is a strong desire for participant to know more about sexual intimacy. Religious groups did not seem to deal extensively with the subject of sexual intimacy. Marcinechova and Zachorcova (2020) indicate that historically religious institutions only taught procreation as the purpose of sex and disapproved sexual behaviours engaged in solely for pleasure. It is important that Christian organizations pay close attention to the subject of sexual intimacy. Counsellors should not feel awkward and shy talking to their counselees about sexual intimacy and how to be sexually expressive.

6.2.2 Process-related aspect of premarital counselling

Findings from this study suggests five process-related aspect of premarital counselling experienced by counselees. These are enrollment, format of counselling, intensity/dosage of counselling programme, methodologies and tools used. This is similar to the classification made by researchers such as Hawkins et al. (2004) and Murray (2005) who indicated that some process-related aspect of premarital counselling includes the intensity/dosage, methodology, format and approach.

The findings reveal that participants of premarital counselling predominantly initiate the premarital counselling process. Since most churches require participating in premarital counselling before officiating the wedding ceremony most couples approach the church for such counselling rather than Christian denominations actively engaging in strategies to recruit premarital counselling participants. Those who want to get married often tell their pastor about it, and the pastor will pick a day for them to start counselling. In large congregations where premarital

counselling are conducted in groups, those who want to get married at certain time of the year register with the department in charge of marriages and are put in a premarital counselling cohort.

There are differences in the format in which premarital counselling in Ghana is presented across churches. The common format is a couple meeting with a counselor or priest alone. This is consistent with research by Lee (2007) who indicated that a common format for premarital counselling in church settings is the private meeting of a couple with the pastor or lay counselor. Another popular format of premarital counselling among Christian denominations today is having the premarital counselling in a group/class. This is mostly common among larger congregations. Each assembly offering the group counselling differ in the number of members in the counselling groups. One to three couples made up small counselling groups, three to fifteen couples made up most medium groups, and over forty couples made up a few very big groups

Another process-related aspect of premarital counselling in Christian setups in Ghana revolves around tools used. These include the use of assessment questionnaires, teaching aids and manuals. Some counsellors gathered information about the couple, such as their personality and differences, using assessment tools. The outcomes were either addressed in later sessions or simply used by the couple to get to know one another better.

A fourth process-related aspect of premarital counselling is intensity/dosage with issues such as duration of programme, sessions per week and session duration. The duration of premarital counselling among Christian denominations varies from three, four, six months and a year. The findings revealed some individuals had unique arrangements with their counsellors for a condensed curriculum. In these peculiar situations, the counsellor abbreviated and expedited the participants' counselling sessions rather than letting them go through the whole allotted time for premarital counselling in the church. Duration of such abridged programmes may be as brief as

two weeks or a month. Such flexibility and special arrangements are made available for counselees who have some unique reasons.

Hawkins et al. (2012) identifies dosage as a programmatic moderator of the effectiveness of relationship education programmes. Dosage here is represented by both contacts hours per session and the total number of sessions for the entire programme. 1-8 contact hours, 9-20 contact hours and 21 and over contact hours are classified as low, medium and high-dosage programmes respectively. The findings of the current study suggest that premarital counselling in Ghana generally has higher dosages in comparison to Hawkins et al. (2012). Session of premarital counselling in Christian settings in Ghana lasted for either 60 minutes, 60-120 minutes, 120-150 minutes or 180 minutes. Most counselling sessions lasted for 60-120 minutes. The longest hours per session reported by participants was 180 minutes (three hours). Most counselling sessions were stretch for such long hours because most counsellors frequently went beyond the allotted time for each session depending on the topic being discussed and the level of participation from participants. Yet some counsellors were consistent and adhered to their allotted time.

The current study also suggests a considerably higher total number of sessions for the entire premarital counselling programme in comparison to Hawkins et al. (2012) programme dosage classification. Beside couples who have an abridge premarital counselling programme almost all participants had their counselling once a week. This suggest counselees averagely had weekly meetings for three months, 4-5 months, six months or a year. Stanley et al.'s (2020) recommendation for best practices in relationship education suggests that issues of format and dose should be decided in light of the group being served, the resources available, and how suitable it is to use a particular method in a specific setting.

The fifth process-related aspect of premarital counselling in Ghana highlighted by counselees is methodological issues. This includes the teaching styles used and venue where counselling is held. Premarital counselling was typically by a lecture, a discussion or both. The findings of this study revealed that the majority of participants had their premarital counselling sessions held on the church premises. Others received counselling in-person at the counsellor's house. This could take place in the counsellor's home office or any other open area that is available. A third group received counselling both on the grounds of the church and at the house of their counsellor. A few received virtual counselling on a Zoom call.

6.2.3 Counsellor-related issues

Counsellor-related issues of premarital counselling include type of counsellors, number of counsellors used, marital status and involvement of partners of counsellors, age range of counsellors and evaluation of counsellor's expertise and competence. The findings of the current study showed that the premarital counsellors were either priests or pastors, church leaders, trained church counsellors, professionals (in any pertinent field such as legal, finance etc.), and mentor couples. This finding is consistent with previous research by Osei tutu et al. (2020) which reported that the providers of premarital counselling in religious settings consist of priests, lay ministers, church elders and deacons and ordinary worshippers who are tasked to facilitate the premarital counselling programme.

These counsellor types and their combination varied from one church assembly to the other. The analysis showed a small number of couple-alone counselling formats use multiple counsellors, while the majority only used one counsellor. There were also different forms of the number of group counselling facilitators used from one church to the other. There are three types of groups: those with a single facilitator, those with several facilitators and a personal counsellor

available for confidential conversations, and those with several facilitators and a designated mentor couple who have separate sections with counselees distinct from the group counselling. This is similar to the role of mentor couples described by Lee (2007) and Stanley et al. (2020) idea of coaches who support relationship education by offering more personal, one on one guidance. The findings revealed that the groups with multiple facilitators had each facilitator treat a topic or two.

A third counsellor-related aspect of premarital counselling in Ghana highlighted is the marital status of counsellors and spousal involvement (the involvement of their spouse) in the counselling process. The findings showed that majority of premarital counsellors were married with the exception of the Catholic priests. The degree to which spouses were included in the counselling process varied from church to church. While some participants experience their counsellors and their spouse engaging in the counselling process, others only encountered their assigned counsellor.

The final counsellor-related aspect found is evaluation of counsellor expertise and competence. Some participants considered their premarital counsellors to be experienced and skilled. They asserted that the counsellors administered the programme expertly.

6.3 Usefulness of programme

The current study found that premarital counselling was helpful to counselees in several areas. Specifically premarital counselling has helped counselees to better handle their finances, have improved communication, help in resolving conflicts, help in dealing with major issues before marriage, improve sexual intimacy, knowing and accepting each other, mentally prepare couple for some issues in marriage, better handling the extended family, helpful in property acquisition, helpful in managing expectations, help serve as check on each other, help have

periodic evaluation of the marriage, helped know parental roles and learning how to get information from one's partner.

In contrast to the few participants who had negative views of their premarital counselling experience majority of participants were greatly pleased with their premarital counselling experience and felt it has helped their relationship greatly. This finding runs counter to Adzovie and Dabone (2021) who indicated that Christian married couples held a negative perception about the effectiveness of premarital counselling.

The findings of this study showed that participants indicated that their premarital counselling experience helps them deal with some common and recurring challenges they experience in their relationship. Common challenges experienced by couples includes raising children, issues on expenditure, personality and individual differences, mundane activities, phone and social media usage, temper issues, relating to the opposite sex, childbearing and expectations. Premarital counsellors may have a much greater impact if they paid attention and addressed some of these typical problems couples encounter in their relationships during the premarital counselling programme. The findings however suggested that counsellees were better able to deal and cope with these common challenges as a result of the help premarital counselling offered them. By helping them to effectively address issues, learning to apologize, learning to communicate, learning how to be patient with one another, learning to adjust and accommodate to one another, managing one's expectations, gaining better knowledge of partner and better handling household chores counsellees were able to deal effectively with the common challenges they faced

6.3.2 Three key benefits of premarital counselling

The findings suggest that counsellees perceive their premarital counselling as offering key benefits such as relationship satisfaction, promoting help-seeking and helping reduce the odds of

divorce. Premarital counselling experience contribute considerably to the marital satisfaction of most recipient. Also, the connection built with the counsellor and experience of premarital counselling in general promote help-seeking behaviour. Third, premarital counselling experience contributes towards reducing the odds of divorce among most couples.

Help-seeking

First, the findings suggest that premarital counselling promote help-seeking among participants. This is in harmony with researchers such as Williamson et al. (2018) and Bruhn and Hill (2004) who affirmed that premarital counselling offers the potential of building help-seeking behaviour in the couple. One of the themes to emerge from this analysis is that although majority of married individuals have not yet sought for help for any marital problems, they intend to do so when the need arises. Generally, premarital counselling in Christian settings in Ghana encourages and empowers couples to deal independently with their marital issues rather than involving third parties such as family and friends. This is essential since the couple in the formative years of their marriage ought to build the confidence in themselves to handle their marital issues. This is also used to protect the couple from constantly putting out their marital issues and also protect them from soliciting wrong advice that may negatively affect their marriage. Beyond the churches encouragement for the couple to be discrete about what they share and the emphasis on handling their issues internally, it is essential the church offers an avenue where couples can easily seek professional help from their premarital counsellors or any available counsellor. Stanley et al. (2020) suggest one best practice in relationship education is for providers to make the effort to provide information about other services that are likely to be relevant to participants. They also suggested providers use relationship education to promote the mindset of help-seeking.

The analysis suggested that both men and women showed high help seeking interest. On a particular occasion the need to engage in help-seeking was initiated and expressed by the man. This is surprisingly contrary to other findings like Hubbard and Harris (2020) who state that men may know of problems in their relationship but seem reluctant to seek couple's therapy.

The impact premarital counselling has on future help seeking behaviour cannot be over emphasized. Simply partaking in premarital counselling informs counselees that the people they started their marital journey with are people they can talk to in the marriage. These findings are similar to that of other researchers who found that prior help-seeking behaviour and previous experience of mental health service facilitates help-seeking (Velasco et al., 2020; Watsford & Rickwood, 2014).

A great premarital counselling experience may lead to higher help seeking behaviour. Participants who expressed having a great premarital counselling experience were more likely to indicate their willingness to engage in help-seeking from their premarital counsellor or any other professional when the need arises than individuals who expressed not having a great premarital counselling experience. This is supported by findings by Wilson and Deane (2012) who indicates that the helpfulness of prior mental health care serves as a facilitator for future help-seeking.

Counselees use the premarital counselling experience to build trust and connection with their premarital counsellors. Some counselees indicated that they see their premarital counsellors as part of their marriage/family. Having such established relationship with a provider, in this case the premarital counsellor facilitates future help-seeking (Velasco et al., 2020; Gulliver et al., 2012). It is therefore essential the premarital counsellor consciously seek to build these connections with their participants. Also, premarital counselling was used as an avenue to communicate trustworthy and availability. Most participants left their premarital counselling relationship feeling that the

doors of their counsellors are still open to them and are available to assist them throughout their marital journey. Martinez-Hernaez et al. (2014) states that positive perception of mental health professionals facilitates help-seeking.

It is worth emphasizing that a poor experience of participants during premarital counselling is likely to adversely affect their help-seeking. When participants feel their counsellors did not have enough time for them, they are unlikely to come back to them for help later in marriage. This finding is supported by Gulliver et al. (2012) who states that negative past experience of help-seeking can serve as a barrier to future help-seeking.

It was discovered that some individuals also sought help with marital issues from their friends and family. This is often because some participants feel their friends and family are readily available to listen to them. There are also some individuals who go to their friends and family for help simply because they believe their challenges are not big enough to warrant seeking help from a professional be it their premarital counsellors, pastors or mainstream counsellors. The danger here is that some issues may escalate and worsen before they are brought to their counsellors. To avert this incidence, it is essential that counsellors in the church periodically connect and check up with their former counselees. This will help them gain up to date information about the couple and also help receive first-hand information on any issue or challenge that comes up.

Marital satisfaction

Secondly, a major theme to emerge from this research is that premarital counselling contributes to couples having a satisfying relationship. This comes about as a result of premarital counselling experience helping couples manage and communicate their expectations, help become patient with one another, help in communicating better and learning to involve God in everything.

These findings is similar to Udofia et al. (2021) who states that couples who received premarital counselling prior to marriage were more satisfied with their marriages than those who did not have a premarital counselling experience prior to marriage. Yilmaz and Kalkan (2010) and Lee (2007) also identified relationship satisfaction as a key benefit of premarital counselling.

In considering the impact premarital counselling has on the marital satisfaction for couples it is important to note that there is a likelihood that this impact may dwindle over time. Although Schumm et al. (2010) suggest both short- and long-term helpfulness of premarital counselling the analysis of the present study showed some participants who attributed their marital satisfaction to their premarital counselling who felt such marital satisfaction was experience mainly at the early stage to their marriage. The findings suggest that one possible reason for this could be that although the impact of premarital counselling on marital satisfaction is dominant during the early stage of the marriage it is likely to reduce when the realities of marriage such as parenting and other responsibilities increase. In view of this it is important that the churches and psychologist take advantage and offer help to couples years into the marriage.

Reducing the odds of divorce

Third, the findings indicate that premarital counselling contributed towards the sustenance of most marriages by helping couples know and accept each other despite their differences, by helping them cross major huddles before the marriage begins, by applying the information received during premarital counselling, by helping couples make informed decision, by helping couples better handle conflicts and offering some spiritual basis for marriage. This is in accordance with other research such as Cobbinah and Osei-Tutu (2019) that found that 91% of their respondents indicated that premarital counselling fosters sustainable marriages and corroborated by Lee (2007)

and Scott et al. (2013) who intimated that premarital counselling and premarital education in general can be seen as helping reduce the odds of divorce.

6.4 Influence of aspects of programme on perception of helpfulness.

The findings revealed that the content of premarital counselling was essential in enriching the premarital counselling experience of couples. In addition, process-related and counsellor-related aspects are also essential to how premarital counselees perceive the helpfulness of their premarital counselling to their relationship. Wilmoth and Smyser (2012) states that in addition to the content some process related aspects of premarital counselling such as intensity/dosage, methodology, approach and format are essential areas to consider when implementing a premarital counselling programme.

6.4.1 Influence of process-related aspect

The findings show that process-related aspect of the premarital counselling such as format, dosage, methodology and tools used influence how participants perceived their counselling to be helpful. Similarly, Schumm et al. (2010) state that the long enduring positive influence of the premarital counselling is dependent on both the content and other factors such as how the counselling is presented and who delivers the counselling. Wilmoth and Smyser (2012) call for the clergy or providers of premarital counselling in religious settings to be educated and informed on what structural aspect to include in their premarital counselling programme to make it more beneficial and effective. The findings of this study show that the format used for premarital counselling among Christian denominations in Ghana has a great influence on how a participant perceive their premarital counselling as helpful.

With the issues of the format in which premarital counselling is provided in Christian settings, one is tempted to ask which approach is more efficient. That is the couple having a private

meeting with a counsellor or having a group format with multiple couples. The findings suggest that regardless of the format a church uses the couples can have either a positive or negative experience depending on how well the programme is conducted. Although having a one-on-one session with a counsellor offers a close connection between counsellors and counselees, having a group counselling format also offers immense benefit to the couple.

The group experience offers some social connection for couples who may be dealing with similar issues in life. Getting to meet other young couples offer an opportunity where couples serve as support for each other and also network. The findings revealed that during the counselling process group members are likely to benefit from experiences shared, questions asked and inputs made by other group members. These contribute towards enriching the premarital counselling experience of couples.

Some challenges of the group format are the lack of privacy and the danger of some couple not being able to build a close connection with their counsellor. Here it is important that an avenue for a closer experience with a counsellor or mentor couple is created so that the couple could have the opportunity to delve deeper into more personal issues and also ask questions which they might not be able to ask in the group setting. Having such personalized experience will also foster help-seeking since the close connection the couple build with their personal counsellor or mentor couple could propel them to seek help from such individuals later in their marriage.

The findings suggest that counselees having some separate meetings for each partner may lead to greater satisfaction with the premarital counselling experience. This is supported by other studies such as Stanley et al. (2020). Their suggestions on some best practices in relationship education indicate that relationship education may serve couples together, serve individuals whose partners are absent or focus on an individual alone to assist them with individual issues. Here the

man is met without their wife-to-be and vice versa. Having an individual session for each partner has the potential of enriching peoples experience of premarital counselling and also lead to them having greater benefits. The partners of the counsellors could be made to assist in having these individual sessions where each partner has the opportunity to meet alone with a counsellor of the same sex, of the opposite sex or both.

The use of assessments tools and teaching aids and manuals, duration of programme and duration per session are also some process related issues that affect the premarital counselling experience of participants in Christian settings. Busby et al. (2015) indicate that assessment questionnaires in relationship education can be use as part of curriculum-based relationship education. They also indicated that assessment questionnaire can be used alone as a type of relation education. The current study revealed that providing premarital assessment as part of premarital counselling was not commonplace and was practiced by a few denominations. In churches that make use of assessment tools the recipients were greatly pleased with that experience. They indicated that was one of the highlights of their premarital counselling experience. The analysis showed that some participants who took an assessment used it to identify more about each other and such insight gained was used in resolving their differences. This is similar to Busby et al. (2015) who state that assessment used in relationship education are used to offer detailed feedback to couples about their relationship weakness and strength. Similarly, Cobbinah and Osei-Tutu (2019) indicated that counsellors identified that the filling of forms individually by would-be couples about themselves concerning their reasons for getting married, their desired number of children, their age, parental concern etc. assisted in bringing to the fore some topics and issues that may have been overlooked during courtship. They indicated counsellors used this information gain from filling the form to help couple resolve their differences.

The findings of the current study also suggest that the role of the counsellor here could be to assist the couple to reconcile their differences as revealed through the assessment questionnaire. Providers of premarital counselling can offer greater help, support and preparation for their premarital counselees by using relationship assessment questionnaires. The findings suggest that counselees may have greater benefits from their premarital counselling when providers make use of such objective measures.

Giving participants manuals or materials had great influence on their experience of the premarital counselling programme. An individual's dislike of their premarital counselling revolves around not being given a handout for the counselling. It is essential churches and other providers of premarital counselling invest into designing student manuals for participants. Providing students manuals to counselees may serve as a reference material which the couple can constantly use in their marriage to remind themselves of what they learnt during premarital counselling and in turn better their marriages.

In general, it was revealed that having a well-structured premarital counselling programme contributes to how participants perceive their counselling experience as helpful. Having a well-structured programme, communicating the structure to counselees and consistently following the structure helps counselees have a rich premarital counselling experience and offers them greater benefit. Providers of premarital counselling in Christian settings should ensure that they have a well-defined structure for their premarital counselling programme and also endeavor to stick to it.

The findings suggest that the intensity/dosage of premarital counselling which includes duration of the programme and length of sessions were aspects of premarital counselling that affects the experience and how counselees perceive their programme as helpful. How long the premarital counselling takes has great effect on participants experience of the programme. Having

a very long programme displeases most participants. Prolonged periods of counselling may interrupt the wedding plans of some couple whereas other feel overburdened for having their premarital counselling stretched. These findings are consistent with Hawkins et al. (2012) who suggest that there is a likelihood that when relationship programmes over stretch for more than 6 months the programme may not yield any greater effect and may also have the tendency of being counterproductive.

Having a very short premarital counselling experience also comes with its own challenges. Most individuals who had a very short programme felt they could not have the full benefit the premarital counselling had to offer. Such individuals indicated feeling rushed through the programme. This is supported by studies such as Hawkins et al. (2012) who found that programme dosage correlates with programme efficacy. Hawkins et al. stated that relationship interventions may not produce significant effect when offered in less than 9 contact hours.

Another process-related aspect of premarital counselling that influence the experience and how participants perceive their premarital counselling to be helpful is the setting or venue. Having a venue that is secluded and free from obstructions enrich the experience of counselees during premarital counselling. Counselees may feel there is confidentiality when the venue for the premarital counselling offers privacy.

6.4.2 Counsellor-related aspect and perception of helpfulness

The findings of this study show that some traits of the counsellors of premarital counselling programme affected counselees experience of their premarital counselling and how they saw it to be helpful. Some traits of the premarital counsellors such as the number of counsellors used, counsellors' openness to sharing their personal experience, counsellors being interactive, counsellors having a cordial relationship with counselees and the involvement of the spouses of

counsellors influence the experience of premarital counselees and how they perceive their programme as helpful. This affirms the notion that who delivers a premarital counselling and how the counselling is presented leads to a long enduring positive impact on the relationship of the couple (Schumm et al.,2010).

The number of counsellors providing premarital counselling may affect the experience of counselees. Here whether a group or couple alone premarital counselling format had a single or multiple counsellors has the potential of influencing the experience as well as how counselees perceive their experience to be helpful. As indicated earlier, with the premarital counselling groups some had a single counsellor whereas others had multiple facilitators. The findings suggest that having the group premarital counselling with a single facilitator pose some disadvantages. Here the counsellor may not be able to connect personally with all group members in a way that will ensure a continues relationship. If such a relationship is established counselees can later in their marriage come back to their premarital counsellor for help. These findings are similar with those of other researchers such as Gulliver et al. (2012) who stated that having an established relationship with a provider was a facilitator of help-seeking of mental health care among adolescents.

The findings suggest that such counsellors who handle a group alone may also be overwhelmed by the responsibility and are likely to be portrayed as not having time for their counselees. This greatly influence how counselees experience and makes them perceive their premarital counselling as less helpful. Such negative perception and evaluation of counsellors by their counselees may further prevent them from seeking help from their counsellors after the premarital counselling programme. These findings are in line with other research by Gulliver et al. (2012) and Velasco et al. (2020) who stated that negative prior mental health service or help-seeking experience acts as a barrier for help seeking in future for mental health services. It is

essential churches that make use of group premarital counselling provide multiple counsellors to handle the group so that a single counsellor does not feel overwhelmed. In settings where the number of counsellors is limited the churches should ensure that such counsellors are not overburden with several other responsibilities in the church. Generally, these suggestions will ensure participants have optimum benefit of the premarital counselling programme as well as be able to build a better connection with their counsellor for help-seeking later in their marriage.

Also, the findings showed that having multiple counsellors offers counselees a great deal of variety in the manner in which information is presented to them. Each counsellor or facilitator may bring their unique teaching style and experience on board to help counselees have a rich and diverse experience. Churches with limited number of counsellors can recruit and train older couples to be part of their counselling team to serve as co-leaders of the group. This is similar to the idea of having coaches in relationship education as suggested by Stanley et al. (2020).

The findings indicate that most groups with multiple facilitators assigned individual counsellors or mentor couples to participants to ensure they have a more personal and intimate encounter beyond the group experience. Similarly, Stanley et al. (2020) indicated that counselling coaches support relationship education classes by offering more personal and one-on-one guidance. The approach of some Christian institutions using mentor couples to supplement the group counselling experience is similar to what is describe by Lee (2007) who indicates that another form of premarital counselling is when couples yet to marry meet in the home of a mentor married couple to examine key aspects of marriage over a period of time. The findings revealed that counselees who had mentor couples in addition to their group facilitators expressed great satisfaction and saw their premarital counselling as beneficial. Here the experience of having

sessions with their assigned mentor couple was a major contributing factor to this perception of helpfulness of their premarital counselling experience.

Counselees who experienced professionals joining as facilitators/counsellor saw this experience as enriching and something that stood out for them. These professionals who were mostly members of the church contributed to counselees seeing their premarital counselling as helpful by sharing on topics in their area of expertise. Beyond members who are professionals sharing on subjects in their specialty, some participants also suggested that the churches work together with some professional counsellors in mainstream practice who will also serve as facilitators. It is important churches recruit members who are in the legal, accounting, medical, mental health and other professions in their congregation to also assist with couple group lectures and presentations or couple alone counselling. Here participants get the opportunity to benefit from the wealth of experience and the expertise of such professionals since they address topics in their area of specialty.

Also, churches who have the capacity can bring on board professional counsellors or psychologist to handle some aspects of their premarital counselling programmes. Some participants also recommended offering training for their lay counsellors in the church. These findings are in line with other research such as Schumm et al. (2010) who indicate that providers of premarital counselling such as religious providers having specialized training in premarital counselling or collaborating with other trained providers could help increase the quality of their counselling programme which in-turn make it more attractive to potential counselees.

The age of the premarital counsellor can affect participants experience and perception of helpfulness of the programme if the age gap between counsellors and counselees hinders counsellors from freely addressing topics of interest to the younger generation. A counsellee who

wished the subject of sexual intimacy was treated during their premarital counselling indicated the counsellor did not address that topic probably because she was old and shy.

The marital status and involvement of the spouse of the counsellor has the potential of affecting the premarital experience of counselees and how they see their experience to be helpful to them. Some individuals who had a group premarital counselling indicated their facilitators came along with their partners who either gave part of the lecture or simply came to offer support to their spouse. For some participants there was a strong desire to interact with the spouse of their premarital counsellor in order to have a practical and balanced learning experience. Premarital counselling providers in Christian settings should consciously involve their partners so participants experience a balance perspective.

When counsellors together with their spouses share their marital experiences, it will help counselees have a practical perspective on marriage and also understand how individual and gender differences plays out in the marriage. A participant who had her marriage counselling in an Orthodox Church, whose priests do not marry express a strong desire and wish that other couples join the priest so they share their marital experience. Also, participants who expressed the desire of having an individual session alone without their partners highlights the important role counsellors' spouses could play in the premarital counselling process. Here the would-be couple could be divided among the counsellor and their spouse for these individual sessions.

The analysis showed that some traits of the premarital counsellors such as being interactive contributed to counselees having a positive experience of premarital counselling which leads to them seeing their premarital counselling as helpful. Rather than counsellors being rigid in their presentation and simply reading from their teaching manuals counsellors should engage participants in the learning process. The findings of this study suggest that what some participants

like the most about their premarital counselling experience was the fact that their counsellors were interactive and engaged them in the learning process.

Counselees seeing their premarital counsellors as open and going to the length of sharing their own marital experience contributes to how high they perceive their premarital counselling to be beneficial. Counsellors being open to share their personal experience and having a cordial relationship with counselees were seen by some participants as what they like the most about their premarital counselling experience. Similarly, Stanley et al. 2020 indicated that the impact of relationship education will be heightened when there is a strong working alliance between providers and participants. Providers here should be mindful to demonstrate care and understanding of participants.

6.4.3 Programme content and perceived helpfulness

The content of premarital counselling offered to counselees greatly influence how helpful they see their counselling experience. The findings of this study showed that some contents were what some participants like the most and felt was outstanding for them during premarital counselling. Premarital counselling experience offering rich content, offering biblical support for claims made, instruction on financial management, instruction on acceptance, instructions on property acquisition and helping pre-inform counselees about marriage are some aspects that stood out for participants.

For most participants who indicated extreme satisfaction with their counselling experience, they had just a topic or two that was outstanding for them which they felt led to their marital satisfaction and helping sustain their marriage. Also, for most couples the topics they treated during premarital counselling has help them deal with some marital issues they face.

Some individuals who expressed displeasure with their premarital counselling experience felt that the information they received was monotonous and was not rich and practical.

Generally, the topics counselees treat during premarital counselling may be beneficial to them by helping better manage their finances, improve their communication, improve their sexual intimacy, equipping them with conflict resolution skills, better managing and communicating their expectations, knowing and accepting each other's differences and better handling the extended family just to mention a few.

In order for the premarital counselling programme offered in Christian institution in Ghana to offer greater preparation and help to couples, counsellors should ensure they offer rich content to counselees. Also, premarital counsellors can increase how helpful their programmes are to couples by paying attention to topics participants expressed in need of more in-depth information highlighted above.

The findings revealed that counselees like about premarital counselling revolve around process related aspect, counsellor related aspect and programme content. Participants dislike about their premarital counselling on the other hand revolve around only process-related and counselor-related aspects without including a content. However, a participant's suggestion of area for improvement of premarital counselling in Christian settings included the need to change the church's view and teaching on roles and responsibilities in marriage. It is worth noting that this counsellee however did not indicate this subject as their dislike about their premarital counselling programme.

In conclusion providers can consider some of these contents, counsellor- and process-related aspects counselees like and dislike as well as areas indicated in need of more information

in order to help improve the premarital counselling they offer, help enrich participants experience and increase the benefits counselees gain from premarital counselling. Paying attention to these issues would assist in offering a more effective premarital counselling in Christian settings in Ghana.

6.5 Need for in-marriage counselling

There was a great desire and request from participants for Christian institutions to organize in-marital counselling in addition to the premarital counselling. Generally, the mood of most couple prior to their wedding and their excitement to get married might hinder some of them from paying attention and having the full benefit of premarital counselling. Here, receiving the same or similar information after the couple are married would be greatly appreciated. Similarly, Stanley et al. (2020) suggests follow-up or booster training for relationship education in order to maintain the impact of the programme. In-marriage counselling could also serve as an outlet where issues couples are facing could be identified and addressed.

For an individual who had experience both premarital counselling and an in-marriage counselling to address some marital issues, she attributed her current marital satisfaction and sustenance of her marriage to her in-marriage counselling rather than her premarital counselling experience. The reason being that her in-marriage counselling helped her address directly the challenges she had begun to face in the marriage.

This in-marriage counselling could either be held on a one-on-one basis for the couple or held in a group for a number of couples. Such groups can be segmented into years of marriage so that people in similar phase of their marriage are addressed. Mentor or older couples could also come together with younger ones to offer support and share with them from their wealth of experience. In-marriage counselling can be held in church settings in the form of a couples' club

or preferably held outside the church settings in a form of couples' retreat. Seminars and workshops are also avenues through which the religious institutions can offer in-marriage counselling to their congregants.

6.5.2 Non problem focused help-seeking

Cornally and McCarthy (2012) in contrasting health seeking with help-seeking indicated that although health seeking behaviour can occur with or without the presence of a problem, help-seeking on the other hand is entirely problem focused. The findings of this study suggest that help-seeking intentions with couples in Christian settings in relation to in-marriage counselling suggest an idea of both problem and non-problem related help-seeking. Participants highlighted the need and desire to simply engage with the premarital counsellor or any other counsellor after marriage. Here the goal is to engage in evaluation, going for more information and gleaning from the experience of the counsellors while there is no marital distress present.

The findings of the current study in relation to in-marriage counselling and help-seeking in general can be explained using Doss et al. (2003) three steps for couple help-seeking, namely, problem recognition, treatment consideration and treatment-seeking. With in-marriage counselling the findings suggest counselees having engaged in problem/need recognition. Also, the findings suggest most counselees have engaged in treatment consideration for in-marriage counselling. The third step of treatment-seeking would be facilitated by religious institutions offering in-marriage counselling programmes. Also, counselees who indicated engaging in help seeking went through the steps of problem recognition, treatment consideration and treatment seeking. Some counselees however indicated not undertaking the final step of treatment seeking since they manage to resolve their issues on their own.

6.6 Satisfaction with premarital counselling experience

The satisfaction participants have about their premarital counselling can be explained using expectancy/disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver 1980). Counselees may be dissatisfied with their premarital counselling when they experience worse than they are expected. Also, counselees may be satisfied with their premarital counselling when their experience exceeds their expectation of the programme. This may apply to the counselling programme in general or some aspect of the programme.

One participant indicated that he had a preconception about premarital counselling that it did not offer any new information but turns to revolve around the “routine stuff”. This individual after participating in premarital counselling indicated his experience confirmed his preconception. His experience confirming his low frame of reference made him less satisfied with his premarital counselling in general. However, he expressed great satisfaction with the session where he was made to fill an assessment questionnaire since he felt that experience was quite unique. It can be seen that his experience of being given an assessment questionnaire exceeded or was better than this preconception that premarital counselling did not offer anything new but simply dealt with “routine stuff”.

Also, another participant indicated having dissatisfaction with the session on sexual intimacy because she felt the information she received, fell short to what she was expecting. This however did not translate to her being dissatisfied with the entire programme since other aspects of her premarital counselling experience exceeded her expectation.

Finally, a third participant’s would-be partner questioned the relevance of going through premarital counselling since he felt they have known each other for a long time. This partner however felt greatly satisfied with his premarital counselling experience. This was as a result of

his experience exceeding his initial expectation or perception that premarital counselling was not relevant.

6.7 Limitations of research

It should be stressed that the current study is concerned with the experience of individuals who have gone through the premarital counselling programmes and have married or are yet to be married. The study however has not examined the differences in these subcategories. The participants were from different denominations namely Orthodox, Charismatic and Pentecostal. However, the denominational differences have not been examined. The focus of the study was to have a deeper and broader understanding of the experiences of premarital counselees in Christian settings (across denominations) rather than exploring the distinct experience among denominations. Also, a core group of people that were excluded are those who have gone through premarital counselling and have divorced or separated.

The researcher did not deliberately include more females than males in this study. The greater number of females to males is because most females volunteered to take part in the study. Also, in churches who gave an equal number of volunteers of each gender, the females contacts showed greater response, willingness and availability to partake in the interviews than their male counterparts. Also, most female participants voluntarily referred their female friends and colleagues to partake in the study. It is not certain why most of the females showed such greater response than some of the males. There can however been some possible explanations. The first is that most of the females may likely be communicative or socialized to be more open and emotionally expressive thereby leading to them showing greater response and eagerness to participate in this research. Also, some female participants indicated having some prior

conversation with friends about some marital topics. This may explain why some females were more likely to recommend such female friends to also participate in the research.

There are some challenges that arose during the data collection phase. Some participants who opted for phone interviews encountered some technical challenges. On one occasion, it was discovered after the phone interview that the recording failed to capture the voice of the participant due to a malfunction of the software application. Here the participant had to be contacted to undertake another interview. Also, a few participants who undertook phone interviews had some network challenges. Such individuals with poor network connectivity were asked to repeat somethings they said on multiple occasions. Although phone interview participants were informed about the need to have a good network connectivity and how they should take steps to ensure good network connectivity such bad network challenges are commonplace, unpredictable and often out of the control of participants.

The research included individuals who have married for a number of years such as those married over 10 years. This may pose a challenge of being unable to recall the exact details of content and/or processes experienced. Whereas some individuals married over 10 years indicated not remembering most details of the content they received, some indicated they recall vividly most of the information shared with them during their premarital counselling. Also, some newlyweds could not recall all the details of the content of their programme. Some recently married individuals indicated that they referred to their premarital counselling notes before the interview in order to refresh their memory of the details of what they learnt. The issues of recall which could be a challenge for both recently married and those married for a long while have the potential of leading to underreporting or overreporting of experience (especially content related) by some participants.

6.8 Implications for Future Research and Practice

The study presents suggestive evidence for the important role premarital counselling plays in Ghanaian Christian marriages, such as helping couples overcome some huddles prior to the marriage, helping couples become better in handling issues such as finance, conflicts and the extended families. It also fosters help seeking behaviour, promote marriage satisfaction and reduce the odds of divorce and also helps couples deal with recurrent challenges in their marriages. This study supports the demand for in-marriage counselling to augment the benefits given by premarital counselling. Focusing on in-marriage counselling would help consolidate the gains made through premarital counselling. This research offers significant information for churches and institutions who seeks to engage in in-marriage counselling. It offers details on what content could be treated, the kind of format the in-marriage counselling can take and the dosage/intensity to be used. This finding is significant for research on in-marriage counselling since it offers some recommendations and interest areas highlighted by married couples on the subject of in-marriage counselling. Future researches can build on this general information offered on in-marriage and focus on any of the specific areas such as content to be treated, non-problem focus in-marriage counselling, in-house couple groups, couples retreats and seminar, individual in-marriage counselling and group format in-marriage counselling.

On the face value, this study suggests that beyond the content of premarital counselling the counsellor-and process-related aspects such as format, tools used, methodologies and traits of the premarital counsellor are important component which helps participants gain greater benefits from the programme. Providers of premarital counselling may pay greater attention to these counsellor-and process-related aspects of premarital counselling in order to better prepare counsellees for marriage. The study is significant in offering relevant and specific information to

churches and other institutions who seek to improve their premarital counselling programme. For instance, some issues raised such as provision of manuals, using assessment tools, having a moderate duration rather than a having a very short or too long duration, having individual session for partners etc. are significant for the improvement of premarital counselling practice in both religious and non-religious settings. These are also specific areas that can be explored further by researchers.

6.9 Recommendation.

Possible areas for further research include a focus on the experience of divorcees. It is important that other researchers seek to understand the experience of this group and how premarital counselling may or may not have impacted their marital life. Such research will offer a greater insight to the providers on premarital counselling on how to better address the issue of divorce. One area for further study would be an investigation into an individual's experience of premarital counselling in comparison to that of their partners. This is important to help discover whether there are differences in the experience of the individual partners and also help in offering individualized experience for each gender if such need is identified. Future research might be helpful by focusing predominantly on the experience of individuals of lower socio-economic status. Also, indigenous Ghanaian languages of participant could be used for such group who may not be fluent with the English language. Other studies may be helpful by examining difference in the perception of couples in various subcategories (yet-to-marry, newlyweds, married for 4-9 year, and married over 10 years etc.). Also, the experience of Christian premarital counselees could also be examined based on denominational differences.

These findings could also have some implication for practice. First, it is important that religious organizations establish in-marriage counselling for their members. Participants of premarital counselling could be informed about this avenue for continues learning and the

willingness of their religious group to stick with them through their marital journey. Secondly, providers of premarital counselling should also invest into designing and making student manuals available to their counselees. Such documents may serve as reference materials for the couple in the future. Thirdly, it will be helpful for premarital counsellors in Christian settings to be offered continuous professional training. Also, churches with the capacity to bring on board professional counsellors or psychologists to handle some aspects of their premarital counselling programmes could collaborate with such professionals.

In addition, providers of premarital counselling should take into account the duration of their programme. Having a programme that is unduly overstretched may dent the experience of the participants. Also, having a very short programme may prevent participants from having the utmost benefit from their premarital counselling programme.

Also, about roles and responsibilities in the family, it is essential the church does not only prescribe specific and traditional roles husbands and wives should play in the family. It will be helpful to also suggest other equal and egalitarian roles and responsibilities for husbands and wives. The findings suggest that some young couples today feel the traditional domestic roles assign to couples in marriage may not be helpful considering the structure of the modern family where both husband and wife are likely to have a career.

In addition, Christian premarital counsellors should not focus entirely on encouraging partners not to deny each other of sexual pleasure. They should be more practical with their counselees by addressing ways they can improve their sexual life and discuss the couple's sexual expectations before marriage. Also, counsellors can make use of books that address the subject of sexual intimacy. Here counselees could be given such books to read and offered guidance on some of

the things they read. Some information gleaned from such readings could serve as points for discussion during the counselling sessions.

Parenting is a key area premarital counselling can help couples with. One of the themes to emerge was how couples felt ill-prepared to be parents. It is important premarital counsellors pay closer attention to the subject of parenting. The introduction of children into the family may bring some changes in various facet of the marital life of the couple. Having this understanding will help the couple prepare for the changes that may ensue and also be better able to cope by having the understanding that such changes are normal and are to be expected. Also, some counsellees prior to marriage may not see the need for learning about parenting. This may be because the idea of parenting might be seen as a distant reality for most of these counsellees. Premarital counsellors should point out this danger to counsellees whiles highlighting the importance of parenting and its effect on the marriage.

There is also the likelihood that some couples may have challenges bearing children and therefore the premarital counsellor ought to inform the couple on such possibilities. Here the couple could be encouraged to seek help from a medical center. They could be made aware that such help-seeking is not contrary to their faith therefore should not be frowned upon. Finally, participants of premarital counselling should be encouraged to pay close attention during premarital counselling lessons. One of the reasons suggested by some participants for churches to have in-marriage counselling is that counsellees may not be paying attention during premarital counselling. This may be due to the excitement associated with getting married or the wedding ceremony. Premarital counsellees should be warned against the possibility and dangers of being overwhelmed by the bliss and excitement of getting married which may hinder them from paying attention during their premarital counselling.

6.10 Conclusion

The current study has made some contributions to the literature on premarital counselling among Christian institutions in Ghana. First the participants were taken from various denominations. Hence, the data is not limited to a single denomination or assembly but rather it covers the experience of participants across multiple denomination and also across different assemblies ranging from large to small-sized congregations. Secondly, this study was not limited to individuals of one geographical location but included married individuals across five regions in Ghana. This offers greater representation of marital counselling in Ghana as opposed to studies that focuses on a single geographical location. Thirdly, the qualitative approach used has offered a more in-depth understanding of the experience of participants of premarital counselling. Also, areas they evaluate as most helpful was unearth and areas where there can be improvements were also suggested.



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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Thank you for accepting to participate in this research. I am interviewing people about their experience of premarital counselling. I would like to learn from your personal experience.

PREMARITAL COUNSELLING HISTORY

1. Are you married?
 - a. How long have you been married?
 - b. If single – when do you intend to marry
 - c. If divorced- When did you divorce?
2. When did you have your premarital counselling?
3. Where did you have your premarital counselling?
 - a. Denomination
 - b. City
4. How was your premarital counselling conducted?

Probes

 - a. What format (eg. Individual session, conjoint session, group counselling, weekend programmes with other couples, established couple mentor/mentee interactions etc)
 - b. Duration (i.e. Sessions & entire programme)
 - c. Who provided the counselling

PREMARITAL COUNSELLING EXPERIENCE

1. Please tell me about your premarital counselling experience.

Follow-up questions:

- a. what topics/issues were discussed during your premarital counselling
(Probe for topics e.g - communication skills, conflict resolution skills, finance, sex intimacy)
- b. What topics do you wish you had received more information on?
- c. What did you like about your premarital counselling experience?
- d. What did you not like about your premarital counselling experience?

USEFULNESS OF PREMARITAL COUNSELLING

1. How useful is premarital counselling to your marriage?

Probe

- a. Do you have any examples to share?
 - b. Has the program been useful in these areas (Communication skills, Conflict resolution skills, Financial Skills, Sexual intimacy etc.)?
2. What are some of the common challenges or disagreement you have had in your marriage?

Probe

- a. How has your premarital counselling help you in resolving these challenges?
3. How has your premarital counselling experience contributed to your relationship or marriage satisfaction?

4. Have you gone to see your counsellor/a psychologist//Pastor on any issue relating to your relationship/marriage after your premarital counselling?

Probe

- a. How did your premarital counselling experience influence your decision to/not to seek such help?
5. How has your premarital counselling experience helped sustain your marriage?

ADDITIONAL QUESTION (IN-MARRIAGE COUNSELLING)

1. You mentioned post-marital counselling
- a. what is your view on it?
 - b. how do you suggest it is done?

Or

There are others who also suggest post-marital counselling/in-marriage counselling

- a. . what is your view on it?
- b. how do you suggest it is done?

Demographic Information: Can you please tell me about yourself?

1. How old are you?

2. What is your gender
3. Marital status (Probe first or second marriage)
4. What is your highest level of education?
5. What work do you do?
6. Where do you live currently?
7. What church do you belong to?

Debriefing

1. Please tell me about how you felt during this interview
2. Are there any questions you want clarification on?
3. Are there any other questions you wished I had asked?
4. Tell me if this study could be useful to others who have participated in premarital counselling?



Appendix 2: Letter of introduction to religious leaders

