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Pre-Marital Counselling and Sustainability of Marriages in Contemporary Ghanaian Society

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ABSTRACT

Marriages in Ghana are usually preceded by counseling. It is believed that premarital counseling helps to sustain marriages because it gives couples the initial skills needed to enable them to start their marriage and solve minor problems that may be encountered in the relationship. This study was aimed at assessing the significance of premarital counseling to the sustenance of marriage. The study adopted a mixed methodological approach in gathering the data. Data was gathered from 112 individuals from three different suburbs of the capital city of Ghana. The results showed that although pre-marital counseling was observed to be important for would-be couples, it does not help sustain all marriages. Married couples that were given pre-marital counseling were getting separated as well as those who never had pre-marital counseling. It is therefore recommended that although premarital counseling may be necessary, it is not sufficient to sustain marriages. Therefore, counseling should continue even after marriage.

KEYWORDS

Couples, Marriage, Person-Centred Theory, Pre-Marital Counseling, Solution-Focused Theory, Would-Be Couples

INTRODUCTION

Pre-marital counseling is always aimed at preparing would-be couples to begin a good and healthy relationship that leads to marriage (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997; Myrick, Green & Crenshaw, 2014). It is a form of training that according to Harway (2005) equips couples with the necessary skills needed by couples to advance in their relationships. Doria, Kennedy, Strathie, & Strathie, (2014) have argued that if family lives and relationships would improve, then institutions must highlight and intensify their counseling interventions and activities. Although pre-marital counseling is aimed at ensuring that individuals relationship are enhanced, it also help to prevent problems associated with courtship or marriage and any problems that could lead to conflicts in the relationship or divorce, but could also enhance relationship quality (Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006 as cited in Carlson, Daire, Munyon & Young, 2012). It is however argued that some religious groups and

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organizations go beyond just organizing marriage ceremonies for would-be couples and organize pre-marital counseling sessions for individuals who desire to marry. Although some critics argue that people consider pre-marital counseling as a preparatory tool that could help reduce the number of cases of divorce there seems to be no empirical evidence to substantiate the argument that it reduces the number of divorce cases (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997; Carlson et al., 2012). A reasonable number of couples do engage in pre-marital counseling to enable them to have a better understanding and foundation knowledge needed in married life (Goerz & Goerz, 1999). Yet some couples continue to have problems in their marriages while marriages continue to collapse.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To help counselors provide support for would-be couples, some theoretical models have been developed. In the 1950s, Person-Centred theory was developed in the USA as a counseling theory which roots could be traced from the humanistic psychology, views individuals as being capable and having the potential of solving their own problems (Seligman, 2006). The ability of counselees as individuals who have an understanding of themselves and the problem they face. However, a major contributor of Person-Centred theory Carl Rogers emphasized that a counselor and the quality of the relationship that exists between the counselor and counselee will determine how successful the counseling process will be (Corey, 2005). According to Carl Rogers, there were six conditions for change to occur in the counseling process. They include; psychological contact between two persons; incongruence marked by vulnerability and anxiety on the part of the client; congruence and integration on the part of the therapist; unconditional positive regard on the part of the therapist towards the client; the counsellor's experience of empathy of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavouring this awareness to the client and the achievement even if it is minimal, of both the therapist' unconditional positive regard and empathetic understanding of the client.

Techniques appropriate for this type of therapy include listening, accepting, understanding and sharing. One major technique used by Person-Centred therapists is to create an atmosphere that facilitates the development of self-awareness and self-esteem. Person-centered approach theory assumes that every individual has the tendency to work towards self-actualization (Seligman, 2006). Self-actualization is the tendency for every individual to develop his/her capacities. However, the genuineness on the part of the counselor is key to a successful therapy session (Rogers as cited in Corey, 2005). Allowing counselees to understand themselves and their problems is a way of helping would-be couples to develop the skills that will help them solve their problems in the future.

The solution-focused theory is another counseling theory that has been used over the years to address marital problems. It was introduced in the 1980s by Steve De Shazer and his colleagues at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee (O'Connell, 1998; Friedman & Lipchick, 1999). Solution-Focused theorists argue that every problem is unique and that both counselors and their clients generate ideas for solutions after a careful study of the problems. The theory seeks to guide couples to develop skills that will help solve problems in their marriages.

Solution-Focused theory indicates that it is practically impossible to know everything about an individual (Corey, 2005). Every individual is unique in its own way. The solution-focus theory focuses on how individuals construct meanings about their experiences, relationships and future plans. The focus is usually on the solution and not the problem. Solution-Focused counselors are interested in finding solutions to problems rather than how and why a problem started. Solution focussed theory helps clients to review how they look at things and review solutions which might not initially be evident (Watson, 2006). Solution-focused theorists believe that emphasis should not be placed on the problem or a full description of it to get a solution. Rather the counselor and the client should move forward to know what the problem will be like when solved. This approach can make counseling sessions brief because the emphasis is on the solution and not how the problem arose. According to Corey (2005), research has shown that this therapy has been successfully applied to dealing with

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