

**SUSTAINING MUSLIM MARRIAGES: THE ROLE OF
PREMARITAL COUNSELLING IN THE NIMA/MAMOBI
MUSLIM COMMUNITIES**

BY

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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis is my own original work that I have produced after a research. Where references have been made or people's ideas and views have been cited, acknowledgements have been given. Also, this thesis has not been presented either in whole or in part to any institution.

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ABSTRACT

The Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities for several years has a traditional method of counselling prospective Muslim couples in the community, however due the challenges of this method there is an introduction of formal premarital counselling centres . This is basically what has aroused the researcher's interest. The aim of this research is to highlight the roles of Imams, Muslim scholars, *Aluwanka*, and relatives of the bride as traditional premarital counsellor and that of Hajia Memuna Maliki as well as Sheikh Muhammad Zakariya Addo as formal premarital counsellors.

As a result interviews were conducted with the facilitators of both traditional and formal premarital counselling in these communities. It included married people who have gone through the formal premarital counselling and some Muslim Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) such as the Ahmadiyyah Muslim Mission (AMM) in Accra, The Office of the National Chief Imam (ONCI) and the Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWAJ) among others. Marriage ceremonies and premarital counselling sessions were also observed. In addition fifty questionnaires were distributed to ascertain the attitude of Muslim youth in these communities to formal premarital counselling as an emerging new development.

The findings revealed that some of the Muslim NGO's like the ONCI and ASWAJ who receive complaints on marriage problems from Muslims have no structure for premarital counselling. Also despite the important roles of the traditional premarital counsellors, very essential topics in premarital counselling such as sexual relationship between couples and parenting in Islam were not thoroughly discussed. Another finding was that the traditional system was biased towards the wife, in the sense that more emphasis is laid on the responsibilities of the wife. However a substantial number of people in the community are not aware of the existence of marriage counselling centres in these communities. Interestingly the individuals running the emerging formal premarital counselling centres have no training in the field of marriage counselling. This therefore raises questions of whether they are able to counsel appropriately and effectively or may be considered 'as square pegs in round holes'.

The research therefore suggests that for the traditional premarital counsellors to continue to remain relevant and impact positively on marriages in these Muslim communities, the *Aluwanka* and the Imams should be taken through an in-service training on marriage counselling. In addition the formal marriage counsellors in these communities will be more effective if they also go through some training on marriage counselling to improve upon their skills. It is also important that the Muslim NGO's in Ghana provide premarital counselling for the various Muslim communities in Ghana, and take initiatives to educate Muslim communities in Ghana on the importance of premarital counselling. This research is important because it serves as a pioneering work in the area of premarital counselling in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, Abdulai Adam Eliasu and our daughter, Shefa'at Nasara Eliasu Abdulai.



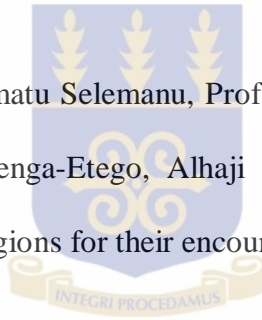
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMM:	Ahmadiyyah Muslim Mission.
ASWAJ:	Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'a.
GMA:	Ghana Muslim Academy.
GMM:	Ghana Muslim Mission.
GBMCC:	Garden of Bliss Marriage Counselling Centre.
ICCWO:	Islamic Charity Centre for Women Orientation.
IMCEC:	Islamic Marriage Counselling and Education Centre.
ONCI:	Office of the National Chief Imam.
NGO's:	Non-Governmental Organizations.
PBUH:	Peace and Blessings of Allah be Upon Him.

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GLOSSARY OF FOREIGN OR TECHNICAL WORDS

These are made up of Arabic, Hausa and Kotokoli words. For the purpose of clarification the researcher has used the initial of every language to indicate the origin of a word. For example, Aluwanka is a combination of Kotokoli and Hausa languages. Therefore it would be indicated with the letters (K, H) and Dawah which is an Arabic word will also be indicated with the letter (A).

Aluwanka (K.H): an old woman who washes and counsels the bride during a marriage ceremony.

Awra (A): the part of a person from the Islamic perspective which is not supposed to be seen by any person apart from his/her partner.

Budan Kay (H): a day when the bride's clothes, cooking utensils and food stuffs are presented to her bride after she is taken to her husband's house in Hausa.

Chuda(H): the process of performing a ritual bath for a bride by the *Aluwanka*.

Dawah(A): an Arabic word for evangelism.

Fiqh(A): Islamic jurisprudence.

Ghusu(A): ritual bath in Islam.

Hadith(A): recorded sayings and practices of the Prophet (PBUH).

Halal(A): a permissible act in Islam.

Haram(A): a forbidden act in Islam.

Imam(A): a religious leader in Islam.

Istikhara(A): a prayer performed to seek Allah's counsel on a matter.

Jahiliyyah(A): the period of ignorance in the pre-Islamic era in Arabia.

Kunshi(H): the process of applying henna on the bride's forehead, palms and feet.

Lalle(H): the name for henna in Hausa.

Leefe(H): the presentation and arrangement of assorted pieces of cloths which is presented to a bride.

Mahr(A): a term used for dowry in Arabic.

Mallam(H): a corrupted form of the word *mualim* in Arabic which means a teacher.

Qur'an(A): holy book for Muslims.

Ranandakakwakwa(H): a day for pounding palm nuts in Hausa.

Sadaka(H): a charitable act in Hausa.

Sadaki(H): dowry in Hausa.

Sheikh(A): a Muslim scholar.

Shirk(A): polytheism.

Wakil(A): a male witness for the groom.

Waleema(A): a marriage party.

Wali(A): a male witness for the bride.

Zina(A): a term use for illegal sexual intercourse in the Qur'an.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 General Introduction

Marriage in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities is a religious and social activity. Religious leaders, relatives of a couple as well as members of the community play various roles in the hope of ensuring that couples enjoy long lasting relationships. Marriage ceremonies in these communities are moments of joy. They are characterised by a lot of eating and drinking. But a greater concern of many people is whether these marriages would be successful. Some marriage counsellors such as Collins¹ and Ayandokun² posit that, marriage as a human institution is bound to face some challenges because it is a bond between two individuals with different orientations in terms of sex, religion, education and culture among others.

For example, the arbitration section of Ahlussunah Wal Jama'a (ASWAJ) has for several years dealt with quite a number of problems between Muslim married couples. In 2010 complaints received on marriage were about 246, out of which 27 of these cases ended up in divorce and divorce certificates were issued to the couples. In 2011, the complaints increased to 253 while 32 ended in divorce and certificates were issued as such. Again in 2012, the office received 297 complains on marriage and 79 of them ended in divorce. Though ASWAJ does not only deal with marital issues, complaints on marriage tops the list of other complains such as inheritance disagreement and problems between tenants and their land lords among

¹ Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counselling: A Comprehensive Guide*, (Texas: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 534.

² Esther O. Ayandoku, *Counselling Made Easy: Vital Hints on Caring for People With Marriage Spices*, (Lagos, Nigeria: Gloryline Christian Publications, 2010), 100.

others. This means that there are several challenges facing marriages in the Muslim communities. If indeed marriage is the basic unit of a society then efforts must be made by parents, Muslim leaders and scholars to save Muslim marriages.

In order to ensure that marital relationships are peaceful and sustainable, Collins and Ayandokun have recommended that prospective couples should be taken through sessions of premarital counselling. This is because premarital counselling provides prospective couples with the requisite skills on how to enhance marital relationships, prevent problems and as well address challenges that might threaten their marital relationships. It is in this light that the researcher is investigating the traditional and the formal premarital counselling in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities. The traditional premarital counselling is the type of premarital counselling where the Imams, Muslim scholars, *Aluwanka* and relatives of the bride play the role of marriage counsellors during a marriage ceremony. On the other hand formal premarital counselling is where prospective couples attend different sessions of premarital counselling which is supervised by a marriage counsellor for a specific period of time. In this work, the researcher has identified two formal marriage counselling centres in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities which were introduced by Sheikh Muhammad Zakariya Addo and Hajia Memuna Maliki.

1.1 Statement of Problem

The Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities has a traditional system of counselling prospective Muslim couples, however due to the lapses of the traditional system some Muslims in these communities have introduced the formal premarital counselling system. This is basically what has aroused the researcher's curiosity to identify the 'pot holes' in the traditional

premarital counselling system and how they are addressed by the emerging formal premarital counselling system.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

This research has sought to establish the role of:

- Imams, Muslim scholars, *Aluwanka* and relatives of the bride as traditional premarital counsellors in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities.
- Hajia Memuna Maliki and Sheikh Muhammad Zakariya Addo as formal premarital counsellors in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities.

1.3 Research Question

The major question this research seeks to answer is: What is the state of premarital counselling in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities?

1.4 Scope of Research

The scope of this work is limited to the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities. This is because they are Muslim dominated and also the two types of the premarital counselling under study are being practised in these communities.

1.5 Methodology

Methodology basically has to do with the various approaches that were used in this research. This research combines the theological and phenomenological approaches. The theological approach is concerned with God or transcendence, doctrines and activities arising from faith

and interpreting faith.³ This approach was relevant in understanding marriage and premarital counselling from the Islamic perspective, using the Qur'an, Hadith and materials which were relevant to the work. The concept *epoche* in the phenomenological approach, which means 'bracketing out' was used in this research. *Epoche* involves 'the absence of presupposition which would influence resultant understanding.'⁴ In other words the researcher needs to do away with all previous ideas about the people or community under study in order to have an objective understanding of what is being studied. Observation as a major tool in the phenomenological approach was also employed. Marriage and premarital counselling sessions are observable phenomena; therefore the researcher observed the performance of marriages and premarital counselling sessions in Nima/Mamobi in order to have first hand information about marriage and premarital counselling in these communities.

1.6 Data Collection

Data from primary and secondary sources were used in gathering information for this work. Primary sources include: Interviews, questionnaires and participant observation. Interview is the most effective method of asking questions when doing research; the questions asked must be relevant to the research topics as well as answers given.⁵ Every interview involves two parties, first is the interviewer or enumerator who has some questions to ask the other party. Second, is the interviewee who is expected to respond appropriately to the questions asked. The researcher in doing this work interviewed a number of people; the first groups of people who were interviewed were three *Aluwanka* (Adama Kotokoli, Haraka and Zenabu Zakariya) in the Nima/Mamobi communities. This was to help gather information on how they carry

³Frank Whaling, *Theological Approaches* in Peter Connolly, *Approaches to the Study of Religion*, (London: York House Typographic Ltd, 2004), 229.

⁴Clive Erricker *Phenomenological Approaches* in Peter Connolly, *Approaches to the Study of Religion*, 77.

⁵Tom K. B. Kumekpor, *Research Methods and Techniques of Social Research*, (Accra: SonLife Press & Services, 2002), 185.

out their roles in marriage ceremonies and the issues they address in counselling prospective brides. Three Imams (Dr. Tamim Abdul Wahab, Imam Ibrahim Abdulai, Sheikh Yunus Ibrahim) who officiate at Muslim marriage ceremonies were also interviewed to know how they officiate Muslim marriages, the significance of the procedures as well as the issues they address during premarital counselling.

Also, Hajia Memuna Maliki of the Garden of Bliss Marriage Counselling Centre and Sheikh Muhammad Zakariya Addo an Imam and a marriage counsellor of the Islamic Marriage Counselling and Educational Service were also interviewed. The interviews with these groups of people helped the researcher to know why they have introduced formal premarital counselling centres and some of the issues they address during premarital counselling.

The researcher also interacted with the president and general secretary of ASWAJ, Hajj Umar Ibrahim and Sheikh Yakubu Abban respectively. The officer in charge of administration: Mallam Musa and a personal assistant to the National Chief Imam: Muhammad Khuzaima Osman, at the Office of the National Chief Imam (ONCI). Some members who were in charge of marriage affairs in the Ahmadiyyah Muslim Mission (AMM) in Accra namely: Osofo Ibrahim Hammond and Osofo Mumtaz Badu were interviewed. From these interviews the researcher was able to identify the Islamic Organisations which were providing and those which were not providing premarital counselling. Also two married couples and two married women who have gone through formal premarital counselling before getting married were interviewed. But since it is against counselling practices to reveal information about couples to the public, the researcher has used general Muslim names such as Mr./Mrs Haruna.

Another method of data collection is the use of questionnaires. This is a form or document which contains a number of questions to be answered by a particular group of persons known to have knowledge on a research topic.⁶ With regards to the research topic, questionnaires were administered to some of the youth in Nima/Mamobi to know their opinions on the formal premarital counselling centres that exist in these communities. The first part of the questionnaire was concerned with personal information about the respondents, such as age, sex, educational back ground and marital status. The second part of the questionnaire was on their views on formal premarital counselling and its importance to the Muslim communities.

Participant Observation was also used for gathering information. This is when the researcher plays the role of an actor and a spectator at the same time, as he/she observes and takes notes of information. When using this method, it is important that the researcher integrates into the group to such an extent that the group sees the researcher as one of them.⁷ Here the researcher observed and participated in marriage ceremonies and premarital counselling sessions. This helped the researcher with first hand information on the issues that are addressed at both the traditional and formal premarital counselling. Lapses in these marriage counselling were identified and recommendation were given on how to improve on premarital counselling in the area of study.

The languages used for data collection were mainly *Hausa* and *Twi*. Hausa is a language that is spoken by most people in the Nima/Mamobi communities in spite of their ethnic background and therefore serves as a *lingua franca*. The Ahmadis also speak *Twi* at their gatherings though their members are from different ethnic groups. The target group for the research has been put in to four categories; these include prospective Muslim couples who

⁶Kumekpor, *Research Methods*, 157.

⁷Kumekpor, *Research Methods*, 74.

have gone through formal premarital counselling and are married, the two Muslim marriage counsellors, Imams and *Aluwanka*.

1.7 Sample of Data

The age range set for category one of the target group consisting of the Muslim couples in this research, ranges between ages fifteen (15) to sixty (60). It is believed that persons found in this target group should have developed some physical features and quite ready for marriage. The second category consists of two (2) marriage counsellors Nima/Mamobi Hajia Memuna Maliki and Sheikh Muhammad Zakariya Addo, three Imams Dr. Tamim Abdul Wahab, Sheikh Yunus Ibrahim and Imam Ibrahim Abdullah who officiated some marriage ceremonies in the Nima/Mamobi communities are members of the third category and three *Aluwanka* Adama Kotokoli, Haraka and Zenabu Zakariya also in the same communities constitute the fourth target group. Seven leaders from some Islamic Organizations in Accra were also interviewed; among them are the Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWAJ)⁸, the Ahmadiyah Muslim Mission (A.M.M.)⁹, the Office of the National Chief Imam (ONCI)¹⁰ and the Ghana Muslim Mission (G.M.M.)¹¹ are in the fifth category.

It is important to note that the names of marriage counsellors, Imams, *Aluwanka* and leaders of Islamic N. G. O's which were mentioned in the work were used with their permission. However, names of the couples whose marriages the researcher observed as well as couples who have gone through the formal premarital counselling were not disclosed, instead general Muslim names such as Mariama and Eliasu were used.

⁸Hajj Umar Ibrahim and Sheikh Yakubu Abban.

⁹Osofo Ibrahim Hammond and Osofo Mumtaz Badu.

¹⁰Mallam Musah and Muhammad Khuzaima Osman.

¹¹Mr. Sulemana Nettey.

1.8 Literature Review

The idea of premarital counselling is not new in Islam, even though the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet (PBUH) do not explicitly mention premarital counselling. There are verses of the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that have bearings on premarital counselling. This thesis therefore makes use of these texts on marriage and their implications for premarital counselling. It is worth noting that Muslims in the developed countries like the United States of America have developed formal counselling services where prospective Muslim couples go for premarital counselling before they get married. Unfortunately Muslims in Ghana have not developed such formal premarital counselling programmes hence there are very few books on premarital counselling from the Islamic perspective. This has therefore necessitated the use of some Christian books on premarital counselling in addition to the few Islamic ones. It is to help the researcher give a broader explanation of premarital counselling before narrowing it to the Islamic perspective. It is important to state that the researcher has categorised the number of book that were reviewed in the work. For example materials on marriage in Islam have been separated from materials on premarital counselling as well as the one on marriage and culture.

Materials on Marriage in Islam

One of the books on the Islamic perspective of marriage is the work of Hammudah Abd al'Ati, (1977), *The Family Structure in Islam*, which looks at marriage from the Islamic perspective. He refers to marriage as 'a religious duty, a moral safeguard and a social necessity'¹². According to him, it is a religious duty, as a result the couple must bear in mind that they have entered a commitment with Allah to whom they are accountable. He cited Qur'an chapter seven verse one hundred and seven which states that 'it was Allah who

¹² Hammudah Abd al-Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam* (Maryland: American Trust Publications, 1977), 52.

created out of one living soul, and created of that soul a spouse so that he might find comfort and rest in her'¹³

In Islam marriage also protects a person's integrity because it affords the satisfaction of an individual's sexual desire in an acceptable and respectful manner. This is why Islam places value on sex and encourages Muslims to marry. The sexual desire of every individual needs to be expressed in a special manner. The Prophet (PBUH) has also encouraged Muslims who cannot afford to marry to practice voluntary fasting because it serves as a form of castration. Abd al Ati's book was relevant to this work because it explains the Islamic perspective of marriage, which is the main focus of the second chapter of this work. However, this research goes further to describe two typical marriage ceremonies in the Nima/Mamobi communities and how the cultural practices of the people in the Nima/Mamobi communities have influenced their marriages. It also highlights some of the elements of premarital counselling in these marriage ceremonies.

Another work discussed was Abdur Rahman I. Doi, (1984) *Shari'ah: The Islamic Law*. The second part of this book on Family relations was relevant to this research. He stated that the purpose of marriage in Islam is for couples to share love, companionship, have children and live in peace in accordance to the teachings of Allah and the exemplary life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He stressed on the importance of satisfying the sexual instinct which is natural in every individual and added that according to the principles and teachings of Islam it is only through marriage that the sexual instinct can be satisfied. He did an extensive discussion on the importance of *mahr* (dowry) in every marriage. He explained that it forms an essential part of a Muslim marriage and no Muslim marriage is valid until *mahr* is paid.

¹³Abd al-Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 55.

According to him, Islam has not placed a specific amount on the men as dowry; however the *mahr* should be reasonable, taking into consideration ‘the position in life and social status of parties to marriage...’¹⁴

He also suggests that courtship is a western practice which is against the teachings and practices of Islam. He advised that prospective couples can have a critical look at each other’s face and hands¹⁵ but not passionately because looking passionately may arouse certain desires and cause prospective couples to act against the codes of conduct of Islam. In his view fair treatment of the wives should be the underlying principle for any man who wants to practice polygyny. For him Muslim men should have tangible reasons for getting into polygyny and stated some of these reasons may include: an incurable sickness on the part of a wife, when a wife has a mental problem or when the wife has reached old age and is sexually inactive among others. Doi’s views on Islamic marriage were also useful in the second chapter as it clearly stated the Islamic position on certain practices like courtship and polygyny.

Material on Marriage and Culture in Ghana:

Enid S. Childkroun, 1978. *People of the Zongo: the transformation of Ethnic Identities in Ghana*. The researcher reviewed the seventh chapter of his work where he discussed Kinship and Marriage in the Second Generation. Here he discussed some of the customs of the Muslims in Kumasi which are means of maintaining kinship relationships; one of these customs is the transfer of a child’s responsibilities to his parent’s relative, like an elderly brother or sister of the parent. Any member who does not adhere to this custom is considered as arrogant, selfish and disrespectful. It is the relatives of a child’s father who name the child

¹⁴ Doi, *Shari’ah : The Islamic Law*, 161.

¹⁵ Doi, *Shari’ah : The Islamic Law*, 121.

when he is born and even take care of all or part of the financial obligations that come with it. Even marriage arrangements are made by siblings of the parent and not the parent. They are also responsible for the payment of the dowry and receiving it.

In looking at how culture influences marriage he discussed a double marriage ceremony between Mossis and Hausas. Seidu who is the father of two brides had his daughters' marriages arranged by his brother and sister. One of the marriages (between Mariama and Nuru) was a *sadaka* marriage because Nuru was a step grandson of Seidu who is Mariama's father. *Sadaka* marriage means no dowry was paid. But a dowry was paid to the other daughter of Seidu because she was married to her father's friend who is Hausa.

Childkrout examined the role of the *Aluwanka* (the one who washes) as one who prayed and bathed the bride. He then discussed how the brides were counselled by their fathers and uncles before they were finally taken to their husbands' houses. According to Childkrout though the counselling was brief, it emphasised the 'dominant position of men and women's duties towards the new husbands. Brides were also told to obey their husbands and were reminded of their Islamic education that says that women went to heaven because they followed their husbands'¹⁶.

Childkrout's work has some commonalities with this research when it discussed the counselling from the bride's father and uncle, advising the brides on their responsibilities to their husbands. It is not surprising that the *Aluwanka* as well as the relatives of the bride towed along the same line in this research. This research is different to that of Childkrout in the sense that it reveals that the cultural practice of *Aluwanka* bathing the bride is now a thing

¹⁶Enid S. Childkrout, *People of the Zongo: the Transformation of Ethnic Identities in Ghana*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 174.

of the past because members of the community have come to the understanding that Islam teaches against it. This research is also different to Childkroust's because apart from the relatives of the bride this research has revealed the role of the *Aluwanka* to not just bathing the bride but counselling her as well. Also the Imam is seen counselling the groom at the officiating of a marriage ceremony though he may not be present. This is because in the Muslim community tradition demands that the groom is represented by his best man at the ceremony. It is expected that the best man will go and inform the groom on everything that transpired including the counselling. Even though this is not an Islamic requirement it has become the norm. Again, this research goes further to identify two formal premarital counselling centres in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities.

Materials on Premarital Counselling:

Imam Muhammad Magid's article, *Premarital Counselling from the Islamic Perspective* was used because he is a Muslim marriage counsellor in America. This article is relevant because of the common religious beliefs between Muslims in America and Muslims in Ghana and how the Islamic beliefs have influenced Imam Magid's writing on premarital counselling. He defines premarital counselling as "a preventive measure to help people understand marital relationships, the responsibilities that come with it and their expectations of one another."¹⁷

According to Imam Magid there are basically two types of premarital counselling, first is the educational where the marriage counsellor meets a group of individuals who are single to discuss issues relating to marriage. The second type is much more private involving only the couple and the counsellor. He stated that one of the qualities of a good counsellor is the ability to listen well, and referred to the Qur'an which states that 'Allah has indeed heard and

¹⁷WWW.isna.net/...Islamicperspectiveofcounselling (accessed, November 20, 2011).

accepted the statement of the woman who pleads with thee concerning her husband and carries her complaint in prayer to Allah...'.¹⁸ Other qualities of a Muslim counsellor include trust, respect, loving what is good for other people and connecting people with Allah among others.¹⁹ He explained that counselling helps in addressing cultural, religious and individual differences among couples. It also provides a platform for Muslims couples to discuss issues in child upbringing, financial planning, decision making and conflict resolution among others.

Latifa Abobo Sidique, (2006), *Premarital Counselling in Islam: A Case Study In Somanya Zongo* discussed premarital counselling in the Somanya Muslim community. She looked at marriage from the Islamic perspective, how Islamic marriages are performed in the community and some of the cultural practices of the people that have negatively affected Muslim marriages. The long essay also highlighted the role of the *Aluwanka*, Imams and parents in premarital counselling and called for well-established marriage counselling centres for Muslims in their various communities. This essay was relevant because, like Somanya Zongo which is a Muslim community, this research work also involves the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities. The two communities share similar cultures as far as the traditional method of premarital counselling is concern, a typical example is the role of the *Aluwanka* in marriage ceremonies. This work would build on where the essay left off; it has identified some formal marriage counselling centres, and therefore is looking at their contribution in sustaining marriages in the Muslim communities in Accra. This thesis is distinct from

¹⁸WWW.isna.net/...Islamicperspectiveofcounselling (accessed, November 20, 2011).

¹⁹WWW.isna.net/...Islamicperspectiveofcounselling (accessed, November 20, 2011).

Abobo's work because it has highlighted some of the challenges of both the traditional and formal premarital counselling and proposed solutions on how to address these challenges.

The researcher also reviewed Garry R. Collins, 2007, *Christian Counselling: A Comprehensive Guide*. In his chapter on premarital counselling, Collins explained that though there is a lot of news on the media about marriage and its challenges, very little has been done by religious leaders and parents to address this problem. He argued that more attention is paid to arrangement towards the ceremony than preparing the couples for the challenges they are likely to confront in the marriage.

He stressed that, it is premarital counselling that prevents problems in marital relationships. This is done by educating and informing the couple on how to prevent problems as well as ways of addressing problems. He cited poor communication as the root cause of most marital problems and added that it is through premarital counselling that couples learn effective communication skills. 'They become aware of the value of spontaneous, honest, sensitive communication. They are also encouraged to discuss their feelings, expectations, differences, attitudes and personal hurts. They learn to communicate about sensitive issues, listen carefully as they try to understand each other, and talk through problems without putting down each other or hiding what they truly feel.'²⁰ For couples to have an effective counselling, he advised that premarital counselling should take place several months before the marriage ceremony. Because it would give the couple and the marriage counsellor ample time to have effective premarital counselling sessions. This material was used in the third chapter of the research. It gave the researcher a general idea about premarital counselling however this thesis has also included the Islamic perspective of premarital counselling to the

²⁰ Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 536.

chapter because the work is on premarital counselling in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities.

1.9 Limitation of the Study

During the research it was noticed that apart from the Ghana Muslim Academy which made it clear that they do not provide premarital counselling to their members, the Office of the National Chief Imam and the Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'a in Accra mentioned that they provide premarital counselling. However, the various interviews that were conducted revealed that they rather officiate at Muslim marriages, settle disputes between couples and take prospective couples through the formality of acquiring marriage certificates. This is why the research is limited to the Garden of Bliss Marriage Counselling Centre by Hajia Memuna Maliki and the Islamic Marriage Counselling and Educational Service by Mallam Addo who are providing premarital counselling in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities.

During the research it became important for the researcher to observe the officiating of a few Muslim marriages, to know if the officiating Imam would counsel the prospective couple before the knot was tied. However, because this activity is usually men's affair, as a female researcher it was difficult to get inside the mosque to observe the marriage ceremony. Culturally within the Muslim community the officiating of a marriage ceremony has become men's affair. This raises the question of why in spite of Islam's position on women men still refuse the women to enter the mosque and observe the ceremony. A tape recorder was used to record proceedings at the marriage ceremony and the officiating Imam was later interviewed to further explain the procedure for officiating marriage ceremonies and how they counsel prospective couples. The recorded information and the interview with the officiating Imams

gave better understanding of the issues raised by the Imams as a way of counselling prospective couples.

It was difficult to assess the impact of the traditional and formal premarital counselling systems because it would be unfair to assess the formal against the traditional method of premarital counselling. The traditional method has been in practice for decades while the formal type is a new development which is now gaining grounds in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities. Another challenge encountered in assessing the impact of the two types of premarital counselling was the difficulty in getting couples who have gone through it for interview, even though some couples interviewed were barely a year in marriage.

1.10 Structure of the Work

This work has been divided into six chapters. Chapter one gives a background of the work; statement of problem, aims and objectives, the methodology of data collection and limitations. It also includes literature review as well as structure and relevance of the work. Chapter two is entitled *Islamic Perspective of Marriage*. Issues such as the Islamic idea on marriage, the requirement of a Muslim marriage, responsibilities of the couple in marriage and the importance of marriage in Islam were discussed. Chapter three is entitled *Premarital Counselling in Islam*. It defines premarital counselling and the different types from a broader perspective as well as the qualities of a marriage counsellor and the subject matter of premarital counselling. The Islamic perspective of premarital counselling and the importance of premarital counselling were also discussed in this chapter. Chapter four is titled *Marriage Ceremonies in Nima/Mamobi communities*. This chapter gives a description of marriage procedure and discusses two typical marriage ceremonies among Muslims in Nima/Mamobi. This chapter helps in identifying elements of premarital counselling in the people's marriage

ceremony. The fifth chapter on, *Formal Premarital Counselling Centres in the Nima/Mamobi communities* discusses premarital counselling at the Garden of Bliss Marriage Counselling Centre, which was founded by Hajia Memuna Maliki and Mallam Addo's Marriage Counselling Centre at the *Zurak* Mosque at Mamobi. Chapter six which concludes the research deals with the analysis and summary of the work, recommendations and other areas for further research.

1.11 Relevance of the Work

This research is important because it serves as a documentation of a pioneering work in the area of premarital counselling in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities. The work has identified two forms of premarital counselling in these communities and highlighted the individuals involved and how they carry out their premarital counselling. It is the hope of the researcher that Muslim leaders such as the Imams as well as Islamic organisations will treat premarital counselling with the seriousness it deserves, and make it a requirement for officiating Muslim marriages in these communities.

CHAPTER TWO

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON MARRIAGE

2.0 Introduction

Though the main focus of the thesis is on premarital counselling, this chapter is dedicated to the Islamic perspective on marriage. This is important because according to Collins discussing marriage with prospective couples would help them take their marriage seriously and see it as a ‘relationship that needs to be nurtured and built’.²¹ Imam Mageed also emphasised that a Muslim marriage counsellor needs to explain the Islamic perspective on marriage to prospective couples during premarital counselling so that they would attach importance to their relationship.²² The chapter therefore addresses the Islamic understanding of marriage by using materials that were mainly written by Muslim scholars. Some Qur’anic verses and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) about marriage were also used to explain the Islamic perspective on it.

2.1 Marriage in Islam

According to Ali, the Arabic word for marriage is *nikah* which originally means *aqd* or uniting.²³ Marriage which is the basic unit of most societies is considered an important institution to the development of every community. It is believed that a healthy marriage relationship tends to nurture a healthy family. Islam regards the institution of marriage with great respect indeed. For example, Qur’an chapter 30 verse 21 states that ‘And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in

²¹ Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 533.

²² WWW.isna.net/...Islamicperspectiveofcounselling (accessed, November 20, 2011).

²³ Maulana Muhammad Ali, *THE RELIGION OF ISLAM: A COMPREHENSIVE DISCUSSION ON THE SOURCES, PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF ISLAM* (Ohio: Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Isha, at Islam, 1990), 445.

them, and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for people who give thought²⁴. The above verse explains that marriage is an institution that is ordained by Allah, which is supposed to be entered into by a consenting male and female. The verse also stresses the issue of love and mercy as crucial for the survival of marriage. Affection or love is a very important element for a successful marriage in Islam. This is because Islam frowns upon any element of force, resistance or pressure either on the part of the man or woman to marry.²⁵ Couples are expected to love each other so that the marriage can result to success and remain peaceful.

One other point that can be inferred from the verse is that couples are also expected to show mercy to one another, especially with regards to the performance of their duties and responsibilities, keeping in mind that they seek the pleasure and favour of Allah. According to Nuamah, marriage 'is a fusion of two partners (male and female) brought together to live in mutual harmony, develop a common family vision and work together towards its attainment'.²⁶

Another important aspect of marriage in Islam is that celibacy is not an act of piety; a Muslim is not expected to stay unmarried in order to solely concentrate on the worship of Allah. There is evidence to support this, where some companions of the Prophet (PBUH) mentioned to him; one said he would not eat any food but fast as long as he lives, another said he would not marry while the third person said he would not sleep again. They all wanted to devote their time to the worship of Allah for the rest of their lives. But the Prophet (PBUH) responded that he sleeps, eats and has married. He made it clear that

²⁴ Al Muntada Al Islam, *The Qur'an*, (Jeddah: Abul-Qasim Publishing House, 1997), 394.

²⁵ Doi, *Shari'ah : The Islamic Law*, 120.

²⁶ Sheikh Ishaak Nuamah, *Marriage a Lifelong Vow*, (Accra: Anest Company LTD, 2004), 4.

anyone who does not follow his practices is not among his followers.²⁷ For Doi therefore celibacy is a real violation of human nature.²⁸ The sexual instinct is a natural one which needs to be satisfied within marriage. In the same way fornication or adultery is forbidden in Islam and they attract punishment.

2.2 The Purpose of Marriage in Islam

Marriage which is a recommended act in Islam is recommended for a purpose though some people may marry for several reasons, such as pressure from family members or friends or for financial support.²⁹ The main purpose of marriage in Islam is that it is considered as an act of worshipping Allah and obedience to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This is because the responsibilities and challenges that come with it, require of a couple with the fear of Allah to move on and create a happy relationship. Qur'an chapter 59 verse 7 says 'And whatever the messenger has given you- take; and what he has forbidden you- refrain from.'³⁰ Thus, marriage can be seen as obedience to the Prophet (PBUH) because he married and had children. He advised Muslims who have attained marriageable age and can afford to marry to do so but those without the means should practice voluntary fasting since fasting will help reduce their desire for sex.³¹

Another purpose of marriage is that it gives vent to man's/woman's sexual desire which is a natural one that needs to be satisfied. Marriage therefore enables Muslims to satisfy

²⁷Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *SAHIH AL-BUKHARI: THE BOOK OF NIKAH*, (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: DARUSSALAM Publishers & Distributors, 1996), 886.

²⁸ Doi, *Shari'ah : The Islamic Law*, 120.

²⁹ Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 524.

³⁰Al Muntada Al Islam, *The Qur'an*, 560.

³¹Abdul Hamid Sidiqi, *Sahih Muslim: Book of Marriage*, (New Delhi – India: Adam Publishers and Distributors, 2008), 339.

their sexual desires.³² However if a person is impotent and has been proven by medical examination that there is no cure for his illness then such a person is excused from getting married. Also according to Doi the main purpose of marriage is for couples to provide companionship, love, and offspring and live in peace and tranquillity with each other in accordance to the teachings and principles of Islam.³³

2.3 Islam and Polygyny

Since the research area is a Muslim community where polygyny is practised it is important that the researcher looks at the Islamic perspective on polygyny and the rules governing it. This is to also help marriage counsellors explain the rules and regulations governing polygyny in Islam to prospective couples. Polygyny is not new to Ghanaians; it was practised in Ghana even before the introduction of Islam.³⁴ It is one of the factors that aided the acceptance of Islam into Ghana because Ghanaians were familiar with the practice. It is also important to state that the role model of all Muslims, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was polygynous.³⁵ Polygyny is a type of marriage which allows a man to marry more than one wife. Islam as a religion allows limited polygyny. This means that the Muslim man is allowed to marry up to four women at a time as stated in Qur'an chapter 4 verses 3 'marry those that please you of (other) women, two, three, or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then (marry only) one or those your right hands possess'³⁶

³²This is on condition that all things are equal and there are no medical challenges to one satisfying his sexual instinct.

³³Doi, *Shari'ah the Islamic Law*, 114.

³⁴ RT. Rev. Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Accra: Ghana Publishing Co-operation, 1974) 78.

³⁵ Muhammad Husayn Haykal. *The Life of Muhammad*, (United States of America: North American Trust Publication, 1976), 285.

³⁶Al Muntada Al Islam, *The Qur'an*, 69.

It is important to note that every Muslim man who practises polygyny should treat his wives equitably because the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have stated that ‘A man who marries and then does not deal justly with them, will have his body dropping on the day of judgement’³⁷ This serves as a caution to Muslim men that if the rules of polygyny are not obeyed, it will have serious consequences on the man’s life in the hereafter.

Currently in some Muslim communities in Accra, the perception of polygyny is that, when a man’s wife becomes disobedient and her husband wants to punish her, he marries another woman. But in a radio discussions on Marhaba radio station a resource person who was discussing polygyny in Islam explained that, the underlining principle for practising polygyny is that the man who has decided to practise it should fear Allah. By constantly reminding himself about what Allah says about polygyny, he treats his wives equitably. During the discussion at the radio station Mama Aisha, a panellist in the studio explained that if a Muslim man decides to be polygynous because his wife is disobedient, then he would not be able to treat his wives fairly because he would tend to pay more attention to one person than the other and this is what Islam cautions Muslim men about.³⁸

It is interesting to see how some Muslim men justify their practice of polygyny. If man decides to practise polygyny because his wife is disobedient and he does not take the appropriate steps to reconcile with her, what is the guarantee that the second wife would always be obedient to him? Muslim men need to understand the Qur’an’s view on polygyny and practise it accordingly because at the end of the day, marriage is an act of worship and Muslim couples would be accountable to Allah on how they conducted themselves in their relationship.

³⁷Jemima Khan, ‘The Good Wives: What Kind of Woman is Willing to Share her Husband’, *NEW STATESMAN* (2013): 59.

³⁸Marhaba fm. The Sunday Twi Programme on 31 March 2013 , 7: 30am – 8:30am.

2.4 Conditions for the Practice of Polygyny

The fact that polygyny has been allowed in Islam does not mean that there are no rules guiding its practice. Certain situations should call for it, keeping in mind the main aim of marriage, is to promote peace, unity and love in every family. Doi gives certain conditions that allow a man to practice polygyny.³⁹ When a wife is suffering from a serious disease such as paralysis, epilepsy or a contagious disease.

- When all medical examinations have proven that a wife is barren.
- When a wife has a mental problem.
- When the wife has reached old age and she is weak.
- When the wife has a bad character and is refusing to reform.
- When the wife has moved out of her husband's house and being disobedient.
- When there is war and women lose their husbands in the war.
- If a man feels he is sexually not satisfied by one woman and has enough resources to take care of more than one wife.

Contrary to the general notion that a man can only practise polygyny when he has a lot of money or when he wants to punish his disobedient wife, Doi explains that such situations should not lead a man to practise polygyny but polygyny should be practised because of the reasons that have been stated above.

2.5 Courtship in Islam

Doi views courtship as a western practice which allows a man to date a girl he is intending to marry for six months, a year, two or more with the aim of getting to know each other

³⁹Doi, *Shari'ah The Islamic Law*, 146.

better.⁴⁰ He strongly argues that there is nothing like courtship in Islam, which for him has done more harm to most marriages than good. It either ends up into a ‘broken romance’ or unsuccessful marital relationships.

Sheikh Nuamah also agrees that courtship is not accepted in Islam, though some people argue that courtship allows partners to know each other’s likes and dislikes and as well assess their compatibility. On one hand the Prophet (PBUH) has given Muslims guidelines on how to select an ideal partner. On the other hand, the Qur’an is very clear on the issue of fornication and adultery.⁴¹ Therefore for him courtship only allows individuals to get into romantic relationships and conceal their bad behaviour, very often this bad behaviour resurfaces when they become married.

However, a Nigerian newspaper columnist Ustaz Abdul Jaleel Solaudin is of the view that Islam is not strictly against courting.⁴² He explained that courtship begins when a woman accepts a man’s proposal to marry her. At this time it is assumed that the lady who has accepted the proposal is engaged and prohibited to accept any proposal from any man. Other people who are not allowed to get in to courtship include widows or divorced women in their waiting period, a man who has four wives and a married woman. According to him Islam does not encourage physical contacts such as hand shaking, hugging or sexual relationship between the aspiring couple. All their actions at this moment should be geared towards marriage so that the marriage can take place as soon as possible.

⁴⁰Doi, *Shari’ah The Islamic Law*, 122.

⁴¹ Qur’an 17: 32 ‘ Do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way.

⁴²Tribune.com-ng/index.php/muslim-sermon/43362-courtship-in-islam (Accessed 16, May 2013).

Though Doi posits that courtship is against the teachings and principles of Islam, he agrees that people cannot marry those they have never seen before. He therefore suggests that prospective couples could have a critical look at the hands and face of a person they intend to marry. From the views raised above, the researcher can state that, Islam loosely allows courtship but not for a long period of time. If the Prophet (PBUH) allowed for a man to look at the face of the woman he is intending to marry,⁴³ courtship cannot be completely ruled out in Islam since a person cannot marry a stranger. Prospective couples can practise courtship taking into consideration the Islamic position of premarital sex and sexual morality. For example Muslims who are courting are not supposed to hug, kiss, touch and shake hands.⁴⁴

It is however unfortunate that some Muslim youth in recent times are engaged in premarital sex all in the name of getting to know each other. These kinds of relationships often do not end up in marriage. It is therefore advisable that for Muslims to gain the peace and unity as well as the blessing that Allah intends for every marriage the basic rule must be obeyed. This means staying away from fornication and any thing that can lead to extra marital or amorous relationship.

2.6 Procedure for Marriage

Due to the importance Islam attaches to marriage, its requirement is very simple and affordable so that Muslims can marry without facing especially, financial difficulties. The couple must keep in mind that it is a serious commitment which involves Allah and as such every step taken in this regard should be against the background of seeking Allah's blessing. Before a marriage is considered valid there should be a proposal and a

⁴³ Siddiqi, *Sahih Muslim*, 355.

⁴⁴ [Tribune.com-ng/index.php/muslim-sermon/43362-courtship-in-islam](http://tribune.com-ng/index.php/muslim-sermon/43362-courtship-in-islam) (Accessed 16, May 2013).

corresponding acceptance⁴⁵. It is normal that the man makes the proposal and the woman accepts, but this is not a hard and fast rule because the woman can as well propose. The proposal can either be in a written form or pronounced verbally. None of the parties involved should be forced to either make or accept a proposal, because marriage involves only the couple, its success or failure depends on them.

A marriage proposal can be made on behalf of a man or a woman. For example a woman's parent or guardian can propose to a man to marry their daughter. A man can also have his friend, an experienced person in his community or his parents ask for a woman's hand in marriage. But the final decision lies with the prospective couple to either accept or reject the proposal. According to Doi the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have stated that when a man gives his daughter in marriage and she dislikes it, the marriage shall be repudiated.⁴⁶ However a man is not allowed by the teachings and principles of Islam to propose to certain categories of women.⁴⁷ These include:

- A woman in her waiting period⁴⁸ due to the divorce or death of her husband.
- A man who already has four wives cannot propose to another woman. As Islamic polygamy is limited to four wives.
- A man should also not propose to his wife's sister or aunt unless after he has divorced his wife or after her death.

⁴⁵ Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 60.

⁴⁶ Doi, *Shar'iah: The Islamic Law*, 123.

⁴⁷ Doi, *Shar'iah: The Islamic Law*, 125.

⁴⁸ A waiting period is time that Islam stipulates for a widow or divorcee to remain unmarried in order to determine pregnancy for the paternity of the child to be established before re-marriage.

- No proposal shall be made to a lady already proposed to by another Muslim and she has not rejected the proposal.

An Islamic marriage also requires the groom to give a dowry (*mahr*) to the bride. Abd al Ati describes dowry as what a Muslim groom gives to his prospective bride.⁴⁹ He reiterates that the dowry becomes a personal property of the bride. She can choose to use it in any way she wants.⁵⁰ *Mahr* could be in the form of money, property or any service that is considered valuable. Qur'an chapter four verse four states 'And give the women (upon marriage) their bridal gifts graciously. But if they give up willingly to you anything of it, then take it in satisfaction'⁵¹ Islam has not placed a specific amount on the dowry; however the underlining factor is that, it should be moderate and valuable.⁵²

According to Doi *mahr* is considered as an essential part of every Muslim marriage and so a marriage is not valid unless it is paid. Its payment can be made either before or after the consummation of the marriage. However it remains a debt until the husband pays it and if he does not make this payment and he dies it would be deducted from his estates before they are shared.⁵³

In a typical Muslim community like Nima/Mamobi, the Muslim man is required to present a *Leefe* which contains the latest Holland Wax Prints, Super Wax Prints and other expensive cloths because it comes with prestige and honour to the husband and his family members.⁵⁴ Yet the *mahr* which is rather obligatory is far below the economic value of the

⁴⁹ Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 64.

⁵⁰ Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 67.

⁵¹ Al Muntada Al Islam, *The Qur'an*, 69.

⁵² Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 65.

⁵³ Doi, *Shari'ah The Islamic Law*, 160.

⁵⁴ Ayishetu Abdul Kadiri, 'HIV/AIDS PANDEMIC AS A MORAL ISSUE: A CASE STUDY OF MUSLIMS IN THE NIMA/MAMOBİ COMMUNITIES' M. Phil thesis (University of Ghana, Legon 2008).

Leefe. For example, a man can spend more than one thousand Ghana Cedis on *Leefe* and pay fifty Ghana Cedis as the *mahr*.

Some Ghanaian Muslim scholars have argued that this practice of presenting *Leefe* is against the teachings and principles of Islam, because it deters some men who cannot afford it from getting married. Sheikh Nuamah for example is of the view that the dowry should be as affordable as possible. It should not be so high to the extent that will deter some men from getting married. He therefore cautioned Muslims that ‘if cultural dictates make the payment of dowry unaffordable, then it is in conflict with Islam and a threat to the future of marriage’⁵⁵ He cited an example of a saying of the Prophet (PBUH) which states that “the best of women are those whose dowries are minimal and affordable”⁵⁶

In a Hausa drama on Ghana Television entitled *Sadaaki*,⁵⁷ the parent of a girl refused to give their daughter out for marriage because the man could not afford the type of *Leefe* they wanted for their daughter. In specifying what they expected in their daughter’s *Leefe*, the girl’s mother mentioned Italian shoes, a number of Holland wax prints and cows. The parent then started making arrangements for a rich friend’s son to marry their daughter. It took the intervention of the Imam in their community and some elders to convince the girl’s parent. But after the marriage it was revealed that the young man who married this girl had impregnated another girl. He got involved with the girl he has impregnated after the rejection by the first girl’s parent. He never thought he could marry her, considering the type of *Leefe* her parents were demanding from him. This drama was a way of advising the Muslim community on the issue of *leefe* and its negative consequences on the society.

⁵⁵Nuamah, *Marriage*, 194.

⁵⁶ Nuamah, *Marriage*, 24.

⁵⁷Hausa Drama on GTV on 21 May 2013 at 4:15pm.

If the girl's parents had accepted what the young man could afford he would have not impregnated another girl.

From the researcher's point of view if *Mahr* should be anything valuable as it is meant to empower the bride to get into any business activity for her own benefit, then there is nothing wrong with the presentation of the *Leefe* as it complements it especially if it can be afforded. Because, the question that arises is, what can a woman use fifty Ghana Cedis given as her *mahr* for? *Leefe* is a cultural practice which has come to stay with the Nima/Mamobi communities. Since the people in these communities place more value on wax prints, then there should be no problem with making it part of the *Mahr*. The underlining factor is that it should be moderate and within the means of the groom. This way it would be affordable and also help reduce or eliminate the social vices associated with it.

A Muslim marriage is considered valid when there is an approval of a guardian. As stated in a Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) "There is no marriage without a guardian"⁵⁸ Abd al Ati refers to marriage guardianship as 'the legal authority invested in a person who is fully qualified and competent to safeguard the interest and rights of another who is incapable of doing so independently.'⁵⁹ A person is qualified to act as a marriage guardian when he is considered to be a free male, of sound mind, matured and of good character.⁶⁰ The main aim of a marriage guardian is to protect the interest of the prospective couple especially the bride. Generally minors and inexperienced people are expected to have guardians when they are getting married. According to Abd Al Ati people who are inexperienced are those who have not been married before especially in

⁵⁸ Al-Hafiz Ibn Ismail As-Sanani, *Bulugh Al-Maram*, (Riyadh-Saudi Arabia: Dar-us-Salam Publications, 1996) 347.

⁵⁹ Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 70.

⁶⁰ Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 71.

the case of women. He further explained that the emphasis is laid on women because men are believed to be more experienced in practical affairs and the general assumption is that men marry women who are younger than them.⁶¹ This means that the woman needs a guardian to safeguard her interest.

For a Muslim marriage to be considered valid there should be at least two competent witnesses.⁶² Just as people need to have witnesses when they enter into a business agreement, marriage is also seen as such. The prospective couple therefore need witnesses at their marriage ceremony. Since marriage in Islam is considered as a contract, the parties involved need to have witnesses. In the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities witnesses from both sides present themselves at the officiating of the marriage ceremony, where the officiating Imam introduces them to the gathering.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also recommends that a Muslim marriage should be publicise, as he states “Make marriage publicly known”⁶³ Here Abd al Ati is of the view that the main reason why witnesses are required at every marriage ceremony is to publicise the marriage because any attempt to have a secrete marriage makes the marriage invalid.⁶⁴ For him a publicised marriage distinguishes a legal relationship from an illegal one. He contends that since marriage is a communal affair it needs to be publicised so that the members of the community from which the couples come from can be part and parcel of the ceremony. This way their union will not be taken as an illicit relationship by the community.

⁶¹ Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 71.

⁶² Muhammad Subhi bin Hassan Hallaq, *FIQH According to the Qur'an & Sunnah*, (Darussalamn: Global Leader in Islamic Books, 2008), 116.

⁶³ Al- Hafiz, *Bulugh Al-Maram*, 346.

⁶⁴ Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 60.

The last requirement of a Muslim marriage is the reception. After the solemnization of the marriage it is recommended by the Prophet (PBUH) that a party/reception (*waleema*) can be organised for friends and relatives so they can also take part in the celebration.⁶⁵ Doi advises that there should be no extravagance in this celebration as the Prophet (PBUH) emphasises on moderation in all aspects of a Muslim's life.⁶⁶

2.7 Responsibilities of the Muslim Couple in Marriage

The success of every marriage depends on the couple's ability to fulfil their responsibilities in the marriage as ordained by Allah. Allah has assigned special roles to the husband and the wife. The couple are expected to play their roles selflessly in order to ensure a happy marital relationship. These roles have been equitably assigned to the couple taking into consideration their biological, physical and emotional features.

Qur'an chapter 4 verse 34 summarises the responsibilities of the husband and wife 'men are in charge of women by what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend from their wealth.; So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard.'⁶⁷ This means that the husband is charged with the responsibility of providing for the basic needs of his wife. These include food, clothing, shelter, healthcare and education. With regards to shelter Qur'an chapter sixty five verse six states that 'lodge them [in a section] of where you dwell out of your means and do not harm them in order to oppress them. And if they should be pregnant, then spend on them until they give birth. And if they breastfeed for you, then give them their

⁶⁵ Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 61.

⁶⁶ Doi, *Sha'riah : The Islamic Law*, 140.

⁶⁷ Al Muntada Al Islam, *The Qur'an*, 75.

payment...⁶⁸. This means that husband is expected to provide an accommodation in accordance to his means. According to Abd al Ati, this accommodation should also be safe for the couple; it should give them the privacy, comfort and independence the woman deserves.⁶⁹ He added that this accommodation becomes the personal property of the woman and the husband cannot accommodate any of his relatives without her concern.⁷⁰

Also according to Abd al Ati the wife is also entitled to be clothed and fed by the man according to his means. This obligation should neither be discharged with miserliness or extravagance but to be discharged in moderation.⁷¹ He added that it is also the responsibility of the husband to employ and pay a helper to help his wife with the general upkeep of the house if he can afford. The husband has also been entreated to treat his wife with patience and kindness. His actions or words should not cause harm or pain to his wife.

The wife on the other hand is considered as a help mate, she is expected to treat her husband with care; she should respect him and treat him kindly just as he is also expected to do to her.⁷² She should respond to the sexual needs of her husband so far as it does not go against her health or the teachings of Islam.⁷³ She should not lend off or dispose any of his properties without his concern. On the other hand, she has been charged with the responsibility of taking care of her husband's home and his properties.⁷⁴ The wife should also obey her husband as long as obeying him does not cause her to displease Allah. For example, Islam forbids sexual intercourse with a woman in her menstrual periods. This

⁶⁸ Al Muntada Al Islam, *The Qur'an*, 575.

⁶⁹ Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 149.

⁷⁰ Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 150.

⁷¹ Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 150.

⁷² Abd al-Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 168.

⁷³ Abd al-Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 170.

⁷⁴ Abd al-Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 169.

means that if a man desires to engage in an intercourse with his wife during this period, she is obliged to refuse it because her obedience to Allah is rather paramount.⁷⁵ For him these obligations are divinely determined by Allah. Therefore, couples must exercise them with the primary aim of pleasing Allah.

In contrast to this, in the Ghanaian traditional context the wife is expected to cook, wash and do other domestic chores for her husband. Though it is not the duty of the wife in Islam,⁷⁶ it has become part of the responsibilities of a wife to her husband. In a radio discussion on Marhaba radio station, one Hajia Aisha stated that though Islam has not placed this responsibility on the woman, however she believes that if a wife performs this role her husband will love her more.⁷⁷ This is similar to performance of optional prayers in order to earn more blessing from Allah. The wife would also please her husband when she performs these domestic duties. She however cautioned Muslim husbands not to expect their wives to perform these duties even when they are sick or tired. The husband can equally assist his wife in performing this duty to ensure that there is joy and peace in the home.

2.8 The Importance of Marriage in Islam

Marriage makes sexual intercourse lawful to a couple and prevents people from engaging in immoral acts,⁷⁸ so far as sex is between the two, any sexual intercourse with a third party is considered as adultery unless in the case of the polygamous marriage, where the husband has more than one wife. From the Islamic point of view, adultery or fornication is

⁷⁵ Abd al-Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 171.

⁷⁶ Abd al-Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 169.

⁷⁷ Marhaba fm. The Sunday Twi Programme on 31 March 2013 , 7: 30am – 8:30am.

⁷⁸ Abdesamad Dialmy, 'Sexuality and Islam' *The European Journal of conception and Reproductive Health Care*, (2010): 398.

a crime not just against a person but the society; this is why the Qur'an cautions Muslims not to approach adultery.⁷⁹

In Islam, children born out of every marriage have no difficulty in tracing their fathers; they assume their father's name as their surname and also have the right to inherit his property. For example both the Sunni and Shi'ite laws regard children born out of wedlock as not qualified to inherit their father's property.⁸⁰

Marriage which is the basic unit of every society also creates new relationships between two families.⁸¹ A strong bond is created between the families of the couple. As Peter Sarpong emphasised that marriage in the Ghanaian community is not just an affair between a couple, rather 'a matter in which the lineages of the contracting parties are greatly interested.' Marriage as well strengthens one's relationship with Allah, since it is stated in a *hadith* that when a Muslim marries he/she perfects half of his faith.⁸²

In marriage there is what can be described as division of labour. When a person is not married, more time is spent on household chores such as cooking and cleaning. But in marriage couples are able to assist or support each other. It is against this background that Qur'an chapter 2 verse 187 states 'they are clothing for you and you are clothing for them'.⁸³ Islam acknowledges the fact that marriage provides mutual support, companionship and protection for the husband and the wife. Marriage, accordingly establishes a strong bond between the husband and wife; this enables them to support and

⁷⁹Muhammad M. Zain Al-Dien, 'Perception of Sex Education among Muslim Adolescent in Canada', *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* (2010): 398.

⁸⁰Doi, *Shari'ah The Islamic Law*, 320.

⁸¹ RT. Rev. Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 77.

⁸² Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 52.

⁸³Al Muntada Al Islam, *The Qur'an*, 26.

protect each other in times of difficulty. Married people also become more responsible in the way they conduct themselves, because their status in the community has changed and for example spend their resources wisely.

2.9 Conclusion

The chapter has stated the Islamic perspective on marriage, its purpose, requirements and importance. The next chapter will explain premarital counselling from a general perspective and then investigate if Islam addresses the issue of premarital counselling. Issues on choosing an ideal marriage partner, sexual relationship among couples and parenting among others would be discussed.

CHAPTER THREE

PREMARITAL COUNSELLING IN ISLAM

3.0 Introduction

Islam accords a lot of importance to marriage. It sees the sexual instinct as natural and recommends marriage as an instrument that can be used to satisfy that sexual feeling. Marriage is also important in Islam because it is seen as a form of worship to Allah, therefore every Muslim who marries is said to have perfected half of his or her faith.⁸⁴

Marriage as a human institution is bound to face some challenges; this is why prospective couples are encouraged to go through premarital counselling. The focus of this chapter is therefore to examine the Islamic perspective on premarital counselling. This will be done by first discussing premarital counselling from a general perspective and then zero into the Islamic perspective by highlighting the major ideas and principles in the primary sources of the religion.

3.1 Marriage Counselling

Marriage counselling is defined as a specific type of psychotherapy that focuses on understanding and improving communication and resolving conflicts in a relationship.⁸⁵ According to Nystul, in well-established countries like the United States of America, licensed therapist or clinical social workers usually lead marriage counselling sessions. The sessions involve couples meeting the therapist together or each member of the couple meeting the therapist at a separate session depending on the issue at stake. Atiemo, a

⁸⁴ Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 52.

⁸⁵ Micheal S. Nystul, *Introduction to Counselling: An Art and Science Perspective*, 3ed(New Mexico State: Argosy Publishing, 2006), 50.

reverend Minister, is of the view that during premarital counselling sessions, a time can be allocated separately to meet prospective couples, to discuss a premarital counselling questionnaire with them.⁸⁶

Basically, marriage counselling is meant for three categories of people: first is for those who want to get married, second is for couples who are already married but are facing some challenges, and third is for families who are facing some crisis. But for the purpose of the study, the researcher has concentrated on marriage counselling that is meant for people who are getting married (premarital counselling). According to Ayandokun, every marriage counselling session involves two parties, the counsellee and the counsellor.⁸⁷ The counsellee is the prospective couple, sometimes referred to as the client. The counsellor on the other hand, 'guides and nurtures the counsellee'.⁸⁸

3.2 Qualities of a Marriage Counsellor

Since the main aim of marriage counselling is to sustain happy relationships between couples, the counsellor is expected to demonstrate a character that would bring peace, love and respect between the couple and other people. In Islam, because marriage is seen as an act of worship, the marriage counsellor is also expected to use his/her qualities to connect the couple with Allah.⁸⁹

First of all, the counsellor must be trustworthy; this means that the counsellor must exhibit a character that would convince the couple to have absolute confidence in disclosing

⁸⁶ Abamfo O.Atiemo, *WALKING TOWARDS THE Altar A Pre-Marital Counselling Manual for Ghanaian Churches*, (Accra-Ghana: Qolyns-Skan Multimedia Limited, 2011), 34.

⁸⁷ Ayandokun, *Counselling Made Easy*, 2.

⁸⁸ Ayandokun, *Counselling Made Easy*, 4.

⁸⁹ WWW.isna.net/...Islamicperspectiveofcounselling (accessed, November 20, 2011).

secrets about their relationship to the counsellor.⁹⁰ The counsellor can only disclose the secrets with the permission of the couple. Since communication is one of the basic tools for a successful marriage, the marriage counsellor should have good communication skills. The counsellor should establish a cordial relationship with the couple, identify with their problems and listen attentively to their worries and fears. This would help the counsellor to come up with suitable solutions to their problems.

A counsellor should also be empathetic; he or she should have genuine interest in the union of the prospective couple. In secular counselling, the counsellor should feel with the couple and see the world as the prospective couple sees it.⁹¹ This cannot be applied to the Muslim world view, a Muslim counsellor also needs to have good knowledge about the Qur'an and Hadith and take Islamic teachings and principles into consideration when counselling. To counsel effectively, the Muslim counsellor must have some knowledge on Islamic marriage and premarital counselling.⁹² A good counsellor is the one who equips couples with problem solving skills to solve their marital challenges not to always seek the advice of the counsellor at the least problem as 'a man is an architect of his own fortune'.⁹³

3.3 Premarital Counselling

According to Atiemo, premarital counselling involves helping couples to assess their personalities and compare to that of their partners so that they can know each other better. It also helps couples to confront or deal with challenges in their relationship.⁹⁴ Collins

⁹⁰ Ayandokun, *Counselling Made Easy*, 4.

⁹¹ Ayandokun, *Counselling Made Easy*, 3.

⁹² WWW.isna.net/...Islamicperspectiveofcounselling (accessed, November 20, 2011).

⁹³ Ayandokun, *Counselling Made Easy*, 4.

⁹⁴ Atiemo, *WALKING TOWARDS THE Altar*, 13.

proffers that premarital counselling 'seeks to prevent problems and personal conflicts that could make life miserable, difficult, unfulfilled and unproductive after marriage'.⁹⁵ It can be discerned from the above definitions that premarital counselling is focused on preventing problems in marriage relationships rather than solving problems. Premarital counselling provides couples with coping skills, to help them resolve challenges in their relationship. Couples are not expected to run to the door steps of religious leaders, parents, friends or counsellors, whenever there is a problem in their relationship. Collins added that premarital counselling is more about educating and informing the couple about marriage and its challenges and how couples should survive pressures in marriage relationships.

According to Collins, three categories of people who need premarital counselling include; those who have never been married, widows, widowers and divorcees who are getting married again.⁹⁶ For Collins those who have been married before should not make the mistake of thinking that because of their previous experiences in marriage they do not necessarily need premarital counselling. It is important that such people go for premarital counselling because it gives them the opportunity to discuss past marriage experiences and plan for a better future relationship in their marriage. Collins added that the marriage counsellor in dealing with these people needs to appreciate the individuals' past marriage experiences and guide them on how to avoid mistakes in new marriage partnership.

3.4 Types of Premarital Counselling

Imam Mageed Muhammad, an expert in marriage counselling at the Adams Centre, provides marriage counselling for some Muslims in the United States of America. He identifies two types of premarital counselling. One is educational and the other more

⁹⁵Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 540.

⁹⁶Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 530.

private which involves the prospective couple.⁹⁷ For him the educational type is when programs are organized for men and women who have attained the age of marriage. In this type of pre-marital counselling, the participants are taken through the rudiments of marriage and how to prepare them towards it. The second type is more private; it involves only the prospective couple and the marriage counsellor. Here, more private issues such as communication, parenting style, the role of the extended family, conflict resolution in marriage, sex and financial planning among others are discussed. From the researchers point of view, both forms of premarital counselling are educational and so one can conclude that premarital counselling can be categorized into mass and private premarital counselling. Whilst the mass type deals with quite a number of people who are counselled by a marriage counsellor, the private one mainly focuses on a prospective couple only.

3.5 The Subject Matter of Premarital Counselling

According to some marriage counsellors like Atiemo, premarital counselling spans three to six months before the marriage ceremony.⁹⁸ During this period the prospective couple book appointments with the marriage counsellor for sessions of effective premarital counselling. During premarital counselling certain basic issues are discussed to ensure its success.

One such issue is the importance of marriage in their respective ethnic groups and religious denominations.⁹⁹ It is recommended that before a couple commit themselves to marry they should understand the institution of marriage both in their society as well as from their religious point of view. This is because marriage is a serious commitment and a

⁹⁷ WWW.isna.net/...Islamicperspectiveofcounselling (accessed, November 20, 2011).

⁹⁸ Atiemo, *WALKING TOWARDS THE Altar*, 34.

⁹⁹ Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 537.

lifelong thing. The counsellor also tries to know how ready the couple are for marriage and get the prospective couple to be aware of its challenges before they commit themselves to it.

Another area that is worth discussing in premarital counselling sessions is communication in marriage, as ‘communication is to a relationship what oxygen is to the body.’¹⁰⁰ During this session couples are taught effective communication skills, since it is through communication that couples become aware of each other’s feelings, expectations, differences, attitudes and personal hurts.¹⁰¹ Counsellors such as Collins have stated lack of communication among couples as the main cause of problems in most marriages. He therefore advised marriage counsellors to discuss effective communication, listening and feedback with prospective couples. Effective communication means discussing issues that concern the couple, it also involves listening attentively to what is being discussed and understanding the issues that are being discussed.

As stated by Atiemo, some tools for effective listening include:¹⁰²

- Listening with undivided attention without interrupting the speaker.
- Recollecting in details what has been discussed.
- Maintaining eye contact
- Understanding non-verbal gestures which send important signals about feelings that are not expressed verbally.
- Showing empathy, thus seeing yourself in a situation as a way of trying to feel with the one who has had an experience
- Ask for clarifications where necessary.

It is also worth noting that the underlining principle in communication for every married couple is respect. The couple are expected to show respect for each other.

¹⁰⁰Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counselling: Resource For the Ministry of Healing and Growth*, (Nashville, United States of America: Abingdon Press, 1992). 254.

¹⁰¹ Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 536.

¹⁰²Atiemo, *WALKING TOWARD THE Altar*, 20.

The other grave area of concern that requires a thorough discussion between the counsellor and the counsellee is sex.¹⁰³ In most countries like Ghana and the United States of America, religious leaders normally counsel prospective couples before the officiating of the marriage. However some people find it a bit awkward to discuss issues on sex with their religious leaders or even counsellors. Hence, Collins suggests that the counsellor at this point can refer the couple to a sex therapist for an effective discussion.¹⁰⁴ However, counsellors who think they can effectively handle the topic should make sure that prospective couples are comfortable with them, because the discussion may involve questions that may be very embarrassing.¹⁰⁵

According to Collins, the counsellor or sex therapist inquires to know the questions the couple have about sex. The counsellor again raises issues on how men and women reach orgasm and how they can stimulate each other to enjoy their sexual relationship, the different methods or positions for sexual intercourse as well as the method of contraception to use.¹⁰⁶ Other issues relating to sex that need discussion include menstruation, masturbation, pregnancy and menopause among others.¹⁰⁷

Imam Mageed also emphasised that, it is important for a marriage counsellor to inquire from the prospective couple what they know about abuse and discuss the various forms of abuse with them.¹⁰⁸ Abuse can be verbal, physical or emotional. These discussions will help the couples to become aware of how these forms of abuse can affect their relationship and guard against them. During pre-marital counselling, couples are also encouraged to

¹⁰³ Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 538.

¹⁰⁴ Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 538-9.

¹⁰⁵ Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 539.

¹⁰⁶ Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 538.

¹⁰⁷ Charles William Stewart, *The Minister as Marriage Counsellor*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 56.

¹⁰⁸ www.isna.net/...Islamicperspectiveofcounselling (accessed, November 20, 2011).

screen for diseases such as HIV/AIDS and check their blood groups.¹⁰⁹ This is to educate them on their health status and enable them make informative decisions about their health before they get married.

The joy of most couples is to have children of their own; children are gifts from God. Therefore a marriage counsellor should discuss the issue of parenting with prospective couples.¹¹⁰ Once couples start having children they will need to learn to train them to become responsible adults. The marriage counsellor makes it clear to the family that God has his own time for blessing couples with children. Some have theirs immediately after marriage, some years after marriage, while others do not have any at all which could be due to medical reasons. He added that the counsellor helps them to understand this issue and discuss with them various means of seeking help, for example, seeking medical attention when it becomes difficult to have biological children of their own. It is also important that the counsellor and the couple discuss the planning of the wedding since it comes with a lot of financial problems.¹¹¹

3.6 Procedure for Premarital Counselling

A successful counselling starts from the environment where the counselling takes place, the attitude of the counsellor as well as the counsellee. According to Stewarts, the counselling room should be in a private place or room where both parties will feel comfortable and relaxed.¹¹² The counselling environment should be free from interruptions such as telephone calls. In the first session, the counsellor uses the opportunity to build a

¹⁰⁹ Atiemo, *WALKING TOWARD THE Altar*, 48-9.

¹¹⁰ WWW.isna.net/...Islamicperspectiveofcounselling (accessed, November 20, 2011).

¹¹¹ Atiemo, *WALKING TOWARD THE Altar*, 35.

¹¹² Stewart, *The Minister as Marriage Counselor*, 42.

good relationship with the counsellee.¹¹³ Here the counsellor makes sure that the counsellee has absolute trust and confidence in him/her. The couple need an assurance that issues discussed would not be disclosed to anyone. At this session questions such as why do the couple want to marry, their family backgrounds, interests and hopes are discussed.¹¹⁴

The second session involves a discussion of the concept of marriage, since the couple might have different views about marriage considering their family and religious background.¹¹⁵ Collins reiterates that this discussion would help the couple to treat their marriage with much seriousness. During the third and fourth sessions attitude and expectations of the prospective couple are discussed. Here questions that are usually considered include: The couple's expectation in marriage, the differences among the couple as well as their interests, the attitude of their parents towards the marriage as well as their attitudes towards children.¹¹⁶

The fifth session discusses love and its relationship with sex. This would help the prospective couple to prepare 'mentally and psychologically to understand the intimate physical relationship of a marriage'¹¹⁷ Collins suggests that it is better for sex therapists to discuss issues relating to sex with the couple, if the counsellor feels uncomfortable discussing the topic with them. The last session is for the wedding ceremony which deals with things such as the cost of the wedding reception. Collins recommends that, two to three months after the wedding, at least two sessions of marriage counselling should be

¹¹³Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 534.

¹¹⁴Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 536.

¹¹⁵Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 537.

¹¹⁶ Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 537-8.

¹¹⁷[WWW.isna.net/...Islamicperspectiveofcounselling](http://www.isna.net/...Islamicperspectiveofcounselling) (accessed, November 20, 2011).

scheduled to assess marital relationship of the couple.¹¹⁸ This would help identify the joys and problems of the couple and address them appropriately.

3.7 Premarital Counselling: The Islamic Perspective

Islam regards marriage as a very important institution. In stressing the importance of marriage in the lives of people, Allah states in the Holy Qur'an: 24: 32 'And marry the unmarried among you and the righteous among your male slaves and female slaves. If they should be poor Allah will enrich them from his bounty'¹¹⁹ Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), emphasising on the significance of marriage, is reported to have said: 'When a Muslim marries, he thereby perfects half of his religion'¹²⁰. Given that marriage is regarded this highly in Islam, a lot of principles govern the process as precautionary means to ensure that the outcome is successful. From selecting a prospective spouse through to being declared husband and wife, Muslims have important guidelines to follow based on the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). So that by the time the marriage process is done, the couple are well-equipped to deal with, at least, the basic challenges they are expected to confront during marriage.

In the Qur'an and Hadith, there are guidelines for individuals to follow with regards to selecting an ideal partner for marriage, how the prospective couple conduct themselves during the period before marriage and during the marriage itself, how responsibilities in the home should be shared in a way that makes the man and the woman relevant to one another in the relationship, how conflicts should be addressed and the style of parenting.

¹¹⁸Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 539.

¹¹⁹Al Muntada Al Islam, *The Qur'an*, 340.

¹²⁰ Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 52.

This means that the idea behind premarital counselling is strongly embedded in the process which Islam has outlined for marriage.

3.7.1 *Selecting a Suitable Marriage Partner*

Islam prescribes that before a Muslim man initiates the process of selecting an ideal partner for marriage, he has to be capable of supporting a wife.¹²¹ This includes being financially sound relative to the basic needs of a nuclear family. Once this condition has been fulfilled, the man is then ready to search for a suitable female partner.

However, Islam also recommends a special prayer called *Istikhara* which the Prophet has prescribed for Muslims as a means to seeking counsel with Allah for any major decision in a person's life such as marriage. The *Istikhara* can be performed by the couple involved, their parents or a spiritual leader in a community on behalf of the couple. It is believed that when this prayer is performed for a few days, the decision to marry a particular person or not will be known to the one who performs the prayer. Sometimes the decision comes in the form of a dream or having another person confirming the partner involved.

In a radio discussion on the topic, selecting a suitable marriage partner, Sheikh Nkrumah explained that *Istikhara* is very important when it comes to choosing an ideal marriage partner.¹²² He said that performing *Istikhara* means one has allowed Allah to take the final decision on the choice of the marriage partner. He criticized what some Muslims do by way of consulting a 'mallam' or soothsayers to help them in the selection of an ideal marriage partners. According to him, these 'mallams' ask them to do strange things or give them strange criteria for choosing ideal partners. He gave an example where a Muslim woman was cautioned by a 'mallam' not to marry a man who has space in between his teeth because such a man would be irresponsible. From the researcher's point

¹²¹Al- Hafiz, *Bulugh Al-Maram*, 342..

¹²²Marhaba fm, The Sunday Twi Programme on 23 September 2012 at 7: 30am – 8: 30am.

of view, this certainly is absurd and any discerning Muslim should not be allowed to be taken for granted.

Selecting an ideal marriage partner does not end with *Istikhara*. There are other guidelines stipulated in the teachings of Islam to make spousal selection easier. For instance in a narration by Abu Hurayra (Allah be pleased with him), the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said that a woman is married for four things, i.e., her wealth, her family status, her beauty and her religion. However the Prophet (PBUH) advised that Muslims should marry the one who is best in her religion and character.¹²³ To support this point on the importance of piety as a quality of a good wife, he is known to have said again in a narration by Abdullah Ibn Amr, that ‘the whole world is a place of enjoyment, and the best of its enjoyment is a righteous woman’¹²⁴. Also according to Lemu this guideline given by the Prophet (PBUH) also applies to the Muslim woman for a husband.¹²⁵ She reiterated that a woman should not choose her husband because of his good looks, wealth or status because he can lose them in a matter of time, rather his religion and character.

3.7.2 *Conduct of Muslim Couples*

Just like the guidelines on spousal selection, there are also guidelines to direct the behaviour of the husband and the wife in marriage. These guidelines are supposed to help the couple attain harmonious life when followed religiously. In various parts of the Qur’an, Allah stipulates how the couple should conduct themselves in marriage. This has also been demonstrated in the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). For example, on responsibilities and rights of each partner, the husband has been charged with the responsibility of taking care of his wife and children. In Islam emphasis is laid on the fact

¹²³ Sidiqi, *Sahih Muslim: Book of Marriage*, 393.

¹²⁴ Sidiqi, *Sahih Muslim: Book of Marriage*, 396.

¹²⁵ B. Aisha Lemu, *The Ideal Muslim Wife* (Niger State: Islamic Education Trust, 1995), 7.

that the man is responsible for the financial needs of the family. For this reason Imam Mageed suggests that issues on the man's income should be discussed during premarital counselling in order to ensure that couples spend within their means.¹²⁶ Also in the case of a polygynous family the man is expected to treat his wives equitably. The wife on the other hand is supposed to support and respect her husband. She is also responsible for supervising the household and taking care of the early educational needs of the children.¹²⁷

3.7.3 *Sexual Relationship for Muslim couples*

Sexual intercourse with one's legal partner is also regarded as a form of worship in Islam, therefore attracts reward from Allah. From the Islamic perspective sexual intercourse should not be engaged in just because couples have the urge for it, it is an act which should be enjoyed by married couples. As stated by Dialmy¹²⁸ that for the Prophet (PBUH), "the marital coitus leading to pleasure is equivalent to alms and for Muslim jurist sexual pleasure purifies ones heart." Dialmy added that because of the importance Islam places on sexual satisfaction the Prophet advised that 'None of you must throw himself to his wife like an animal' rather sexual intercourse should begin with 'glances, fine words, caresses, kisses and games' among others. When this is done couples would have their orgasms and sexual satisfaction and at the end gain Allah's blessings.

As stated earlier, sexual satisfaction is one of the objectives of marriage. Islam therefore discusses it extensively so that it may be utilized well in order to make it beneficial. According to Lamin, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has recommended a special prayer for the newly-wed couple on their first night of being together in order to ward off evil from

¹²⁶WWW.isna.net/...Islamicperspectiveofcounselling (accessed, November 20, 2011).

¹²⁷B. Aisha Lemu, *The Ideal Muslim Wife*, 23.

¹²⁸Dialmy, 'Sexuality and Islam': 160-168.

their home.¹²⁹ He (PBUH) recommended that they both perform ablution and perform two units of supererogatory prayer, after which the man puts his right hand on the lady's forehead and recite a special prayer 'O Allah I seek from You her good and the good You created from her, and I seek refuge in You from her evil and the evil You created in her'. The Prophet (PBUH) also advised that when a man is ready to make love to his wife he should recite this prayer 'In the name of Allah, O Allah protect us against Satan, and keep Satan from that which you have bestowed upon us'¹³⁰ It is the belief that if Allah blesses the couple with a child Satan will not be able to harm him or her.¹³¹

It is important to state that, Islam is not strict on the position of sexual relationship so far as it is through the vagina. Qur'an chapter 2 verse 223 states: 'your wives are a place of cultivation for you, so come to your place of cultivation however you wish'.¹³² This means that Muslim couples cannot have sex through the anus since it is considered as a minor sodomy. There is also a narration of the Prophet (PBUH) where Umar said to the Prophet (PBUH) that last night he turned his wife over. Then the Prophet (PBUH) told him "from the front or the back, but avoid the anus and intercourse during menstruation".¹³³

However, sexual intercourse is prohibited during menstruation as Qur'an chapter 2 verse 222 puts it 'And they ask you about menstruation. Say it is harm, so keep away from your wives during menstruation. And do not approach them until they are pure'.¹³⁴ This does not mean that the man should entirely distance himself from his wife; he can fondle, kiss and enjoy her without entering her.¹³⁵ Qaradhawi further explains that there are also health

¹²⁹ Lamin, *Selecting an Ideal Partner*, 63.

¹³⁰ Sidiqqi, *Sahih Muslim: Book of Marriage*, 371.

¹³¹ Lamin, *Selecting an Ideal Partner*, 64.

¹³² Al Muntada Al Islam, *The Qur'an*, 32.

¹³³ Yousif al Qaradhawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*. 1st ed. (Islamic Republic of Iran: Islamic Culture & Relations Organisation [ICRO], Translation & Publication Department, 1998), 312.

¹³⁴ Al Muntada Al Islam, *The Qur'an*, 32.

¹³⁵ Qaradhawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, 310.

reasons for avoiding sexual intercourse during menstruation. This is because the reproductive system of a woman becomes very congested and the nerves very sensitive. Intercourse can tamper with the menstrual discharge, causing a lot of harm to the body and injury to the sexual organs.¹³⁶ In the same vein Oheneba Ntim Berima a health campaigner on Net 2 television, thinks that sexual intercourse during menstruation can cause vaginal infections which may lead to infertility.¹³⁷

3.7.4 Parenting for Muslim Couples

In Islam, parenting is not limited to either the man or the woman alone; it is a collective responsibility of every couple to nurture children to become responsible Muslim adults. Parents play a significant role in forming a child's personality; they are expected to show kindness to their children. Children should be educated and taught good manners by their parents. They are expected to take care of the general welfare of their children. Parents are responsible for the material and emotional needs of their children. Islam encourages parents to discipline their children when they go wrong. For example the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have admonished parents to teach their children to perform the five daily prayers at age seven and discipline them when they refuse to perform their prayers at age ten.¹³⁸

3.7.5 Conflict Resolution for Muslim Couples

Islam also accepts that marriage is a human institution and for that matter bound to face some challenges. Couples have been advised according to the teachings and principles of Islam to address these challenges amicably in order to ensure peace and tranquillity in

¹³⁶ Qaradhawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, 311.

¹³⁷ Secretes Of Health, Net 2 Television on 9 June 2013 at 8: 00pm – 9: 00pm.

¹³⁸ Abd al-Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 199.

every Muslim family. According to Abd al Ati there are two methods that can be used to resolve conflicts in a Muslim marriage: one is overt and the other covert.¹³⁹ The overt type is when Muslim jurists are allowed to be part and parcel of a resolution while the covert type sees conflicts in marital relationships as a private matter which should be addressed privately and peacefully. He added that the Qur'an in chapter 4 verse 34 which addresses the covert method provides Muslim men with three steps on how to deal with recalcitrant wives. First he should counsel his wife and if this method does not work then he moves to the second step where he avoids sharing the same bed with her, if the second method does not work he is allowed to apply physical beating such as slapping or hitting her without causing her any pain or injury. Abd al Ati states that it is a forbidden and punishable act for a man to ignore these steps and go ahead to apply the third method or abuses it.

Though Islam is against any form of abuse, some Muslim scholars have misinterpreted this Qur'anic text to mean that, because men are responsible for taking care of the financial needs of their wives, they have absolute control over them and to the extent of beating them when they are disobedient. This according to some scholars should be lightly done. But Ammah is of the view that if Islam teaches against any form of abuse of women then the verse needs to be looked at again because the Qur'an cannot contradict itself. She cited an argument advanced by Hassan that the Qur'anic verse 4: 34 is talking about the responsibility of a husband to his wife. Hassan posits that the *Qawama* verse (Q 4:34) has been misinterpreted to mean, maintainers, in charge, superior and protectors among others. But for her the term *Qawama* means breadwinners, implies that Allah has divinely tasked the husband to take care of the financial responsibilities of his wife and the wife is also

¹³⁹Abd al-Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 158-9.

responsible for bearing children.¹⁴⁰ She added that these are divine responsibilities which should be executed by couples religiously. Another issue that arises is that if Islam allows the beating of a disobedient wife, what then should the wife do to her husband who offends her since the husband is also human and can make mistakes?

However Abd al Ati is of the view that the wife is also allowed to use the first two steps when her husband is being recalcitrant. She can invite two arbitrators from both sides when the first two steps do not change the husband. Abd al Ati states that some schools of thought also allow the woman to use the third step but the Muslim court will execute the act in the name of the woman. He added that the Hanafi School of thought for example suggests that the husband can be imprisoned until he changes or amends his ways.

3.8 Importance of Premarital Counselling

During premarital counselling couples are encouraged to discuss their fears and expectations about marriage. This discussion with the marriage counsellor will help relieve some of their fears and anxieties about marriage and teach the couple ways of dealing with challenges in marriage.¹⁴¹ Premarital counselling helps couples to pause, think and assess their relationship. It helps the couples to identify loopholes in the relationships: those that are likely to negatively affect their relationship and address them appropriately before the knot is tied. In the same manner premarital counselling reduces anxiety about marriage and its challenges, because during the premarital counselling sessions the couples are allowed to discuss their ‘fears and insecurities together’¹⁴². This

¹⁴⁰ Rabiātu Ammah Koney, ‘Violence Against Women in Ghanaian Muslim Communities’ Kathy Cusack & Takyiwaa Manuh (eds) *Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre* (Accra, Ghana: Gender and Human Rights Documentation Centre, 2009) 171.

¹⁴¹ Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 534.

¹⁴² Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 534.

obviously would help reduce the anxiety and as well help them to learn how to deal with marital challenges.

3.9 Conclusion

From the discussion it can be concluded that in principle, premarital counselling is not new in Islam. The Qur'an and Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) clearly have elements of premarital counselling. They guide Muslims on how to choose an ideal marriage partner, the responsibilities of a couple in marriages, parenting in Islam as well as sexual relationship and how to sustain marriages. But as to whether it is properly and effectively put into practice or not in the Muslim communities is debateable. Also, the extent to which it is formalised in Ghana will be the subject of investigation in the next chapter, using Nima/Mamobi as the case study.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRADITIONAL PREMARITAL COUNSELLING IN THE NIMA/MAMOBI MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

4.0 Introduction

In the Nima/Mamobi communities, the celebration of a marriage ceremony is not the affair of the couple and their families alone, but a communal one. Members of the community, including *Aluwanka* and religious leaders are also part and parcel of the ceremony. This is mainly because of the important roles they play in counselling prospective couples during a marriage ceremony.

This chapter discusses two typical marriage ceremonies in the Nima/Mamobi communities with highlights on how Islam and culture have influenced marriage ceremonies in the community. Then the chapter also analyses and assesses some of the issues raised by *Aluwanka*, Imams, Muslim scholars and relatives of couples, who for several years have counselled Muslim couples in the Nima/Mamobi communities. Before discussing the marriage ceremony in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities, it is important to look at the geographical location of the people as well as their religious, culture and economic background.

4.1 The Nima/Mamobi Muslim Communities in Accra

The Nima/Mamobi communities are among the 300 Muslim communities in Ghana which are popularly known as the Zangos. According to Bari the word Zango is of northern

Nigerian and the Republic of Niger origin though it is not commonly used there. He further explained that the word Zango could be described as a community, settlement, society or station.¹⁴³ Nima is about 10km on the northeast part of Accra from the centre of Accra and bordered on the north by Mamobi. The common language that is spoken by these groups of people is Hausa.

Due to the strategic location of the Nima/Mamobi communities, it is one of the busiest business centres in Accra. For example, it is surrounded with government institutions and some residential areas such as 37 Military Hospital, Kanda Estate and Cantonments. This has invariably provided occupation for the people in Nima as cooks, security guards and labourers among others.¹⁴⁴

Nima/Mamobi communities are Muslim dominated, mainly because the early settlers in these communities were Muslims from some parts of Africa like Nigeria and Niger. Later some Muslims from Northern Ghana such as the Dagombas, Frafra, and Kusasi also migrated into these communities. Some of the religious activities of the people of the Nima/Mamobi communities include preaching, delivering of sermons, providing humanitarian and educational services which according to Bari has won the Muslims many converts in the community.¹⁴⁵ Despite the fact that these communities are Muslim dominated, there are also Christians and members who belong to the African Indigenous Religion.¹⁴⁶ Every marriage ceremony in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities is a mixture of Islamic and cultural practices of the people. For example pre-marriage arrangement is characterized by the *Leefe* and the *Aluwanka*.

¹⁴³Osman Bari, *A Comprehensive History of Muslims and Religion in Ghana* (New Town, Ghana: Dezines Focus, printing & Publications Co, 2009) 378.

¹⁴⁴Bari, *A Comprehensive History of Muslims and Religion in Ghana*, 503.

¹⁴⁵Bari, *A Comprehensive History of Muslims and Religion in Ghana*,503.

¹⁴⁶Bari *A Comprehensive History of Muslims and Religion in Ghana*,503.

It is important to state that the Nima/Mamobi communities have some challenges. One of the major problems of the community is poor sanitation. Also these communities lack adequate recreational centres, where social activities such as, marriage and naming ceremonies can be held. As a result streets are blocked with ‘No Way’ signs for such occasions. Some people also blame this on the lack of a proper building plan in these communities.

4.2 Marriage Procedure in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim Communities

Generally when a man finds a woman and wants to marry her, he informs his parents. The parents will do some investigations to find out if she has a good family background and good character.¹⁴⁷ When the man’s family is satisfied with the outcome of their investigations, they send a delegation to the lady’s family to inform them of their son’s interest in the lady. They carry in their hands some money with kola nuts which is known as *knocking*. The lady will then be asked whether the proposal should be accepted. Here the consent of the lady is very important since Islam is against any form of forced marriage. This is with reference to the saying of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that ‘A virgin girl came to the Prophet (PBUH) and mentioned that her father had married her against her will, so Allah’s messenger (PBUH) allowed her to exercise her choice’¹⁴⁸. In giving a commentary of this Hadith Muhammad bin Ismail As-Sanani explained that without the consent, virgin or *Aiyim* (the Arabic word for a woman who has sexual experience, she may be a widow or a divorced)¹⁴⁹ cannot be married. He added that if she

¹⁴⁷ Dendi chief, Ibrahim Abubakar, interviewed on 20th January, 2011, at his residence at Spintex, Accra.

¹⁴⁸ Al- Hafiz, *Bulugh Al-Maram*, 349.

¹⁴⁹ Al- Hafiz, *Bulugh Al-Maram*, 349.

is married without her consent, she has the right to cancel it or keep it, even this marriage be arranged by her father or brother.

When the proposal is accepted, the prospective bride's family will now have the opportunity to also investigate the man's background. Later a message is then carried to the man's family that the proposal has been accepted. The man's family goes for a second visit with some money to the lady's parents to show their appreciation.

A date is then fixed for the presentation of what is popularly known as *Leefe*. '*Leefe* is a Hausa culture which involves the arrangement and presentation of assorted pieces of wax prints, scarves, veils, and pairs of sandals to the wife to be'¹⁵⁰. The number of items for the *Leefe* and their quality depends on the ability of the prospective groom, the number of cloths range from five to fifteen pieces. Though a Hausa culture *Leefe* has become part and parcel of Muslim marriage in the Nima/Mamobi communities. The Nima/Mamobi communities attribute a lot of importance to this practice to the extent that it even precedes the presentation of dowry. It is also after the presentation of the *Leefe* that a date is fixed for the marriage ceremony. On one hand this practice has been criticised by some Muslim scholars for the reason that it puts unnecessary pressure on the men who cannot afford it. On the other hand it helps the bride to settle down happily in her marital home, because the *Leefe* becomes a form of capital and property for her.

In order to give a general picture of Muslim marriages in the communities under study, the researcher observed two Muslim marriages, one in Nima and the other in Mamobi. It is also important to note that though the researcher observed these two marriages the

¹⁵⁰Abul Kadir, 'HIV/AIDS Pandemic as a Moral Issue', 65.

procedures were virtually the same, except that in the marriage between Mariama and Eliasu at Mamobi, the *Aluwanka* did not mention anything about bathing her, she was allowed to do her normal bathing after which the *Aluwanka* applied henna on her body. Also in this marriage ceremony the groom (Eliasu) was present at the officiating of the marriage ceremony and there was also a Muslim marriage counselling seminar. The researcher will describe the marriage of Asana and Ibrahim below as representative of marriages in the community.

4.3 A Typical Marriage Ceremony in Nima

Asana is a 28 year old Junior High School graduate who is living in Nima, she had just graduated from seamstress training and looking forward to having her own shop so that she can also design beautiful cloths and train people as well.¹⁵¹ Asana's marriage ceremony was scheduled for Sunday, 17th June 2012 after her prospective in-laws had presented her *Leefe* at her family house in Nima.

On Friday, 15th June some members in the Nima/Mamobi communities as well as friends and other relations of Asana from other parts of Accra started trouping to Asana's house, to help her family in preparing food for the guests who would be coming. As part of the process, a week to the marriage ceremony Asana's Aunts had informed an *Aluwanka* to come and participate in the marriage. A packet of toffee and an amount of five Ghana Cedis were given to the *Aluwanka* as an invitation to Asana's marriage ceremony. The word *Aluwanka* originates from two languages, Kotokoli and Hausa. *Alu* is a Kotokoli word which means old woman while *wanka* in Hausa means bath. These two words come together to mean *the old woman who baths*. *Aluwanka* is a woman of age forty five to

¹⁵¹ Asana, interviewed, 16th June 2012. Nima, Accra.

sixty who is known to have gathered experience in marriage and can apply the henna on a bride during her marriage ceremony. According to Childkrout, Trimmingham describes henna usage as an Islamic practice; Muslims believe it was recommended by the Prophet (PBUH). They also believe that the use of henna purifies a person and protects him/her against evil spirits such as Jinns.¹⁵² The main reason why *Aluwanka* is expected to be an experienced woman is that she is also expected to counsel the bride during the marriage ceremony.

On the same day, Adama Kotokoli, the *Aluwanka* who was invited for Asana's marriage ceremony started with what she called *Kunshi*. This is the process of applying henna (*lalle, Hausa*), on Asana's forehead, palms and feet. She wrapped the bride's palms and feet with plastic sheets to make sure that the *lalle* was fully absorbed into her skin. This stayed on Asana between two to three hours after which the sheets were removed for both palms and feet to be washed thoroughly. This gave them a nice colour. In the past the henna was allowed to be absorbed into the skin until the palms and feet turned black. But currently, most brides prefer the henna to look lighter on their hands and feet, and also make some designs and look more beautiful.

Asana, like every other lady wanted the designs on her feet and palms, she said it would make her look more beautiful and attractive to her husband. Her design was made by a seventeen year old Muslim girl named Salamatu. Salamatu explained that, she learnt the designs by observation. According to her, the substance used for the design is a mixture of hair dye and henna.¹⁵³ When asked what inspires her designs, Salamatu explained that she takes into consideration the bride's skin colour and texture. She added that design for

¹⁵² Childkrout, *People of the Zongo*, 172.

¹⁵³ Salamatu Muhammad, interviewed, 15 June, 2012 at Nima.

brides cost between twenty to thirty Ghana Cedis each. However ordinary people who want to have the designs on their skin pay one Ghana Cedis. These designs are made on different parts of the body, such as the thighs, chest, and sometimes the breast. Salamatu intends to take this to a higher level where she can train other young Muslim girls.



Fig 1: Leele with the design on Asana's feet

Later in the day Asana's friends organised drumming and dancing for her, they danced with her and showered her with a lot of money. The second day (Saturday) of the ceremony was known as *ranan daka kwakwa* (a day for the pounding of palm nut). On this day family and friends gathered at Asana's family house to help with cooking in preparation for Sunday, the final day of the ceremony.

The *Aluwanka* also continued on Saturday with the application of the henna, which she called *chuda*, meaning cleansing. Adama Kotokoli explained that, *chuda* signifies transition in the life of the bride, because she is moving from her parent's home to her

husband's home to begin a new life.¹⁵⁴ On this day, perfume with some spices added to the henna which had already been soaked into water by Adama Kotokoli was applied on Asana's body. As she did this she sang some Hausa songs. After some few minutes Asana washed off the henna on her body and dressed up in beautiful cloths.



Fig 2: Adama Kotokoli doing the chuda alone

There was more merry making on Saturday evening including music and dance for Asana and her well wishers.

On Sunday morning, the *Aluwanka* fetched a bucket of water, sprinkled a little *lalle* and perfume into the water for Asana to perform a ritual bath alone. In Islam, ritual baths (*ghusul*) are performed when semen, menstrual blood or post-natal blood have been discharged,¹⁵⁵ therefore every Muslim girl should know how to perform it. Adama Kotokoli asked Asana if she knew how to perform a ritual bath. When Asana responded in

¹⁵⁴ Adama Kotokoli, interviewed, 13th February 2011, Nima.

¹⁵⁵ Qur'an chapter 4: 43 states that 'O you who believe, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying, or in a state of *Janabah* until you have washed your whole body.

the affirmative she allowed her to go into the bathroom and perform the ritual bath that is performed after sexual intercourse (*ghusul janaba*). Adama Kotokoli lamented that, doing it herself is not an exception; since most brides today do not allow the *Aluwanka* to bath or perform their ritual baths for them. From her point of view it was an opportunity to teach the bride *Ghusl Janaba*¹⁵⁶ before they get into their husband's house. Adama Kotokoli stated categorically that some brides who do not have knowledge of the ritual bath allow her to perform their ritual baths for them. According to Sulemana, ritual baths are performed when the body discharges certain impurities such as semen (sperm), menstrual blood, and post natal blood. These discharge makes the body impure until the ritual bath is performed.¹⁵⁷

The question here is whether Asana had experienced any thing to warrant a ritual bath by the *Aluwanka* during her marriage ceremony. If what the *Aluwanka* says about some Muslim girls not having the knowledge of a ritual bath is anything to go by then it raises a serious issue of how some of these girls perform some of religious activities in Islam such as the five daily prayers and fasting, which require the performance of ritual baths before they are performed. It also means that the Muslim community has a big problem to deal with because the responsibility of educating Muslim girls about ritual baths is primarily on parents and religious leaders. Also the practice of *Aluwanka* bathing the bride is not accepted in Islam because the whole body of a Muslim woman is an *awra*¹⁵⁸ and not to be seen by anyone except her husband.

¹⁵⁶ Ritual bath after sexual intercourse.

¹⁵⁷ Alhaji Mumuni Sulemana, *Islamic Studies*, (Accra: Kapital Publishing, 2004), 62.

¹⁵⁸ The part of a person's body which is not supposed to be exposed to anybody save her spouses.

Hajia Memuna Maliki, a Muslim marriage counsellor explained that the practice of *Aluwanka* bathing brides is a culture of the Hausa people and not Islamic. She emphasised that some *Aluwanka* may give the reason that in the past Muslims women were married off at a very tender age; some were married just after they have had their first menstruation, and did not have knowledge of a ritual bath (*Ghusl Hayd*).¹⁵⁹ The marriage ceremony therefore provided the bride the opportunity to learn how to perform the ritual bath from the *Aluwanka*. Hajia Maliki suggested that it should be the responsibility of the bride's parents and Muslim scholars to teach her how to perform the ritual bath even before she get married and not the responsibility of the *Aluwanka*.¹⁶⁰

When Zenabu Zakari, also an *Aluwanka* in Mamobi was interviewed on this issue, she explained that she has no problem with the latest development.¹⁶¹ She mentioned that the bathing of brides was an old practice, where most women lacked Islamic knowledge. Therefore they took up the responsibility of teaching the bride how to perform the ritual bath. However things have changed now, more Muslim women are getting educated and have at least some basic knowledge about Islam. Zenabu for instance would ask the bride whether she knows how to perform the ritual bath. If she does not, she would then demonstrate it to her, so she can enter the bath room alone and perform the bath.

Asana's marriage ceremony was climaxed on Sunday. On this day the officiating Imam Abdulai, chiefs and men from both the bride and the groom's side gathered in a mosque close to Asana's family house at Nima to solemnize the marriage. Imam Abdulai started by seeking permission from the bride's ethnic chief, Ibrahim Abubakar to tie the knot. When the permission was granted, the Imam then asked Asana's uncle Alhaji Habib who

¹⁵⁹ Ritual bath after menstruation.

¹⁶⁰Hajia Memuna Maliki (the Muslim marriage counselor), interviewed, 12 April, 2012. Mamobi Accra.

¹⁶¹ Zainabu Zakariyya, interviewed 21st May 2012. Nima, Accra.

was the guardian of the bride, if the groom's relatives had sent a delegation to ask for his nieces' hand in marriage. When Alhaji Habib responded in the affirmative the Imam again asked if the family had agreed to give Asana out for marriage, here again Alhaji Habib responded in the affirmative.

The Imam then started to tie the knot. He did this by announcing that he has been instructed by Asana's Uncle, Alhaji Habib (*wali*) to give his niece, Asana to Alhaji Mustapha (*wakil*) Ibrahim's (the groom) uncle, to be given to his nephew, Ibrahim for marriage. According to Dr. Tamim Abdul Wahab Abdul Karim, an Islamic scholar who officiates at Muslim marriages in the Nima/Mamobi communities, it is very important that the names of the bride as well as the groom are mentioned. This is to avoid any doubt, especially when they are not the only children of their parents.¹⁶² The presence of a representative of both couple is very important because they serve as witnesses to the marriage ceremony which is one of the requirements of a Muslim marriage.¹⁶³



Fig 3: Officiating at a Muslim marriage at Nima

¹⁶²Dr. Tamim, Abdul Wahab Abdul Karim, interviewed, 20 March, 2011. Madina Accra.

¹⁶³Muhammad Subhi bin Hassan Hallaq, *FIQH According to the Qur'an & Sunnah*, (Darussalamn: Global Leader in Islamic Books, 2008), 116.

Another important aspect of the officiating of Asana's marriage is the dowry. The Imam publicly mentioned that the groom had given an amount of one hundred Ghana Cedis (GHC 100) to the bride as dowry and handed the money to Alaji Habib to be given to Asana. Here also, Dr. Tamim explained that, in Nima/Mamobi, for instance, the amount of money paid as dowry ranges from twenty to one hundred Ghana cedis. The amount of the dowry (*sadaki*) is announced by the officiating Imam for the people present to serve as evidence to the marriage and the dowry. It was then handed over to the *wali* to be given to the bride. After the presentation of the dowry, the Imam gave a short marriage sermon and the officiating was brought to an end.

It is important to state that both the bride and the groom did not show up at the venue of the marriage ceremony in Nima/Mamobi, they are only represented by their witnesses. In an interview with Mallam Yunus Ibrahim, another Imam who officiates Muslim marriages, he explained that since Islam does not encourage the intermingling of the sexes, the groom can be permitted to attend in order to listen to the pieces of advice that are given. But for the bride it is the responsibility of her *wali* to tell her or she can listen to a recording of her marriage.¹⁶⁴

At about two O'clock in the afternoon when the officiating of the marriage had long ended, Asana was taken to her husband's family house at Madina (*wanka amaria*), where they had also organised some music and dance for entertainment. Later Asana was brought back to her family house, for another round of merry making, with music and dance. Her relatives and friends gave her gifts and placed money on her forehead as she danced.

¹⁶⁴Mallam Yunus Ibrahim, Interviewed, 12 March, 2011, Madina, Accra.

Eating and dancing continued till evening when Asana was finally taken to her husband's house. The question that comes up here is that, if the bride is allowed to dance in public during her marriage ceremony, why is she excluded at her own marriage officiating which is more important?

During the merry making, almost all the women were in their *Yayi* (a Hausa word which is used to describe a situation where women wear the one type of designed cloth at an occasion) *Yayi* is always accompanied with *Rabo*¹⁶⁵. In an interview with Fatimatu, a sister of Asana (the bride) who distributed *Rabo* at Asana's marriage ceremony, she explained that *Rabo* is usually given as an appreciation to all who attended the marriage ceremony. However there are specific *Rabo* meant for people who have bought the *Yayi*. *Rabo* comes in the form of provisions such as tins of milk, soaps, cooking oil and packaged perfumed rice among others. It also includes cooking utensils such as aluminium and 555 source pans, plastic bowls and sets of cutlery.

4.4 Categories of Traditional Premarital Counselling in Nima/Mamobi

In the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities, the traditional premarital counselling is part and parcel of every marriage ceremony; it starts from the Friday when the *Aluwanka* starts with her application of the henna to the day of *buday kay* (uncovering of the head). The traditional premarital counselling sessions take different forms. These include counselling of the following; *Aluwanka's counselling* during the pre-marriage ceremony, the Imam's

¹⁶⁵These are gifts given to guests at a ceremony to show appreciation.

counselling when officiating a marriage, the Muslim marriage counselling seminar and the relatives of the bride's counselling during the post marriage ceremony (*buday kay*).

4.4.1 Pre-Marriage Ceremony – Aluwanka

As stated earlier the responsibility of the *Aluwanka* is not only to apply the henna but to counsel the bride. She counsels the bride on how to lead a happy married life. In the past the *Aluwanka* was known to counsel the bride as she applies the henna on her but currently the counselling is done on the day of *Buday Kay*, the issues that were highlighted during the marriage ceremony of both Asana and Mariama are discussed below:

During Asana's *Buday Kay*, Adama Kotokoli, the *Aluwanka* talked to Asana about cleanliness. She explained that it is very important for Asana to keep her body very clean. This includes bathing, trimming her nails regularly, cleaning her teeth and keeping her hair neat at all times. She also reminded Asana that as she keeps herself clean she should not forget to tidy up her husband's house. She advised Asana to make sure that her husband always comes from work to meet a clean home and not a dirty home. Importantly, the act of personal hygiene should be part and parcel of every individual. From the researchers point of view it was very good that Adama Kotokoli touched on it. But the issue here is whether it is the sole responsibility of Asana or it is the duty of both Asana and her husband. One cannot imagine the situation in the marital home if Asana practises all she was told about hygiene and her husband does otherwise.

Adama Kotokoli again, advised Asana to treat her husband and his relatives with respect. Asana was advised to take her mother in-law as her own mother. She should therefore cook, wash and clean her room. This advice from Adama Kotokoli clearly points to the

Ghanaian traditional perspective of marriage, where the people see marriage as not just a union of the couple but a union of both families.¹⁶⁶ The wife at the end of the day is not only responsible to her husband but his family as well. It is however unfortunate that only Asana is being talked to. This makes the counselling one sided when in reality marriage as an institution that involves two people, ie the husband and the wife. The *Aluwanka* also advised Asana to avoid making lots of friends. She explained that some friends would intentionally visit her and ask her lots of questions about her husband. However the next moment every issue in her marital home will become the talk of town. Such acts she said could cause problems in her marriage. She therefore advised Asana to be careful in choosing her friends because bad friends could cause her problems in her marital home. According to Adama Kotokoli the preparation of food is very important in every marriage. It is the responsibility of Asana to cook for her husband and his parents. She advised Asana to accept the money given to her by her husband no matter how little it is and learn to manage it and even support him financially if she is capable of doing so.

Also during Mariama's *buday kay* her *Aluwanka* by name Haraka advised her not to compare her marriage with other peoples' marriages because women are fond of that. Haraka said that every marriage is unique and so Mariama should be content with what ever her husband gives her. This is because comparing ones marriage to another person could lead to jealousy.

Haraka also advised Mariama to respect her husband and bear in mind that he is the leader of the house. The *Aluwanka* added that Mariama should not hesitate to apologise to her husband when she offends him and avoid getting in to unnecessary arguments with him

¹⁶⁶RT. Rev. Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 77.

because it would bring problems in her marriage. Mariama was also advised to avoid making a lot of friends.

4.4.2 Marriage Ceremony-Imam

As stated earlier the Imams do not only officiate Muslim marriages but also give a marriage sermon. Though the sermons were brief, the researcher identified some elements of premarital counselling. Unfortunately as stated it is not mandatory for couples to be present at the officiating of a marriage in the Nima/Mamobi communities. However, in other places and organizations there are other ways of doing it where both couples are present. For instance the Ahmadiyyah Muslim Mission and the Ghana Muslim Mission allow couples to be present at the marriage ceremony. They believe that when couples witness their own marriage ceremony and see the procedure, they value their marriages. Again they think the presence of the couple also helps members of the community know the couple. It also serves as an opportunity for the couple to listen to the pieces of advice that are given.

From the researcher's point of view since the marriage is for the couple it would be prudent that the couple are present, witness the proceedings and listen to the marriage sermon. This would encourage them to attach a lot of importance to their marriage. Since Islam does not encourage intermingling of both sexes, a special place can be allocated for the bride in order for her to listen to the marriage sermon especially and live by the counsel.

During Asana's marriage sermon, Imam Ibrahim Abdulai, preached that it is the responsibility of every married Muslim man to provide for his family. These include food, clothing, shelter, education and health care. He lamented on how some Muslim men in the

Nima/Mamobi communities have abandoned their responsibilities, leaving the burden of the entire family on their wives. He added that most Muslim women are the ones taking care of their children and husbands and described this act as a disgrace to the Muslim community. The Imam therefore charged Muslim men in the community to rise up to their divine responsibility of taking care of their families. The Imam also advised the unmarried Muslim men among the gathering to put an end to their secret relationships with the Muslim ladies and take the necessary steps to marry them. Because secret relationships can cause them to engage in acts such as fornication, which is not accepted in Islam.

In the same way, during Mariama's marriage the officiating Imam Mallam Yunus who advised the couple to respect each other and bear in mind that their marriage is not just a contract between them but with Allah as well. He added that both wife and husband would be held accountable to Allah with regards to how they performed their roles in their matrimonial home. He reminded the couple about the Prophet's (PBUH) saying that anyone who marries has a foot in heaven and so to get the other foot in heaven the husband and the wife must ensure that their actions are in accordance with the teachings and practices of Islam.

It is obvious that the Imams had raised very important issues such the responsibilities of a husband, and the importance of marriage in Islam. As leaders of these communities they had identified and attempted to address them. Mallam Yunus, for instance explained that because Islam frowns on the intermingling of both sexes it was not appropriate for the bride to show up for the officiating of the marriage. For him it is the responsibility of her *Wali* to tell her everything that was said in the sermon. According to Mallam Yunus it is not compulsory for the groom to be at the place where the ceremony was taking place.

This was not evident in case of Mariama and Eliasu's marriage as Eliasu attended the officiating ceremony. When Eliasu was interviewed on why he decided to show up at his marriage ceremony he said he wanted to witness the proceedings and listen to the pieces of advice that will be given by the officiating Imam.¹⁶⁷ He added that though it is not the norm in the community for a man to show up at the ceremony his action was also not contrary to the teachings of Islam.

4.4.3 Muslim Marriage Counselling Seminar

During Mariama and Eliasu's marriage ceremony, a Muslim marriage counselling seminar was organised by the couple's friends on the Saturday. At the seminar, three Muslim scholars were invited as resource persons to educate the couple on marriage.¹⁶⁸ They include; Sheikh Yakubu Abban the general secretary of the Ahlus SunnaWal Jama'a, Dr. Tamim Abdul Wahab, a Muslim scholar and Hajia Memuna Maliki, a Muslim marriage counsellor. Sheikh Abban who was the first speaker started his speech by congratulating the couple and reminded them that marriage is one of the transitions in a person's life; therefore the couple should be mindful of this transition and respect their marriage.

He then advised the groom that he should not be in a rush to engage in sexual intercourse with his wife when she is brought to him on the first night. Later he asked him to put into practice what the Prophet (PBUH) recommended for newly wedded couples on their first night of meeting. He further added that according to the teachings and principles of Islam, the groom is supposed to lead the bride in a two unit of prayer. After which they should ask for Allah's blessing in their marriage. He said again that after the prayer, the couple

¹⁶⁷ Eliasu,, interviewed 24 June 2012. Mamobo, Accra.

¹⁶⁸ Muslim Marriage Counselling Seminar at the premises of ASWAJ office in Mamobi on 23 June, 2012.

can enjoy a nice meal together, such as an ice cream, *khebab* or any kind of meal that they would enjoy eating. After the meal, the man should again not rush to engage in sexual intercourse with his wife because the Prophet recommended foreplay before sex. This sheikh Abban said this would help the couple gain maximum sexual satisfaction and they would enjoy their marriage.

The second speaker Dr. Tamim also advised the couple to be patient with each other because marriage is very challenging. He told the bride to be careful with her utterances in order not to offend her husband in her speech especially when there is a problem. He said from experience and the complaints he had from some couples in the immediate communities some women make utterances such as ‘if not for marriage do you think that you are my type’. He advised the bride that if she wants to enjoy her marriage she should avoid such utterances. He also advised the groom not to beat his wife because Islam is against this act, but he lamented that some Muslim men abuse the Islamic teaching of conflict resolution in marriage and go ahead to beat their wives as discussed previously.

Hajia Maliki, a marriage counsellor also advised the bride to respect her husband and not get into unnecessary argument with him, she should treat him well and in turn he would also love her very much. She also advised the groom not to hesitate to apologise to his wife when he offends her because some Muslim men think that it is only the wife who should apologise when she offends him and not the other way round.

4.4.4 Post Marriage Ceremony (*Budan Kay*)-Relatives

As Childkroun puts it the responsibility towards a child is not on his/her biological parents alone but equally on relatives of the child’s father such as aunts or uncles. Therefore any

one who does not adhere to this custom is considered to be arrogant and disrespectful. This was evident in the counselling of the two different brides which the researcher observed. It was the aunts and other female relatives of the brides who were completely in charge of counselling the brides, their parents were not present. It is also important to state that in the marriage ceremonies that were observed by the researcher before the day of the *buday kay* aunts, uncles and grandparents of these brides repeatedly made statements like ‘when you go humble yourself’, ‘marriage is not sweet it is full of challenges’, ‘when you are patient you will enjoy your marriage’.

But on the day of the *budan kay* one of Asana’s aunts told Asana not to bring problems of her marriage to them (her family members) for solutions. Such complains, she said are likely to raise their tempers and cause them to over react to situations which could be peacefully settled, especially when they realise that her husband is at fault. Rather, she advised Asana to try solving her marital problems with her husband alone and only include a third party when the problem is getting out of hand. Another aunt of Asana, Sister Hanatu also told Asana that her in-laws might trouble her but she should exercise patience and give them the respect they deserve. In her words ‘close your eyes and ears to everything that happens in your marital home and you would have a happy marriage life, but if you want to be a nagging wife then you will not have a happy marriage’.

Mariama who is a degree holder from one of the universities in Ghana was advised to humble herself to her husband and his family and not to allow her educational background to negatively influence her relationship with her husband. One of her aunt sister Ladi also advised Mariama not to get into unnecessary argument with her husband. She should know the times he eats and make sure his meal is ready around that time. Another aunt

added that they have known Mariama to be a decent lady and encouraged her to keep it up and exhibit this quality to her husband and his relatives.

The advice given to Asana and Mariama creates the impression that marriage is an institution that is full of challenges. Humility and patience are values that couples need to show towards one another in order to maintain a peaceful marriage. From the researcher's point of view, a statement such as 'marriage is not sweet' can create fear in their minds which is likely to affect their relationships with their husbands. It was rather unfortunate that these relatives focused only on the challenges of marriage.

However they did not tell them about the wonderful and interesting aspects of marriage, the fact that they now have companions who will physically and emotionally support them and the fact that the marriage is a blessing for every Muslim because it perfects half of one's faith.¹⁶⁹ Also the fact that marriage will give them the opportunity to bring forth legitimate children as well as an opportunity for them to satisfy their sexual instinct in a legitimate way which attracts reward from Allah could have been mentioned.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to state that the *Aluwanka*, relatives of the brides as well as the Imams all raised very important points during the marriage ceremonies. Among such points include respect, humility, cleanliness and responsibility of the husband. Unfortunately that of the *Aluwanka* and the relatives of the bride seemed biased. They tended to focus their attention on the responsibilities of the bride and ignored that of the husband. Also, apart from the marriage counselling seminar where the couple were

¹⁶⁹Abd al Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, 52.

advised on what to do before engaging in sexual intercourse, neither the *Aluwanka*, Imam nor the relatives mentioned anything about sex to the prospective couple. However, as Rev. Sarpong puts it the main reason for marriage is for one to satisfy his or her sexual desire. Thus, if marriage is for support and companionship only, people could easily find them in their own relatives.¹⁷⁰ It therefore means that if this important issue of sex is not thoroughly discussed at the traditional premarital counselling, it would be very difficult for the Muslim community in Nima/Mamobi to rely on the traditional system of premarital counselling for a comprehensive premarital counselling.

Against this background of challenges posed by the traditional premarital counselling, some individuals in the Nima/Mamobi communities have taken up the initiative of introducing premarital counselling centres where prospective couples in the community would be counselled. The next chapter will account for these formalized premarital counselling programmes and address how the communities are responding to this new development and the prospects therein.

¹⁷⁰Rev. P Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Marriage*, 77.

CHAPTER FIVE

FORMALIZED PREMARITAL COUNSELLING IN THE NIMA/MAMOBI MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

5.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the issues raised by the *Aluwanka*, Imams, Muslim scholars and the relatives of the bride as they counselled her revealed that the traditional method of premarital counselling in the Nima/Mamobi communities did not touch on some issues of contemporary relevance in premarital counselling. Among these are the issues of sex and child training, which are some of the basic reasons why people marry. Furthermore, the said tradition method is not well structured and it is not systematic. It is mostly, piece of advice with little opportunity for the couple to do any personal exploration of their own feelings and evaluation of their own personalities and that of their partners. In an attempt to take care of the lapses in the traditional method, marriage counselling centres have been set up by two Muslims in Nima/Mamobi to educate the community and prospective Muslim couples in particular on marriage and its challenges.

This chapter therefore examines the activities of two marriage counselling centres in Nima/Mamobi: the Garden of Bliss Marriage Counselling Centre and the Islamic Marriage Counselling and Educational Service which were set up by Hajia Memuna Maliki and Sheikh Muhammad Zakariya Addo respectively. Information for this chapter was gathered through one-on-one interviews with the marriage counsellors, and some clients of Hajia Memuna Maliki and Sheikh Muhammad Zakariya. Also, questionnaires were distributed to some members of the community, in an attempt to elicit information on the level of

awareness of premarital counselling and how it can be improved to become more useful and beneficial since it is a new development in the community.

5.1 A Brief History of Premarital Counselling in the Nima/Mamobi Communities

As already stated, premarital counselling is not a new phenomenon in Nima/Mamobi. These communities have a system of premarital counselling that is embedded in their marriage ceremonies; the *Aluwanka* especially does her premarital counselling during the marriage ceremony. The Imams and Muslim scholars also continue with their premarital counselling till the whole ceremony is brought to an end. It is important to state that relatives of the bride though concentrate on organising the marriage ceremony also play an active role in counselling the bride in order to ensure that the marriage is sustained. This they do before she is taken to her husband's house.

Yet it appears that this traditional form of premarital counselling is not very effective. Indeed there is some evidence to show that for a long time marriages have not been peaceful and harmonious as intended by Allah. For example in an interview with Sheikh Yakubu Abban, the general secretary of Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'a in Ghana,¹⁷¹ whose outfit deals with conflict resolution and divorce cases in the Nima/Mamobi Muslim communities in particular, he revealed that in the early eighties the Muslim communities in Nima and Mamobi witnessed an increase in marriage ceremonies a few months to the month of Ramadan.¹⁷² Sheikh Abban added that this rise in marriages was accompanied by a corresponding high rate of marital disputes and divorce in the community. Such disputes were always brought to the head office of the Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'a for

¹⁷¹ Sheikh Yakubu Abban, interviewed on 15th March 2011 At the Ahlus Sunna Head office at Mamobi.

¹⁷² Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic Calendar. It is also a month for observing fast for twenty nine or thirty days.

amicable solutions. In as much as the office tried to settle these disputes and reunite the couples, in other instances they were forced to issue divorce certificates for the couples to go their separate ways. He gave an example of such instances as when a partner was accusing the other of infidelity and is demanding for divorce. Though Hajia Memuna Maliki has no records to prove this, she also claimed that about 80% of some Muslim marriages in the communities ended up in divorce every six months. She narrated the story of a marriage in Nima which was conducted a month before Ramadan and broke down just after Ramadan.¹⁷³ Hajia narrated that a young lady in her twenties was married to a man who has been living abroad for several years. Though she had never seen him, this marriage was arranged by the lady's and the man's parents because they had been friends for a long time. Because the man's parents thought that he had been living abroad for a long time without visiting them in Ghana, they therefore decided to get him a wife in order that he would visit home (Ghana) frequently. Unfortunately, when the man arrived a few days after Ramadan he sent his wife packing because, he caught her on several occasions communicating with her 'ex-lover' on a mobile phone. According to her, apart from the fact that this couple did not know each other physically, they never had any form of premarital counselling where they would get the opportunity to learn more about each partner's background.

Concerned about the problems and challenges that characterised Muslim marriages and of the inability of couples to sustain their marriages, some Muslim organizations such as the Islamic Charity Centre for Women Orientation¹⁷⁴ and Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'a started to move from the usual dancing and merry making during marriage ceremonies to organizing

¹⁷³Hajia Maliki interviewed, 13 June 2012, at her residence in Adenta, Accra.

¹⁷⁴ This is a women's organisation which aims at educating Muslim women about the teachings and practices of Islam.

talks on marital issues at marriage ceremonies. This was in order to educate Muslim couples on the importance of marriage. However, this kind of marriage ceremony was dubbed *Ahlus Sunnah marriage*¹⁷⁵ by the people of the Nima/Mamobi communities. At such occasions, both the groom and bride are present at the marriage ceremony and therefore listen to the pieces of advice that are given by persons who have good knowledge in Islam and marriage.

It was not, therefore, surprising that in 2006 and 2010 Hajia Maliki and Mallam Addo respectively established marriage counselling centres, at Mamobi to educate Muslim couples in Nima/Mamobi about marriage and its challenges, so as to prepare them physically and psychologically before marriage. These marriage counsellors use different approaches in going about their premarital counselling. Whilst Mallam Addo's premarital counselling can be described as educational/mass premarital counselling, Hajia Maliki's premarital counselling is more private, thus, involving the prospective couple. Hajia Maliki who has been counselling prospective Muslim couples for a number of years also started with the mass premarital counselling. She however stated that because she has created the awareness and has become 'popular' in the community now prospective couples call upon her when they are ready to marry. However, for Sheikh Addo who has been counselling for a few years now says that the level of awareness of the private premarital counselling is low but the mass premarital counselling attracts a lot of people. Nevertheless, he occasionally organises private premarital counselling for prospective couples.

¹⁷⁵Khamis, Kauthar, 'A Study of Islamic Charity Centre for Women Orientation' (University of Ghana, Legon 2008). 35.

5.2 The Garden of Bliss Marriage Counselling Centre (GBMCC)

This counselling centre was founded by the former vice-president of the Islamic Charity Centre for Women Orientation (ICCWO), Hajia Memuna Maliki. She was born in Kumasi, in the Ashanti Region of Ghana in 1947, attended her basic school at the Roman Catholic Girls School and later enrolled at the Philips Commercial School. After this, she worked with the Ministry of Agric in Kumasi.¹⁷⁶ Her office work ended when she moved to Accra with her husband and her five children in 1981. Since the death of her husband in 1989, she has been actively engaged in the activities of the Islamic Charity Centre for Women Orientation and her counselling centre.¹⁷⁷

The Islamic Charity Centre for Women Orientation (ICCWO) was founded by two Muslim women, Hajia Memuna Maliki and Hajia Aida Jibril for Muslim women and is aimed at educating Muslim women to understand the basic teachings and practices of Islam.¹⁷⁸ As an executive member of ICCWO, she had observed the activities and problems of these Muslim women in the community. Coupled with her personal experience in marriage for more than twenty years, Hajia Memuna took the opportunity to educate the members of ICCWO about marriage and how to sustain their marital relationships. Later, she started to provide the educational type of marriage counselling in sections of the Muslim communities in Accra such as Nima/Mamobi, Shukura and Cowlane. According to Hajia Maliki, her investigations into Muslim marriages in Nima/Mamobi revealed that though the Muslim youth were developing interest in marriage, the rate of conflicts in these marriages was very high and it led to high divorce rates. This corroborates the evidence from ASWAJ discussed in the introduction to the work. As a result, she established the 'Garden of Bliss Marriage Counselling Centre' in

¹⁷⁶Khamis, 'Islamic Charity Centre for Women Orientation', 14.

¹⁷⁷ Hajia Maliki, interviewed, 28 May 2013.

¹⁷⁸Khamis, 'Islamic Charity Centre for Women Orientation', 10.

2006 to educate and prepare Muslims for marriage in order to sustain these marriages. 'Bliss' means a place of happiness or joy. Therefore the name 'Garden of Bliss' is essentially calling on Muslims to treat marriage counselling seriously so that their marriages would be like a 'Garden of Bliss'.¹⁷⁹

The counselling centre is located at the premises of Al Banat Nursery and Preparatory School in Mamobi with the motto '**Happy marriage, successful marriage**'. She coined this motto because according to her she wants to help the Muslims in Nima/Mamobi to build a happy and a long lasting family relationship in the community. This she said would go a long way to help the development of the community. The counselling centre also has the slogan '**be a cook in the kitchen and a harlot in bed**'. She explained that the centre has chosen this slogan because food and sex are very important aspects of every marriage. The woman especially should know how to prepare delicious and nutritious meals and like the saying goes: "the best way to a man's heart is through his stomach". She added that one of the reasons why Islam encourages Muslims to marry is because of the sexual instinct so that Muslims can express their sexual desires lawfully within marriage. In her own words, "the woman should also not lie in bed like a piece of wood", when having sexual intercourse with her husband but rather "look attractive and actively participate" in the act.¹⁸⁰ This way she will also enjoy sex.

She added that because of the society's perception about sex, regarding it as a taboo subject which cannot be discussed openly and freely, some Muslim couples are inexperienced in the act. Therefore this poses certain serious challenges in the marriages. But according to her, it is neither a taboo nor shameful to discuss issues related to sex with

¹⁷⁹Khamis, 'Islamic Charity Centre for Women Orientation', 33.

¹⁸⁰Hajia Maliki Interviewed, 12 June 2011, Adenta, Accra.

prospective Muslim couples because the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet (PBUH) discuss and educate Muslims about sex. She cited an example that the Prophet (PBUH) did not just recommend foreplay before sex for couples for nothing but with reasons. According to her the Prophet (PBUH) recommended it because sexual satisfaction for both men and women is very important in every marriage.

According to Ayandokun, human beings are the most sexually active of all of God's creation.¹⁸¹ Consequently, if Islam discourages sex outside marriage, then couples need a lot of education on sex before they get married so as to be able to satisfy one another and not feel left out in that relationship. It is also important to understand that in Islam sex is not just for procreation but for pleasure as well.

From the researcher's point of view, one of the reasons why some couples may be inexperienced about sex could be attributed to Africans attitude towards sex as well as their interpretation of the Islamic teachings on premarital sex. In explaining the linguistic expression of sex in the African setting, Igboin argues that the reason why the Yoruba's in Nigeria do not mention direct words for the human private parts in public is because the sexual instinct of human beings is different from that of animals. He added that human beings have the 'ability to control their sexual urge and maintain, to a very large extent the morality of sex',¹⁸². As a result expressions like sexual intercourse are indirectly expressed as 'to sleep with',¹⁸³. So that any one who expresses such a statement in direct words is considered to have 'a dirty mouth',¹⁸⁴ Consequently, in the Muslim community, discussions on sex are interpreted as profane or a taboo and as a result people not dare talk

¹⁸¹ Ayandokun, *Counselling Made Easy*, 93.

¹⁸² Benson Ohihon Igboin, 'Afro-Christian Expression of Sex and Sex Organs: A Critical Moral Challenge to Contemporary African Christianity', *Evangelical Review of Theology* (2011): 346.

¹⁸³ Igboin, 'Afro-Christian Expression of Sex Education and Sex Organs': 350.

¹⁸⁴ Igboin, 'Afro-Christian Expression of Sex Education and Sex Organs': 350.

about it. Any person who talks about it openly and publicly is considered as immoral and also labelled as ‘spoilt’.

Unfortunately, some people in the Muslim communities have misunderstood the Islamic teaching on sex. For them the command ‘do not approach *zina*’ implies ‘do not talk about sex’ and as a result, sex education has been relegated to the background. Rather in Islam, sex education is as important as Islamic teachings on culture, economics, and finance among others.¹⁸⁵ Sex education better equips married people to take responsibility for their reproductive health and sexual relationship.¹⁸⁶ For example, the right to sexual satisfaction is a right conferred on both the married Muslim man and woman.¹⁸⁷ According to R. Bennet, the word *zina* technically means sexual intercourse which also includes non – penetrative forms of sexual contacts such as kissing, embracing, hand-holding, oral sex and mutual masturbation among others.¹⁸⁸ The explanation given by Bennet means that what is forbidden in Islam is premarital sex and any other action that could lead to it. It however does not apply to sex education which helps couples to know and understand their sexual rights and responsibilities. Sex education also informs Muslim couples on how to attain sexual satisfaction. Indeed learning about the *halal* and *haram* of sex is considered as part of sex education; this way Muslim will not go astray.

Though Hajia Memuna has no formal training on marriage counselling, she reads several books on marriage. According to her, she makes use of the late Pastor Bimbo Odukoya’s book entitled *Marriage: Real People Real Problems* and some articles on premarital

¹⁸⁵AL-DIEN Muhammad M. Zain, ‘Perception of Sex Education Among Muslim Adolescents in Canada’ *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, (2010): 396.

¹⁸⁶ Linda R. Bennett, “Sex Education: Zina and the Enigma of Sex Education for Indonesian Muslim youth” *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning* (2007): 380.

¹⁸⁷ Dialmy, ‘Sexuality in Islam’: 162.

¹⁸⁸Bennett, “Sex Education’: 377.

counselling that she downloads from the internet. Hajia Maliki has been given a wider exposure as she is sometimes invited to various radio and television stations like Oman FM and Metro Television respectively, to educate people on marriage and the importance of premarital counselling.

For the past seven years of her work as a marriage counsellor, Hajia Maliki has counselled more than twenty couples both in and outside of Nima/Mamobi communities. She also issues marriage counselling certificates for couples who have received premarital counselling from her, though she has not registered with the Registrar General's Department. The presentation of the premarital counselling certificate is done at the marriage reception, to show that the couple have successfully gone through premarital counselling and are prepared for marriage and the challenges that come with it. Hajia also does this presentation to advertise her marriage counselling centre to prospective couples who would need premarital counselling before they marry.



Fig 4: Hajia Maliki presenting a marriage certificate to the bride (Halima) at her marriage ceremony in a hall at the office of the Ahlus Sunah Wal Jama'a in Mamobi.

Hajia Maliki's marriage counselling centre has a logo of a coconut that has been split into two. She explained that the fruit of the coconut is pure white with no dirt, this represents love and transparency. For a marriage to be peaceful couples need to love and trust each other.¹⁸⁹

5.3 Premarital Counselling at the GBMCC

Normally, when clients report to Hajia Maliki about their intention to attend premarital counselling, they fill a form that gives detailed information about each partner's background at a fee of forty Ghana Cedis. According to Hajia Maliki, premarital counselling at the Garden of Bliss Marriage Counselling Centre takes three to six months. She stated that the six months helps her to adequately take the couple through the various topics that need to be discussed during premarital counselling. She however stated that some couples come after they have set a date for their marriage, in such a situation she counsels the couple for three months or less touching on the most important issues, such as the importance of communication, trust and understanding in marriage, which the prospective couple need to know before they marry. The client pays a monthly fee of GHC 15.00 and GHC 100 for a marriage counselling certificate.

When all requirements have been explained to the prospective couple and they have agreed to the terms, a convenient date for both the couple and Hajia Maliki is fixed for the first session of the premarital counselling. During this session, she tries to familiarise herself with the prospective couple and get them to understand the importance of premarital counselling in every marriage. She sometimes meets prospective couples

¹⁸⁹Hajia Memuna Maliki Interviewed, 14 April 2012, Adenta.

separately when the need arises. According to her, meeting prospective couples separately helps her to examine their personalities. As she engages the couple in conversations separately she gets to know their personalities and character. According to her some people are introverts while others are not. Therefore, meeting prospective couples separately helps her to identify their unique personality traits so that she would know how to go about the counselling process.

During these counselling sessions, Hajia Maliki inquires about the couples' idea of marriage as well as their family and religious backgrounds. She then explains to them the significance of marriage in Islam and the fact that it is ordained by Allah. As part of the discussion, she explains the Ghanaian traditional context of marriage which does not only involve the couple but the families of the couple. She adds that, the fact that a man and a woman have decided to love, respect, share ideas and understand each other, means that they should attach importance to their marriage and to sustain it. Respect, love, understanding and care will only be achieved if couples follow the fundamental elements of marriage. These include communication, understanding, trust and care. She stressed that without communication there would be no unity, and without unity there will be no trust and good marriage.

According to D. Wayne Matthews, communication is the process of sharing messages, ideas, attitudes and feelings to an extent that the sender and the receiver have an understanding of what is being expressed.¹⁹⁰ He added that couples need to be conversant with the verbal and non-verbal types of communication but the most important element of communication in marriage is listening well. Hajia Maliki is also of the view that

¹⁹⁰www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/pdfs/FCS466-2.pdf - United States. Accessed 24 February 2013.

communication is an important tool to a successful marriage; lack of proper communication in marriage is the root cause of problems in most marriages. She advised that a wife should never cease communication with her husband. Even if he stops communicating with her, she should find humble ways and means of talking to him in order to bring peace. The wife should not be arrogant but apologize to her husband when she offends him, likewise the husband. She added that the fact that couples have different family backgrounds and have decided to stay under one roof means that they would step on each other's toes. This is why effective communication is necessary so that couples can correct instead of criticising each other. In her view most marital problems are traced to poor communication, it is effective communication that strengthens and sustains every marriage relationship.

Another important element of a successful marriage that needs to be properly understood is the differences in their biological make up. From Hajia Maliki's point of view, women are generally relationship-oriented while men are not. She said that every married couple need to understand their own natures and that of their partners to promote a peaceful marriage relationship. Men are different from women and these differences are not only identified in their physical bodies but emotions as well, for it is in these differences that couples complement each other. According to Abudu, despite the differences in God's creation 'nature created the male and the female to bond together and to complement, not to compete with each other'¹⁹¹ This therefore means that a marriage is successful when couples get to understand each other's make up and how responsibilities have been divinely allocated to each partner in order to ensure that there is always peace in the Muslim marriage.

¹⁹¹ A. O. Abudu, *Getting Married? Staying Married*, (Accra-Ghana: Creative Opportunities, 2008), 29.

On the issue of trust, she described a marriage without trust as “just like sitting on a time bomb which can explode at any time”. She said that it is very important for couples to be truthful to each other and should never keep secrets from each other. If couples trust each other it means that they can confide in each other.

At one of Hajia Maliki’s premarital counselling sessions at the premises of Al Banat Nursery and Preparatory School which the researcher witnessed, Aishatu Adama a member of the Islamic Charity Centre for Women Orientation (ICCWO) was preparing to get married in the next two weeks.¹⁹² She had already completed her counselling session with Hajia Maliki five months ago. Unfortunately for her, the marriage could not come on because of some problems she had with the man intending to marry her. But now that she has found a new person, she has come to refresh her mind on what was being taught. Aishatu mentioned that her would-be husband was not able to join her for the counselling because he is a busy person; however she briefs him on everything she learns. According to her, she has learnt a lot about marriage from Hajia Maliki and was ready to implement it in her marriage. For example she has learnt the importance of respect and patience which she would apply to the husband. She has also learnt how to relate with her in-laws and create a peaceful marriage relationship.

Halimatu Seidu, a cousin of Aishatu who was also attending the premarital counselling for the first time, is dating a Muslim man who has promised to marry her. Though her marriage date had not been fixed, she wanted to start her premarital counselling to prepare her for marriage. She said her fiancé was reluctant to attend because he would not feel comfortable with the female counsellor (Hajia Memuna Maliki). If the marriage counsellor

¹⁹²Aishatu Adama, interviewed, 14 May 2012, Mamobi.

was a male he would not have had any problem attending the session. Halimatu added that because premarital counselling also involves discussing very important and sensitive issues like sex, it would be difficult for her fiancé to have a discussion on sex with Hajia Maliki who is a woman.

Though the same Muslims are exposed to sex scenes through the electronic media, some of them find it difficult to discuss issues relating to sex. This means that the Muslim community needs a comprehensive programme on sex education so that Muslims can have adequate information about sex before they get married. For example, in Bennett's article concerning *zina* and Sex Education for Indonesian Muslim Youth, she has suggested that sex education should be conducted in single sex classes of the same sex and attended to by teachers of the same sex, or individuals who are well trained in the field. She also revealed that sex education would be effective when age, maturity and physical development are taken into consideration. Discussing issues on sex is a way of educating the youth and not encouraging them to engage in any sexual activity which Islam has prohibited.



Fig 5: Hajia Memuna counselling Aishatu (right) and Halima (left) at the Al Banat Nursery and Preparatory School at Mamobi

5.4 The Views of Some Clients of the GBMCC

Since it is difficult to assess the impact of Hajia' Maliki's premarital counselling because it is a new thing she has started, the researcher managed to conduct interviews with two married women she counselled to know what they had learnt from the premarital counselling and how it is impacting their marriages. The identities of these women will not be disclosed; therefore they are referred to as Mrs. Haruna and Mrs. Seidu.

In an interview with Mrs Haruna¹⁹³ she explained that her step mother in-law introduced her to Hajia Maliki who took her through six months of premarital counselling. During the counselling she learnt how to treat her husband and make sure she looks neat and attractive at all times. One interesting thing she mentioned was that during the premarital counselling Hajia Maliki taught her how to prepare nutritious foods and drinks like palm nut soup and *sobolo* a local drink. She also advised her to learn to manage the money her husband gives her because it does not cost much to prepare nutritious meals. According to Mrs. Haruna premarital counselling has also taught her how to relate to her in-laws. She explained that the first time she was introduced to her mother in-law, her mother in-law made comments that gave her the impression that if she marries Mr. Haruna she would not find it easy with her. This was because the mother in-law had told her that her son (Mr. Haruna) is the only person who supports the family. Therefore, when and if the son stops supporting them after marriage she would be blamed. Mrs Haruna said that initially she was afraid to marry Mr. Haruna because of these comments .But after the premarital counselling she had with Hajia Maliki when she had learnt what is expected of her as a daughter in-law, for almost one year after the marriage she has never had any problem with her in-laws.

¹⁹³ Mrs Haruna, interviewed 28 May 2013 at Dansoman.

According to her, Hajia Maliki advised her to dress moderately when she is visiting her in-laws in order not to create the impression that her husband is lavishly spending his money on her. She was also advised to save some money so that once in a while she could give her in-laws gifts, as this would make them like her. Mrs Haruna added that because Hajia's marriage counselling is very beneficial she has recommended it to a friend who wants to marry but is complaining about the cost involved. Mrs. Haruna however thinks the fee Hajia Maliki is charging is moderate considering the fact that Hajia Maliki has to pay for transportation and other administrative costs.

It is worthy of note that Mr. Haruna did not attend the counselling session with his wife but in a telephone conversation with him, he mentioned that his father is also an Islamic scholar and considering the nature of his work he decided to rely on him for premarital counselling. Nevertheless, he thinks the premarital counselling his wife had from Hajia Maliki is very good because she treats him well. For Mr. Haruna though Hajia Maliki is a female marriage counsellor he would not have had any problem going to her for counselling.

In the other interview with Mrs Seidu, who has been married for a year and four months she said her husband welcomed the idea of going for premarital counselling and participated in it through out the six months. Unfortunately, due to the fact that he had travelled at the time of the interview, the researcher only interviewed Mrs. Seidu.¹⁹⁴ According to Mrs. Seidu, there were some sessions for both of them and other sessions were held separately for them. During the combined sessions they learnt about

¹⁹⁴ Mrs. Seidu, interviewed 28 May, 2013 at Nii Boi Town in Lapaz.

understanding each other by identifying their likes and dislikes so that their relationship would always be peaceful. They also learnt tolerance. She said, 'accept your partner the way he/she is because there are certain aspects of the person's character which cannot be changed in a day'. Hajia also talked to them about neatness, that they should both look and neat at all times in order to be attracted to each other.

However in her separate premarital counselling session they discussed sex and her role during sexual intercourse. She said Hajia advised her to make sure that she always smells good and actively participate in any sexual intercourse with her husband. She added that participating actively in sex does not mean that a person is promiscuous; it rather helps couples to enjoy their sexual relationships. Mrs. Seidu also talked about the discussion she had with Hajia Maliki on her responsibilities at home especially cooking when she was advised by Hajia to make sure that her husband's food is ready when he comes from work. Additionally, she was advised to learn to say 'thank you', 'please' 'I am sorry' so that there will always be peace in their marriage.

In the view of Mrs Seidu the premarital counselling has been very beneficial for her because she never lived with her parents to even experience or see how marriage life is. She said she lost her father at age two and so lived with her grandmother. Therefore when the time came for her to marry she thought that the best place to go for premarital counselling was at Hajia Maliki's marriage counselling centre. She added that she would continue to thank Allah for such an initiative by Hajia Maliki. Subsequently she had even recommended the marriage counselling centre for another woman whose daughter is getting married very soon.

5.5 Challenges and the Way Forward for the GBMCC

Hajia Maliki is facing numerous challenges as a marriage counsellor of which includes; the negative attitude some Muslim men show towards premarital counselling, especially those who do not show any seriousness with the counselling sessions. Some attend just a single session and never attend subsequent ones. When the researcher asked the counsellor the reason for this attitude, she replied that since her method of premarital counselling is a new development in the community, most of the members of the community do not know its relevance. She also stated that though quite a number of women have shown great interest, their male counterparts do not show much interest. She however believes that with time they would come to appreciate the fact that it is necessary for every marriage. Perhaps the reason for most Muslim men showing lack of interest could be because the marriage counsellor is a female; it would be rather uncomfortable engaging in a session with her. This is understandable considering the general traditional notion of norms of sexual behaviour and control in Islam and the intermingling of the sexes in particular.

Hajia Maliki again lamented that education on the importance of premarital counselling has not gone down well with most people in the community. This implies that more work needs to be done on awareness creation and sensitization. Though she charges for the counselling services she provides, she has not been able to counsel a large number of couples. Therefore this money accrued is not sufficient to enable her advertise her marriage counselling centre as some goes into the printing of certificates. Consequently, she has solicited sponsorship from benevolent Muslims to enable buy her airtimes on radio and television to educate the public on the need for premarital counselling. This will complement the ones that already exist when she is invited to render these services *gratis*. As a result, producers in the various media houses find it convenient to invite her when the

need arises. However, she needs a platform where she can at least be on air once every week to educate Muslims on the importance of premarital counselling. This way the programmes on radio and television will become free and make her services more accessible. At least those who cannot afford the charges will still be able to have some counsel to help their marriages.

Hajia Maliki hopes to attend workshops and seminars to improve her skills on marriage counselling, because she does not have the professional competence. It is her wish that one day the Muslim community would appreciate the role of premarital counselling in sustaining marriage relationship so that they would give it the necessary attention it deserves. She hopes to draft a constitution to serve as a guideline for her work and register with the Registrar General's Department in the very near future. This she believes would place more value on her work as a marriage counsellor as well as help her seek support and assistance from individuals and organizations both within and outside the country. One other issue she mentioned was the need for a comfortable location/edifice to carry out her activity because the premise of Al Banat School, where she conducts her premarital counselling does not provide a conducive atmosphere due to the lack of privacy, open space, noisy environment and easy distractions. Though Hajia Maliki is not a trained marriage counsellor, she says she is ready to share her experience with any Muslim who is also interested in getting into premarital counselling. This is because she does not want the marriage counselling programme at the centre to collapse when she becomes weak or dies.

5.6 The Islamic Marriage Counselling and Education Centre (IMCEC)

The Islamic Marriage Counselling and Education Centre (IMCEC) is an initiative of Sheikh Muhammad Zakariya, popularly known as Mallam Addo born in 1960 in Accra.

Apart from the traditional Islamic school (*Makaranta*) he attended in Accra, he also enrolled at the Ghana Institute of Languages from 1975 to 1977 to study Arabic language. In 1980 he travelled to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for his secondary and tertiary education at the Islamic University of Madina. He completed the university in 1989 with a degree in Theology and *Dawah*. On his return to Ghana, he collaborated with some friends to set up a Qur'anic studies group at Nyakrom which is currently known as the Siddique Complex. In 1991 he was employed as a teacher at the Institute of Islamic Research, where he taught *Tauhid* and *Fiqh*. Currently he teaches *Fiqh* at the Institute.

Even though Mallam Addo doubles as an Imam at the Khulafa Rashideen Mosque at Nima and the Zurak mosque at Mamobi, he is mostly identified with the Zurak Mosque at Mamobi because it is closer to his residence. According to Mallam Addo, the Mosque is called Zurak (short form of Zurkanain) because it was named after one Alhaji Zurkanain who built it. He has an office on the second floor and a hall for his educational/mass premarital counselling on the first floor of the Zurak Mosque.

Mallam Addo currently has two wives and admitted that practising polygyny comes with its own challenges, but that should not deter Muslim men from getting into it, because its advantages far outweighs the disadvantages. He also encouraged Muslim men to practise it when the need arises and emphasised that polygyny has been instituted in Islam to create and maintain a peaceful Muslim community. However, owing to lack of understanding, most Muslims have abused it. On the other hand, he cautioned Muslim men to avoid thinking that polygyny can be practiced only when one has the financial means of taking care of more than one wife. Polygyny goes beyond that, it includes treating these wives fairly and being able to maintain a peaceful relationship among these wives.

Mallam Addo explained that his personal marriage experience for more than twenty years, coupled with the experience of settling dispute between Muslim couples in the Nima/Mamobi communities, as well as the experience of assisting some Muslim youth at the Zurak base which is near the Zurak mosque, in addressing their marital problems motivated him to set up a marriage counselling centre. According to him, he realised that there were a lot of challenges in most marriages in the community and the best way to tackle these problems was by providing premarital counselling for the youth in the community.

In view of this, Mallam Addo began to organise what is described as the educational/mass type of premarital counselling, where he meets some Muslim youth in Nima/Mamobi on the first floor of the Zurak mosque and gives them some guidance on marriage. He started marriage counselling with about thirty Muslims within Nima/Mamobi in 2010. Every Friday at 8: 00 pm benches are arranged in two different sessions, one for males and the other for females. The marriage counsellor, Mallam Addo sits in front of the gathering and addresses them. At the end of his presentation there is a contribution of some money by the members to be given to Mallam Addo as a token of their appreciation.

He also conducts private premarital counselling for members of the community when they are ready to marry. During an interview with Mallam Addo he explained that the private premarital counselling is important because it gives him the opportunity to know the prospective couples, their opinions and expectations about marriage, experiences about sex and their fears. He stated that he uses this session to educate the prospective couple about sex and how each party should conduct him/herself to ensure that they both enjoy their relationship.

According to Mallam Mubashir Yaqub, before one becomes a member of the marriage counselling group he/she pays an amount of two Ghana cedi (GHC 2:00) for an application form and a dues card. Members of the counselling group do not need to be residents of the Nima/Mamobi communities. Also, in an interview with the secretary of IMCES, Mallam Mubashir Yaqub, disclosed that the counselling centre currently has a membership of over three hundred (300) with about 80% of these members unmarried. It also has a website (www.islamicmarriagecounselling.com) which contains some information about the centre and some video clips of their educational/mass premarital counselling which were held at the Zurak Mosque.¹⁹⁵

It is important to mention that IMCEC still settles marriage disputes among couples. However, when the centre is unable to settle a dispute it is referred to the Office of Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWAJ). This is because Mallam Addo is a member of this organization which serves as a dispute resolution centre for Muslims in the community where issues concerning rent, inheritance and marriage are addressed. In an interview with Mallam Addo he added that ideally the duration for premarital counselling is six months. Currently, the marriage counselling centre has been named Islamic Marriage Counselling and Education Centre (IMCEC). Mallam Addo stated that though the centre started with marriage counselling, in the near future it would include child training in Islam.

5.7 Premarital Counselling at IMCEC

At the premarital counselling class that was observed, the discussion began at about 8: 30 pm, at the first floor of the Zurak mosque. An opening prayer was said by Mallam Addo

¹⁹⁵Mallam Mubashir, interviewed, 13 May 2012, at Mamobi.

who then stated the topic for discussion: 'Choosing an ideal marriage partner'.¹⁹⁶ As part of his introductory comment, he explained to the gathering that marriage is a lifelong thing and so Muslims should make efforts to understand the Islamic teachings and principles about it. He reiterated that it is only when couples understand what Islam says about marriage that they will enjoy their marital relationships and also nurture their children to become responsible Muslim adults. In addressing the topic for the day, Mallam Addo, the main speaker noted that, just as Islam has laid down rules for acts of worship such as prayer, fasting and pilgrimage among others, marriage, which is an act of worship, also has its rules and regulations. Among such rules include guidelines for choosing an ideal marriage partner. He confirmed *Istikhara* as a method that can be used to identify a genuine marriage partner and illustrated with a scenario. For instance where a man identifies three ladies he wants to marry and does not know the one to choose, it is recommended he performs *Istikhara* in order to make a well informed choice.

Mallam Addo explained that, the person does not make a choice before performing *Istikhara*. Rather the person must have absolute trust in Allah that his/her prayer would be answered. He added that no one can perform *Istikhara* for another person; the one who is involved must do it. He cited an example of the situation where some Muslims in the Nima/Mamobi communities pay some Imams to perform *Istikhara* on their behalf and made it clear that a Muslim can request for prayers on a particular issue but the main responsibility lies with the individual who needs Allah's guidance on a matter. That person can explain to Allah what he/she needs better than any other person.

¹⁹⁶Observed on 22 April 2011, at the Zurak Mosque in Mamobi.

further explained that, when a person wants to perform *Istikhara* he should perform an ablution, make the intention of performing prayer, perform two units (*rakaats*) of prayer, then ask Allah for guidance on the subject matter. He emphasized that the response to the *Istikhara* prayer comes in various forms. It does not necessarily need to appear in a dream; sometimes it is a feeling the person who had performed it experiences and at other times it comes in the form of advice from other people. The most important thing is that the individual should sincerely perform the *Istikhara* and leave it in Allah's hands.

Another resource person at the premarital counselling class, Sheikh Suleiman revealed that some Muslim men and women sometimes consult soothsayers to help them choose their marriage partners. He explained that some of the soothsayers use sand, cowries, calculators, pens and papers and sometimes Qur'an to enhance their work. But it is Satan who aids them. Therefore people who consult them are deceived into thinking that they are capable of helping them. He cited an example whereby Muslim men consult these soothsayers to help them convince the women who have initially rejected their proposals to marry them. He added that such marriages would never last because it was not based on genuine intentions.

On the part of the Muslim women, he said that some of them prefer their husbands to keep girlfriends rather than practice polygyny. He stated that with the help of a soothsayer, they are able to convince their husbands not to practise polygyny. Sheikh Suleiman however advised the gathering to fear Allah and refrain from such practices. For him and according to Islamic principles, any one who consults a soothsayer has committed *shirk* (association of partners with Allah), a sin that is not forgiven by Allah. He added that it is the responsibility of a husband to ensure that his wife performs the obligatory five daily

prayers. If he finds out that she does not know he should teach her, but if both of them are ignorant they should employ an Islamic teacher to teach them.

During another premarital counselling class at the same premises¹⁹⁷ Mallam Addo made it clear to the members that the notion that when a man has a television, a room, a bed, can feed a wife and is sexually active and thus ready for marriage should not be the case. According to him Muslims need to understand what Islam says about marriage before they marry. He cited an example from the Qur'an which states that your wives are your cultivation so you can go into it as you want. Mallam Addo said that cultivation as used in the Qur'an is the process a man goes through to marry a woman, just as a man is required to clear a land before he cultivates it. He added that after the cultivation, some unwanted weeds may grow around the plant and these must be taken care of or be cleared as they could tamper with the plant's growth. He referred to the unwanted weeds as the challenges that are likely to confront the marriage and added that it takes a God fearing person to overcome these challenges.

Mallam Addo advised the young ladies to respect themselves and not allow men to take them for granted. He added that the days of *Jahiliyyah* where women were used as sex objects are over. Therefore, ladies should direct every man who expresses interest in marrying them to their parents in order that they are propelled towards marriage rather than engage in illicit sexual affairs.

During the open forum session, one of the interesting questions asked was on how couples should satisfy each other during sex. Responding to this a resource person Sheikh Abdul

¹⁹⁷ Observed on 11 May 2012, at the Zurak Mosque in Mamobi

Razak answered that the purpose of sexual relationship is not just for procreation but for enjoyment. This is why couples need to make efforts in understanding sex. He was however quick to add that it is quite unfortunate some Muslim couples in the community do not know much about sex. Sheikh Abdul Razak explained that orgasm is the sign of a good sex and that is why Prophet (PBUH) recommended foreplay before sex. Because women by nature take a longer time to reach orgasm, it is important to practise a lot of foreplay to induce or attain orgasm. He said it is unfortunate that some men do not take the satisfaction of their wives into consideration during sexual intercourse. However, once they (men) have reached their orgasm then sex has been successful. He explained that in sexual relationships there should be equal satisfaction for both partners and not only one person. This statement was also confirmed in Dialmy's article on sexuality in Islam which suggests that some Muslim jurists and erotologists have advised that during sexual intercourse men should not climax before their wives.¹⁹⁸

A follow up questions that was asked by a lady was on how the woman would know she has reached orgasm. Abdul Razak replied that since men and women have different biological features, they also have different times for reaching orgasm. For example, it takes a woman a longer time to reach orgasm than a man. Also, the orgasm of a man is identified with the release of sperm or ejaculation but that of the woman is a feeling. Abdul Razak said that from what some women have told him, when a woman reaches her orgasm, she experiences an exciting feeling which starts from the sole of the feet to the palms, fingers, in her chest and the head.

It is interesting how Abdul Razak who is a man tried to explain what the feeling of orgasm is like for woman. It is also normal that Sheikh Abdul Razak struggled to explain what orgasm is in women. Orgasm in both men and women is a feeling that is difficult to

¹⁹⁸Dialmy, 'Sexuality in Islam':161.

explain in words. It is an experience which occurs within a very short period as Derek Llewellyn-Jones a gynaecologist in Sydney admits. However, as a gynaecologist who has discussed the issue of sexuality with a number of women, he described orgasm as a ‘feeling of intense pleasure which is the peak of sexual arousal’. He further explained that the feeling starts in the pelvis of the woman then spreads to every part of the body.¹⁹⁹

Another question that was asked during the open forum is whether it is permissible for a man to beat his wife when she refuses to respond to his sexual needs. According to Mallam Addo, if it is not her habit, the husband should ask for an explanation and be patient with her. However, if it is becoming her habit then he should report her to her parents or any elderly person to be counselled because such acts can be considered as basis for divorce. He also explained that sexual intimacy is one of the reasons why Islam encourages Muslim to marry. This being the case women should not refuse their husbands’ request for sexual intimacy without a tangible reason. This is in affirmation to the saying of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that, ‘When a woman spends the night away from the bed of her husband, the angels curse her until morning’²⁰⁰ He added that sexual intimacy between married couples is considered as *sadaqa* in Islam. Therefore, if a partner offends the other that should not serve as grounds to avoid each other because sexual intimacy could be used as a strategy to solve marital problems. He advised that under no circumstance should a man raise his hands against his wife because Islam is against causing any form of pain to one’s partner.

¹⁹⁹Derek Llewellyn –Jones *Everywoman: A gynecological guide for life* (Ibadan: Safari Books (Export) Limited, 2007) 54.

²⁰⁰ Siddiqi, Sahih Muslim, 372.

It is the contention of Bennet that some Muslim scholars argue that a woman has the right to refuse sexual intimacy if she is sick, tired or menstruating. On the basis of this the man on the other hand has no right to beat her if she refuses.²⁰¹ On these grounds one issue that may be asked is what the Muslim woman will do to her husband if he also refuses to respond to her sexual needs? It is unfortunate that both Mallam Addo and Bennett's did not address the other side of the issue. It is in view of this that Diaimy has concurred with the suggestions of some jurists that 'men should not make love to their wives too often for fear of saturation, nor too little for fear of causing harm.'²⁰²

There was also a question on whether it is permissible to take a ritual bath after sexual intercourse with a bucket of water that has been contaminated with soap. Mallam Addo replied that if the soap changes the colour and scent of the water, then it can not be used for ritual bath. However, if it does not change the colour and scent of the water then it is permissible to use it to perform the ritual bath. He also advised that Muslim couples should learn to bath together because it is the practice of the prophet (PBUH). As Nana Aisha, one of the wives of the Prophet reported, she bathed with the prophet (PBUH) from the same bucket. He continued to explain that the reward for sexual intimacy with a person's married partner continues when they take their bath together.

5.8 Views of Some Clients From the IMCEC.

To assess the views on Mallam Addo's premarital counselling, a married couple and a married woman who had receive premarital counselling from him were interviewed. The researcher has named them Mr/Mrs. Jamil and Mrs Hamid. It is important to note that the

²⁰¹Bennett, 'Zina and Sex Education': 376.

²⁰²Dialmy, 'Sexuality and Islam': 161.

counselling that these couples received was the educational/mass type. Their partners were living abroad but welcomed the idea when their wives told them about their participation.

Mrs Jamil who has been married for two weeks and three days said though her husband was not in the country during the period of premarital counselling, he had listened to some of their video programmes on the educational/mass premarital counselling on YouTube in Germany.²⁰³ According to her she has been a member of the marriage counselling centre for about a year. Though no private premarital counselling was held for her Mallam Addo was among the panels who advised them on the day of their marriage.

She said that by participating in the mass premarital counselling she has also learnt about marriage, sex and appearance. She said that she has been educated on how to enjoy sex with her husband and the type of clothes she is supposed to wear when she is in doors with her husband so that she would look attractive to him all the time. Additionally Mrs Jamil said she had learnt how to avoid and resolve conflict in her marriage because both women and men have reciprocal rights. Therefore she needs not only to understand her husband but accept her mistakes and apologise when she offends him.

Mr Jamil said that from the YouTube videos he watched he has learnt more about marriage and his responsibilities as a husband. He has also learnt that he must look good, respect his wife and not to treat her like a slave in the same way he expects the wife to do. He emphasised that the times when women were maltreated are passed and gone

²⁰³ Mr./Mrs. Jamil, interviewed 29 May 2013 at Darkuman.

especially because Islam is against maltreating women. Therefore he will be kind to his wife and respect her.

Like wise, Mrs Hamid's husband never took part in the premarital counselling because he was also abroad though he came for the marriage and left after two months. Currently Mrs Hamid who is five months pregnant was among the pioneers who started attending Mallam Addo's educational/mass premarital counselling.²⁰⁴ She said that apart from the pieces of advice they were given by Mallam Addo and his colleagues, sometimes they also discussed stories and experiences of other marriages in order to learn lessons from them. For example she narrated a story of a young Muslim girl who was forced by her mother to divorce her husband because he had lost his job and could no longer cater for his family. Even the intervention of some elders in the community did not stop the girl's mother from insisting on the divorce.

Unfortunately, after the divorce she realised that she was pregnant for him. For Mrs Hamid, when such stories come up at the counselling centre they teach patience. But they also remind them of Allah's statements in the Qur'an that He will test human beings to know their level of faith in Him. As such these challenges should also be seen as a test from Allah. For her it takes a person with a strong faith and proper understanding of Islam and marriage to still stay in challenging marriage and believe in Allah that things will improve.

In another narration she gave a story of a friend who was living abroad with her husband. Though this friend was working as her husband was, their salaries were used for the

²⁰⁴ Mrs. Hamid, interviewed 29 May 2013 at Ashale Botwe.

payment of bills and upkeep of the home. When the time came for her to come back for a funeral, her husband refused to buy her a flight ticket, but luckily some friends supported her in this regard. According to Mrs. Hamid her friend who is now stranded in Ghana calls her former boyfriend for financial assistance. For Mrs. Hamid since people will never give things for free, there is a possibility that this friend will be engaging in extra marital affairs. She argued that should this happen then part of the blame should be put on her husband for his inability to provide for his wife's needs.

5.9 Challenges and the Way Forward for the IMCEC

According to Yaqub the secretary of the IMCEC, one of the challenges of the marriage counselling centre is the negative attitude of some members of these communities towards this service. They have their own prejudices about the centre and sometimes discourage other people from attending. Yaqub explained that some members of the Nima/Mamobi community think that it is only members of Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'a who can access their services, because it is run by Mallam Addo who is an ardent member of the group. For him this is not true because they are aware that these communities are dominated by Muslims of different Islamic doctrines: such as the Tijaniyyah and the Shi'a among others. Therefore, the marriage counselling centre is open to every Muslim irrespective of their doctrines.

Another challenge confronting them is the issue of dues. According to Mallam Addo, he has observed that some Muslims in the communities criticise any initiative that has something to do with money as members of the Muslim community are used to *fi sabilillah* and free services. As a result of this, some did not understand why they had to pay for

admission forms and weekly dues. They understood the educational/mass premarital counselling as a form of preaching which should be done for the sake of Allah.

Closely related to this is the issue of finance. Every association needs money to take care of its administrative cost and logistics. However, the only source of income for the IMCEC is the weekly dues from their members who attend the sessions. Since Mallam Addo does not want to put any unnecessary burden on the youth he does not charge for providing premarital counselling but stated that in the near future the marriage counselling centre will charge any member who requests for their services to pay a fee. Currently, participants give a token from their purse during the premarital counselling and pay an amount of fifty Ghana cedis (GHC 50.00) for marriage counselling certificates when they are ready to marry. He also hopes to register the organisation and make sure that in the near future all Imams in the community counsel Muslim couples before they officiate at their marriages.

5.10 Attitude of Muslims in the Community toward Premarital Counselling

Obviously the community does not seriously patronize the two marriage counselling centres. Therefore some views were solicited to find out the lack of interest. Views on the attitude of the members of the community were mainly gathered from single fifty Muslim youth in Nima/Mamobi. The ages of those interviewed ranged between twenty two (22) to forty (40) years and their educational levels ranged between Junior and Senior High Schools. Among this group, 35 were females and 15 were males. This is due to the unwillingness of some of the Muslim men in the community to answer the questions because they did not understand why the researcher was carrying out such a research. Upon explaining to them that this is a research work from the University of Ghana for the

award of an MPhil degree, some of them concluded that I would not make any money from this research and it would be better if I travel overseas to further my education.

Questions were asked about the awareness of premarital counselling in the Nima/Mamobi communities. Out of the fifty questionnaires that were distributed only ten respondents either knew about the GBMCC or the IMCES in these communities. Five (5) men, out of the fifty (50) respondents made reference to the office of Ahlus Sunnah walJamaa as a marriage counselling centre and thirty five (35) did not have any idea about the existence of any marriage counselling centre in Nima/Mamobi.

From this one can say that most people in the communities will not go for premarital counselling before they marry. Therefore, it is highly likely that they would find it difficult to cope with marital challenges if they should rely only on the traditional premarital counselling system. It also means that the two marriage counsellors Hajia Maliki and Mallam Addo need to intensify their education on the importance of premarital counselling in these communities. Because if after six years of marriage counselling by Hajia Memuna and four years of Mallam Addo's premarital counselling, there are still a large number of the youth in the community who would wish to marry sometime in their lives but have no idea of the existence of any marriage counselling centre in the community, then a lot of work has to be done. Also, the five respondents who made reference to the office of Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'a were not aware that the office is not a marriage counselling centre but a grievance centre for Muslims where issues on marriage, divorce, rent and inheritance among others are discussed and resolved. These five respondents even explained that they would not access the office of Ahlus Sunah Wal Jama'a because the Muslim scholars at the office disgrace Muslim men any time a

marriage problem is presented to them for settlement and tend to always side with the women.

When the researcher explained what premarital counselling entails to the thirty five (35) respondents, who said they did not have any idea of premarital counselling, thirty (30) of them agreed that it was a laudable idea and would access it if it is introduced in the community. However, five respondents out of the thirty five rejected the idea of premarital counselling and viewed it as an imitation of what Christians do before marriage. They explained that the Muslim community has a traditional method of premarital counselling which they need to stick to though some added that this has proved to be less effective because the youth do not listen to the pieces of advice they are given during their marriage ceremonies.

When asked whether there should be medical examination before marriage, forty out of the fifty (50) respondents agreed that it is important that prospective Muslim couples do a medical examination to check their health status before they decide to marry, while ten (10) of the respondents did not think so. For some thirty (30) respondents issues on Islam's position on marriage, responsibilities of a couples, sex and how to create and maintain peace in marital relationships should be part of the topics that should be discussed during premarital counselling. They believe that when these issues are discussed thoroughly marriage disputes and divorce would be reduced if not eliminated.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the nature and procedure of premarital counselling, by Mallam Addo and Hajia Maliki as well as their challenges. This is because, they have come to the realization that members of the community do not understand Islamic marriage and their responsibilities in it. Therefore, they are unable to make peace in the home. In their view, premarital counselling will help make a better home. Undoubtedly, these are people who have not had any professional training on premarital counselling but are making endless efforts in their own small ways to ensure that marriages in the Nima/Mamobi communities are successful and sustainable. However, it is important that these counsellors receive some training to improve upon their counselling skills.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND ANALYSIS

6.0 Introduction

There is no doubt that Islam encourages Muslims to marry because it strengthens one's faith or relationship with Allah. To help Muslims achieve the best in marriage it has also laid down certain guidelines for Muslims to consider before going into it; something that Muslims in the Nima/Mamobi communities attempt to do to the best of their ability in various ways. These include the traditional and formal premarital counselling systems where the *Aluwanka*, imams, and members of the family advise the bride especially. However, in spite of this, the evidence at the disposal of the researcher suggests that this method has not been very effective since there are several challenges facing marriages in the community. It is against this background that the research was done to identify the 'potholes' in the prevailing system and how the emerging forms of premarital counselling in the communities are dealing with these challenges to help sustain Muslim marriages.

In an attempt to achieve these aims and objectives the researcher in the first chapter introduced the work by stating the problem and the motivation behind the work, the aims and objectives, the main research question guiding the work and the scope of the research. Apart from this the various methods of data collections which included, interviews, personal observation and the administering of questionnaires were also discussed. In addition, relevant and appropriate literature was reviewed. These included both Christian and Islamic materials on premarital counselling. Materials on marriage from the Islamic perspective were also reviewed. The chapter also dealt with the limitation, organization

and relevance of the research, which is a pioneering one in terms of its contribution, both to scholarship and policy formulation in the Muslim community.

In the second chapter entitled *Islamic Perspective on Marriage*, the researcher highlighted the significance of marriage in Islam. One of the findings was that marriage as an institution is regarded as sacred in Islam and celibacy or monasticism is not regarded as a virtue in Islam. This is because the sexual instinct is as natural in every individual which needs to be satisfied only within marriage. Further the perpetuation of the human race is dependent on the use of the sexual instinct. Without procreation the human race will become extinct.

Subsequently, the chapter discussed the requirements of a Muslim marriage which is the foundation of a successful marriage on which family life is based. These include: a proposal with a corresponding acceptance, the presence of at least two competent witnesses, the presentation of *Mahr*, a marriage guardian and a marriage party or reception (*Waleema*). From the Islamic perspective, *Mahr* is a dowry or a gift which is given to the bride from the groom. It becomes her property and she can use it for anything she wishes. The discussion on the other hand revealed that *Leefe* which is a cultural practice, where the groom is expected to present some pieces of clothes, scarves, veils and other items to the bride as part of the dowry before he marries her, has crept into marriages (as a requirement) in these Muslim communities. This practice has received a lot of criticisms from some Muslim leaders in the communities because it deters some men from getting married. However, it was established that *Leefe* is a practice which has come to stay in the Muslim community and sometimes even the *Mahr* that is given to the bride on the day of the ceremony of a marriage is very little. For some therefore *Leefe* should be seen as part of the *mahr*.

Other areas discussed in the chapter bordered on polygyny and courtship especially, which some considered as debatable issues. Whilst Islam accepts polygyny in a limited form and on certain conditions, scholars have differed on courtship. According to some scholars it is western practice and forbidden in the religion of Islam. Others hold the view that it is not entirely forbidden as the Prophet (PBUH) tacitly approved it. Thus, it is allowed provided it does not lead to *zina*.

Premarital Counselling in Islam which is the title of the third chapter explained premarital counselling from a general perspective and then narrowed it down to the Islamic teachings and principles on the subject. The chapter discussed the purpose of premarital counselling as not to entirely avoid problems in a marriage relationship, since problems and challenges will always arise. Rather, it is to minimize the problems as well as equip prospective couples with problem solving skills so that they can appropriately address these challenges in the relationship as they emerge.

It was also established that premarital counselling is not new in Islam, though it is not well developed in the Ghanaian Muslim communities. Indeed there are hints and general guidelines in the Qur'an and Hadith/Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) on premarital counselling. In the discussion, it was evident that Allah did not only encourage Muslims to marry without guiding them on how to go about it. The Qur'an and Hadith guide Muslims on the things to consider before getting married. This starts from choosing an ideal marriage partner to sexual relationships among married couples and parenting among others. Beyond the physical and the material, *Istikhara* was identified as one of the spiritual means through which Muslims can seek Allah's counsel for a suitable marriage

partner. Therefore Muslims have been given principles that they should follow to meet the main objective of marriage which is peace, tranquillity, love and mercy as echoed in the Quran.

In view of this, the important role of sex in marriage which is one of the subject matter in premarital counselling comes to the fore. Consequently, it is highly recommended that before sexual intercourse (which is sacred) takes place, couples pray to Allah to ward off evil in case the couple is blessed with a child. However, Islam prohibits sex with a woman who is in her menstrual period because of its health implications, but different positions in sexual intercourse are allowed so long as it is through the vagina and not the anus. Children are also considered as a blessing to every married couple in Islam, therefore it is a collective responsibility of the parent to contribute to the upbringing of their children because Allah would hold them accountable on how they each raised their children on the Day of Judgment.

Chapter four, titled *Traditional Premarital Counselling in Nima/Mamobi* highlighted the methods of counselling prospective couples during marriage ceremonies in these communities. On one hand is the *Aluwanka*, a respected elderly woman in the community who counsels the bride on her responsibilities to her husband and advises her to avoid doing things that could threaten her marriage. On the other hand are the Imams who serve as religious leaders of these communities and counsellors of the groom during the officiating of the ceremony. Additionally, the relatives of the bride provide pieces of advice to the bride on the day of *buday kay* while some Muslim scholars counsel the couple at marriage counselling seminars. All these are forms of premarital counselling.

It would appear that Muslim leaders such as Imams and scholars in the two main communities reduce their roles to officiating and counselling on the day of the marriage ceremonies. This is not the best as it does not afford ample time to discuss important issues. The Imams should therefore encourage members of the community to notify them about their marriages ahead of time so that these religious leaders could arrange for some premarital counselling for the prospective couples before they marry. The fact that this does not happen probably means that these officiating Imams and those others who provide these services are themselves not conversant with premarital counselling.

One of the findings in this chapter is that though the Nima/Mamobi communities recognize the importance of marriage in the society and counsel prospective couples to some extent, certain important aspects of premarital counselling are left out. For example, sex which is one of the core reasons why Islam encourages marriage is not discussed. It was observed that all of them; the *Aluwanka*, Imams, Muslim scholars and relatives of the bride did not effectively touch on sex-related matters. This may be due to the fact that it is culturally considered a taboo subject.

One of the major findings of the research was that, the nature of the traditional premarital counselling is biased in the sense that it concentrates on the bride as though she is the only party involved in the union of marriage. Marriage takes place between two individuals and so it is the duty of the couple to join hands together to ensure that the marriage works. It is reasonable to argue therefore that, the man must also be counselled appropriately for him also to play his role well. Indeed, apart from being the main person counselled the pieces of advice given by the traditional counsellors are one sided; it is the bride who is told to be humble, obedient and respectful etc. not the husband. This attitude towards women reflects the patriarchal nature of the Ghanaian community. Despite the shortcomings of the

method of this traditional premarital counselling system, marriage ceremonies in the communities cannot be performed without the contributions of these people.

It is these lapses in the traditional premarital counselling in these communities and the bid to improve it that pushed some members of these communities to introduce premarital counselling. This formed the basis of the discussion in chapter five entitled *Formalized Premarital Counselling in the Nima/ Mamobi Communities*. It studied two main individuals who have set up marriage counselling centres for prospective couples and offer both educational/mass and private premarital counselling services. These marriage counsellors, Hajia Maliki and Mallam Addo, take prospective Muslim couples through different sessions of premarital counselling before the couples get married. They have attempted to introduce both educational/mass and private premarital counselling in these communities.

As identified earlier sex related issues were rarely discussed in the community due to cultural and religious factors and considered a taboo area. However these individuals are now addressing these issues during premarital counselling. They take the opportunity to inform couples about sex in order to enhance their sexual relationship with their partners. This is a clear indication that they are trying to break cultural barriers. In the same manner they counsel the couples on some tools that could help enrich marital relationships. These include communication, understanding, trusting each other etc using modern forms of counselling techniques.

It is quite evident in the interviews conducted with members of the community there is some knowledge and awareness of the existence of the new trend of counselling. In addition some are aware of the Garden of Bliss Marriage Counselling Centre and The

Islamic Marriage Counselling and Education Centre (IMCEC) in the Nima/Mamobi communities where prospective Muslim couples could always go for premarital counselling. By virtue of the fact that these are new developments and barely six years old, the centres are bound to face teething problems like any new enterprise. One of such is the introduction of dues and fees which may account for the low patronage.

The other critical concern that emerged is that both counsellors are untrained and therefore may be offering their services unprofessionally. The researcher is aware that the passion for marriage counselling and marriage experience alone does not make a person a good marriage counsellor. It is the training that gives the marriage counsellor the requisite skills to enable him/her counsel effectively²⁰⁵ and help in sustaining marriages. So much as they may be sincere and passionate about helping to check the spate of divorce and challenges in Muslim marriages in these communities under study, it comes with its own risks: they may be doing the wrong things with passion and sincerity. This in itself is a big challenge.

Even though the traditional system of premarital counselling in the Nima/Mamobi plays a significant role, it definitely has set backs and 'pot holes'. As stated earlier it actually provided the impetus and motivation to do the research. But the new and emerging forms of counselling as practised by the two individuals, despite the fact that it is to the best of their ability is amateurish, maybe because it is still in the development stages within the Ghanaian Muslim community in general. For this reason it is equally fraught with problems which must be addressed holistically and with dispatch for premarital counselling to impact positively in sustaining Muslim marriages. As the two especially

²⁰⁵ Michael J. Sporakowski, 'Assessment and Diagnosis in Marriage and Family Counselling', *The Journal of Counseling and Development* 74(1995): 62.

Hajia Maliki has acknowledged, she is only trying her bests and there is still a long way to go.

On the basis of these problems a number of suggestions and recommendations on how these could be taken as challenges and tackled so that premarital counselling could be improved in the Nima/Mamobi communities are made as following:

Firstly, more attention should be given to those stakeholders especially the *Aluwanka* and the Officiating Imams in order to introduce them to premarital counselling. They can be taken through some in-service training like is done for the traditional birth attendants. This will sharpen and improve the skills of those who are already ‘practitioners’ of the discipline.

Secondly, in order to enhance the capacity of all involved in marriage ceremonies to do premarital counselling it is recommended that the Office of the National Chief Imam, the Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama’a and other Muslim organizations should not only include premarital counselling in their sermons, but provide the services for their flock. This is because since the Muslim communities in Ghana highly regards these organizations to which they belong, they will not hesitate to patronize premarital counselling that is meant for their benefit especially when well explained.

Thirdly, since *Leefe* is a big issue in most Muslim communities in Ghana, marriage counsellors should discuss it during premarital counselling sessions to enable the couple decide on what the man can afford when it comes to the *Leefe*.

Fourthly, Muslim leaders should also educate the youth especially the men, on the importance of premarital counselling so that they would appreciate the role premarital counselling plays in every marriage relationship. This education can be done through sermons at marriage ceremonies, Friday congregational prayers, and other Muslim gatherings.

6.1 Suggested Areas of Further Research

The office of Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'a as a dispute resolution centre for Muslim couples in Nima/Mamobi

A study of premarital counselling among the Ahmadiyyah Muslim Mission and the Ghana Muslim Mission in Accra.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Questions for Couples Who Have Gone Through Formal Premarital Counselling

Sex:..... Age:.....

Years of marriage:.....

How did you of this counselling centre?

Who introduced you to this centre?

What was your husband's reaction?

Did he also attend premarital counselling? Yes /No

Please give reasons for your answer

What were some of the issues discussed during the session?

How did these issues influenced your marriage?

Would you recommend premarital counselling for every prospective Muslim couple?

Yes /No

Please give reasons for your answer

What are some of the things that can be done to improve upon this premarital counselling?

Appendix B

Interview Questions For Imams who Officiate Marriage Ceremonies.

Name:.....

Sex:.....

Age:.....

Education:.....

Mosque:.....Please explain to me what you do at the officiating of a marriage ceremony

Do you counsel the couple? Yes /No

Please give reasons for your answer

Why are only men at the officiating of a marriage ceremony?

Why are the couples not present?

What are some of the issues you address when counselling?

What are the challenges you face as you counsel couples?

Appendix C

Interview Questions For *Aluwanka*

Name:.....

Age:.....

Community:.....

Can you explain to me what you do on Friday, Saturday and Sunday when you are with the bride?

Do you counsel the couple (bride)? Yes /No

Please give reasons for your answer

What are some of the issues you address when counselling the bride?

Why do you discuss those issues?

Do you counsel both the bride and the groom (the couple)? Yes /No

Please give reasons for your answer

Appendix D

Interview Questions for Formal Marriage Counsellors

Please give a brief biography of yourself

What is the motive behind your marriage counselling centre?

What is the name of the marriage counselling centre?

Are you a trained marriage counsellor? Yes /No

If no, how then do you counsel?

What is the duration for your counselling?

What are some of the issues you address when counselling?

What are your challenges?

Do you issue certificates? Yes/ No

Please give reasons for your answer

Do you charge for the counselling?

Is the centre registered?

What are the center's plan for the future?

What is the community's attitude toward the counselling centre?

Appendix E

Questionnaires on the Attitudes Of The Muslim Youth Towards Premarital Counselling In The Nima/Mamobi Muslim Communities.

Age

Marital status

Educational background

What do you know about premarital counselling?

Does the community provide any form of premarital counselling, if yes please mention them?

Do you think the type of premarital counselling given by the Aluwanka, Imams and parents are enough to sustain marriages in the community?

Would you and your partner like to attend premarital counselling before marriage?

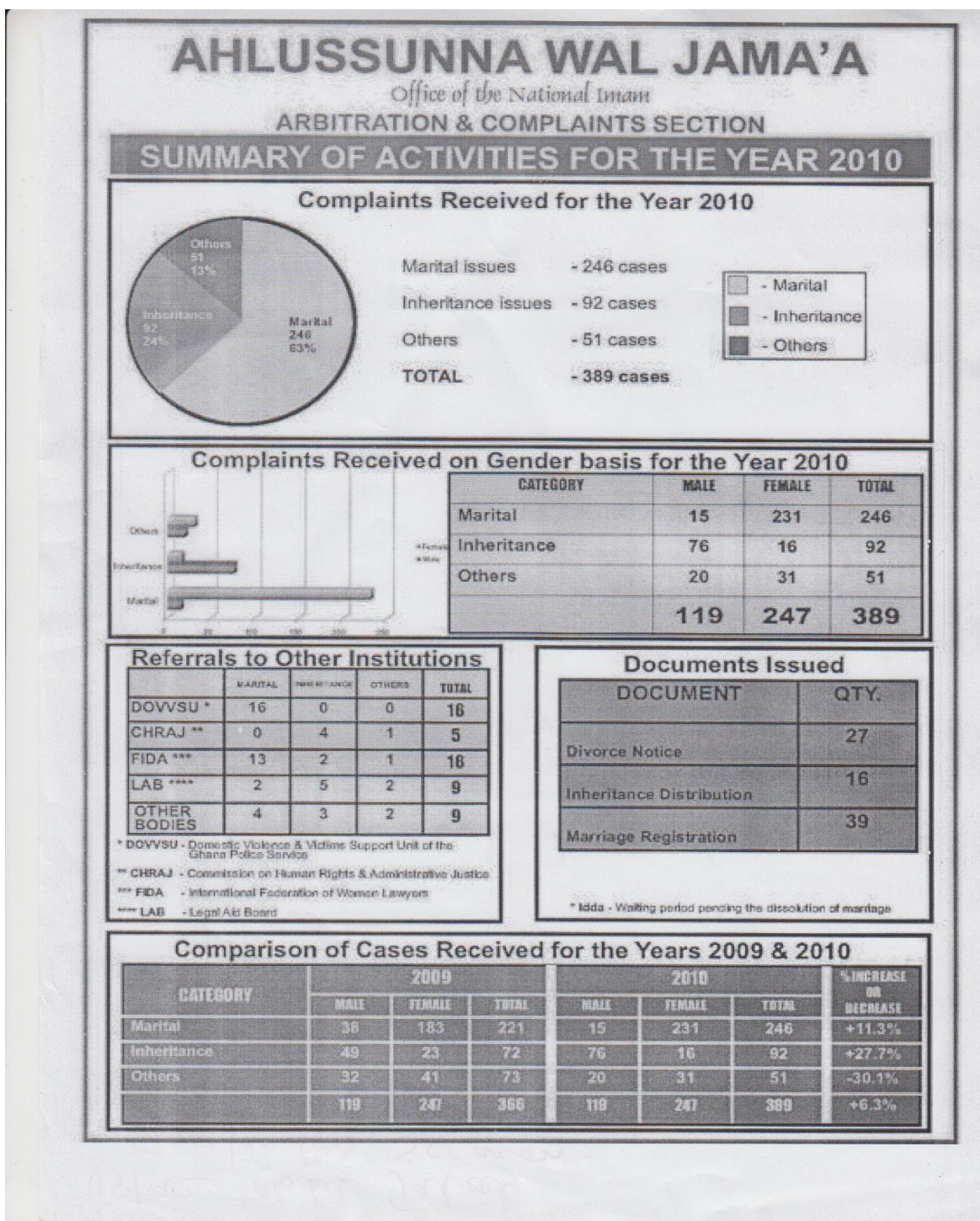
What are some of the issues you would want marriage counsellors to discuss?

How do you think premarital counselling would help your marriage?

Do you know of any premarital counselling in the community?

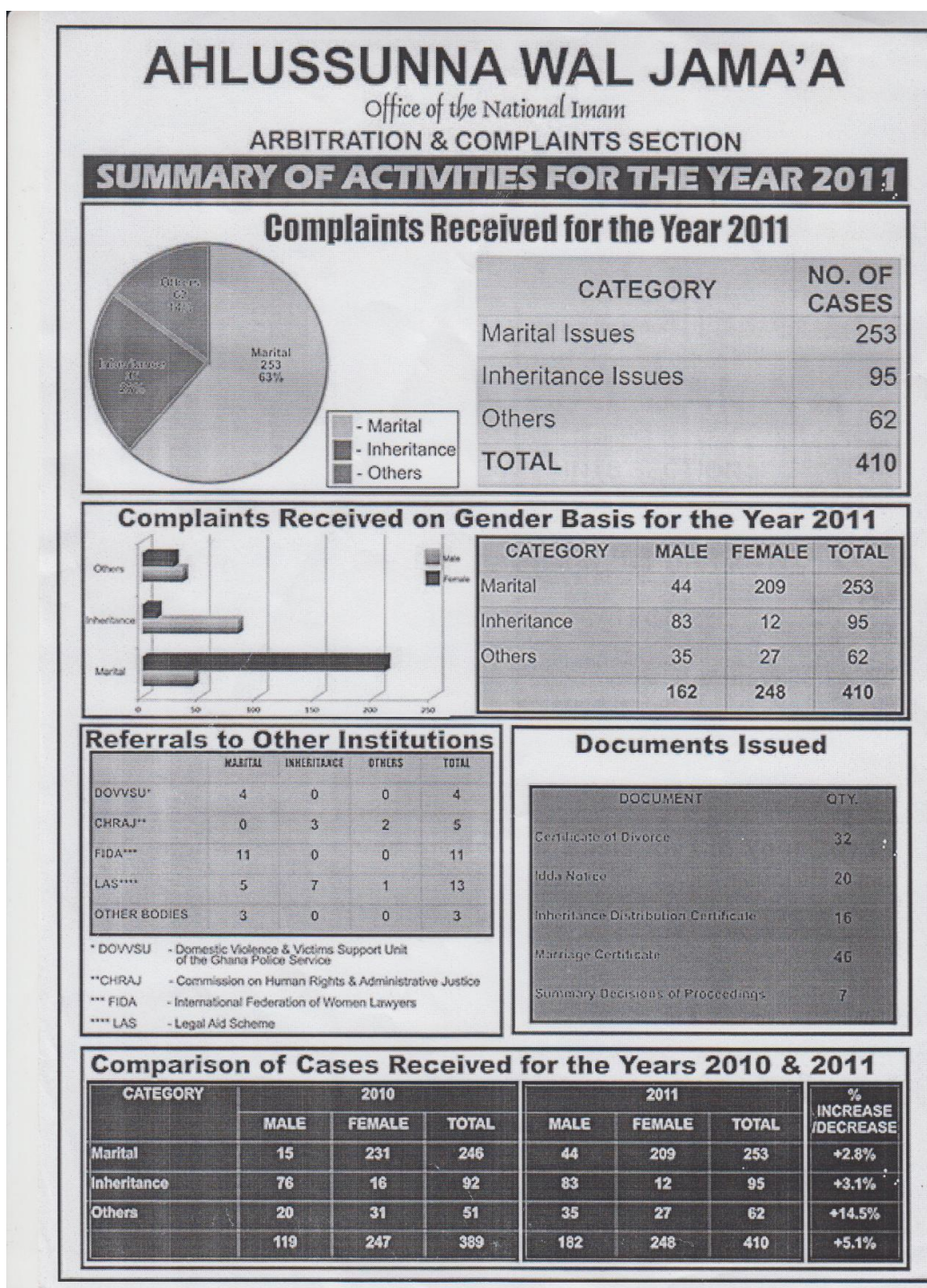
Do you think premarital counselling can help your marriage?

Appendix F



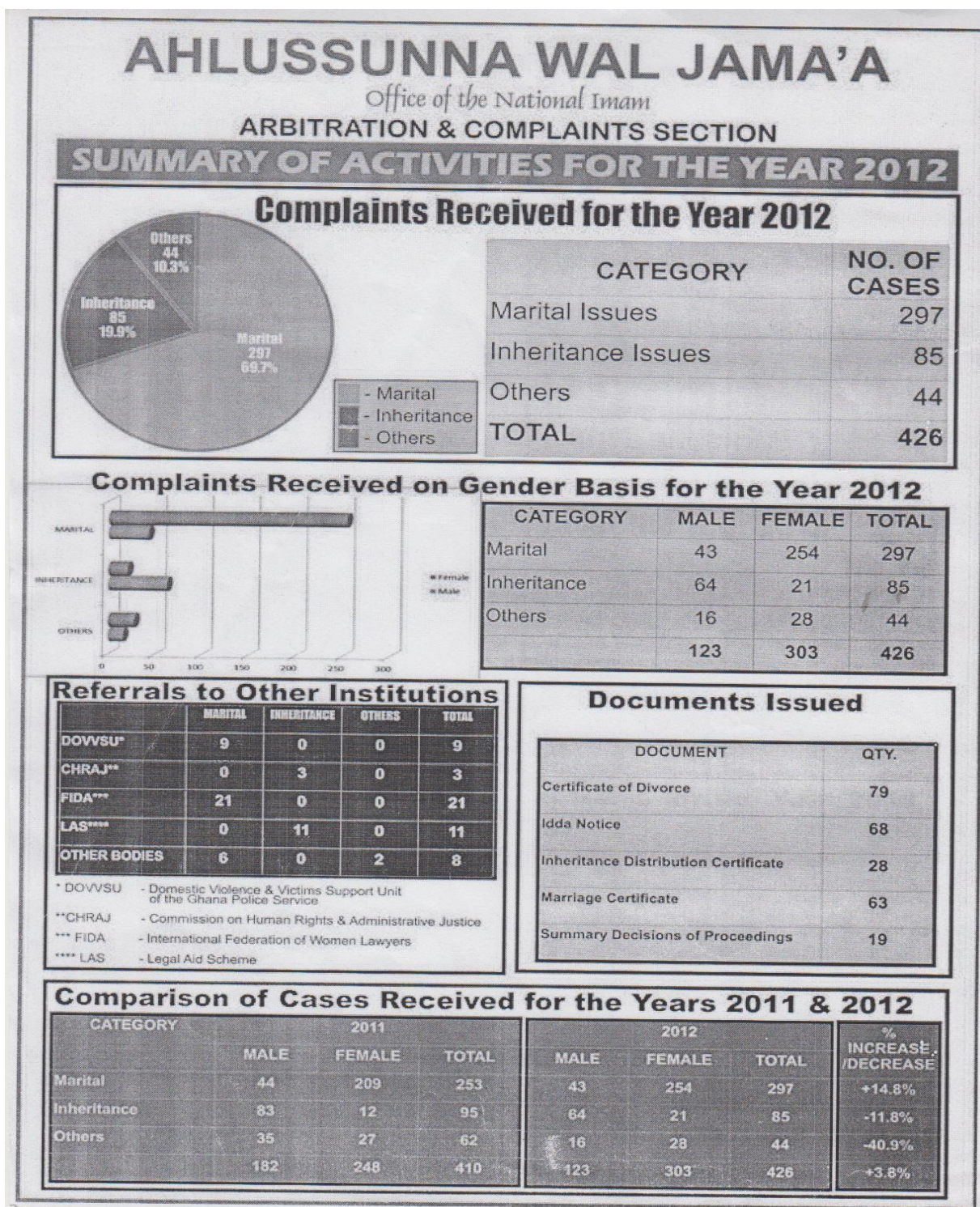
Records of complaints received from at the ASWAJ office in 2010

Appendix G



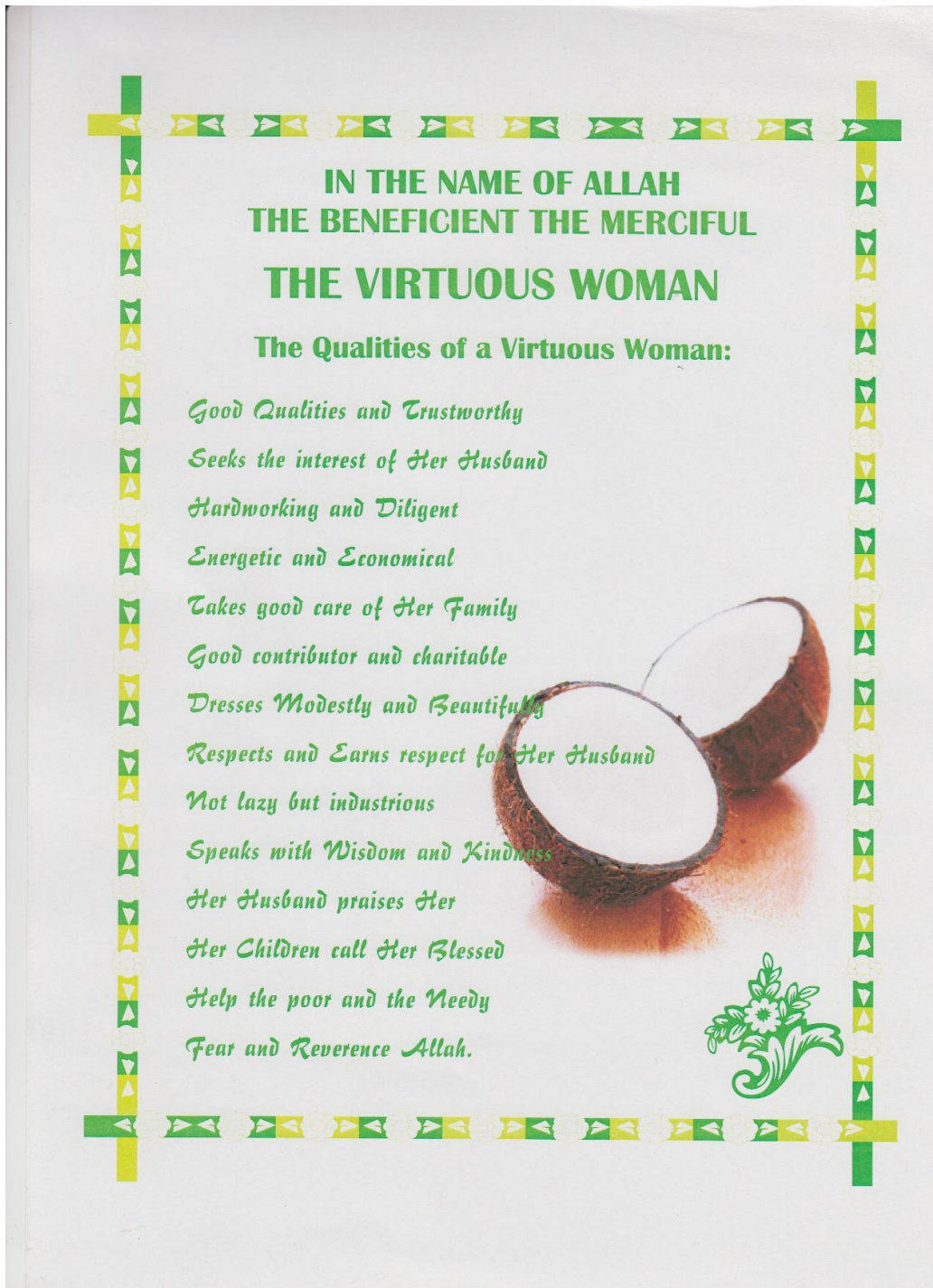
Records of complaints received from at the ASWAJ office in 2011

Appendix H



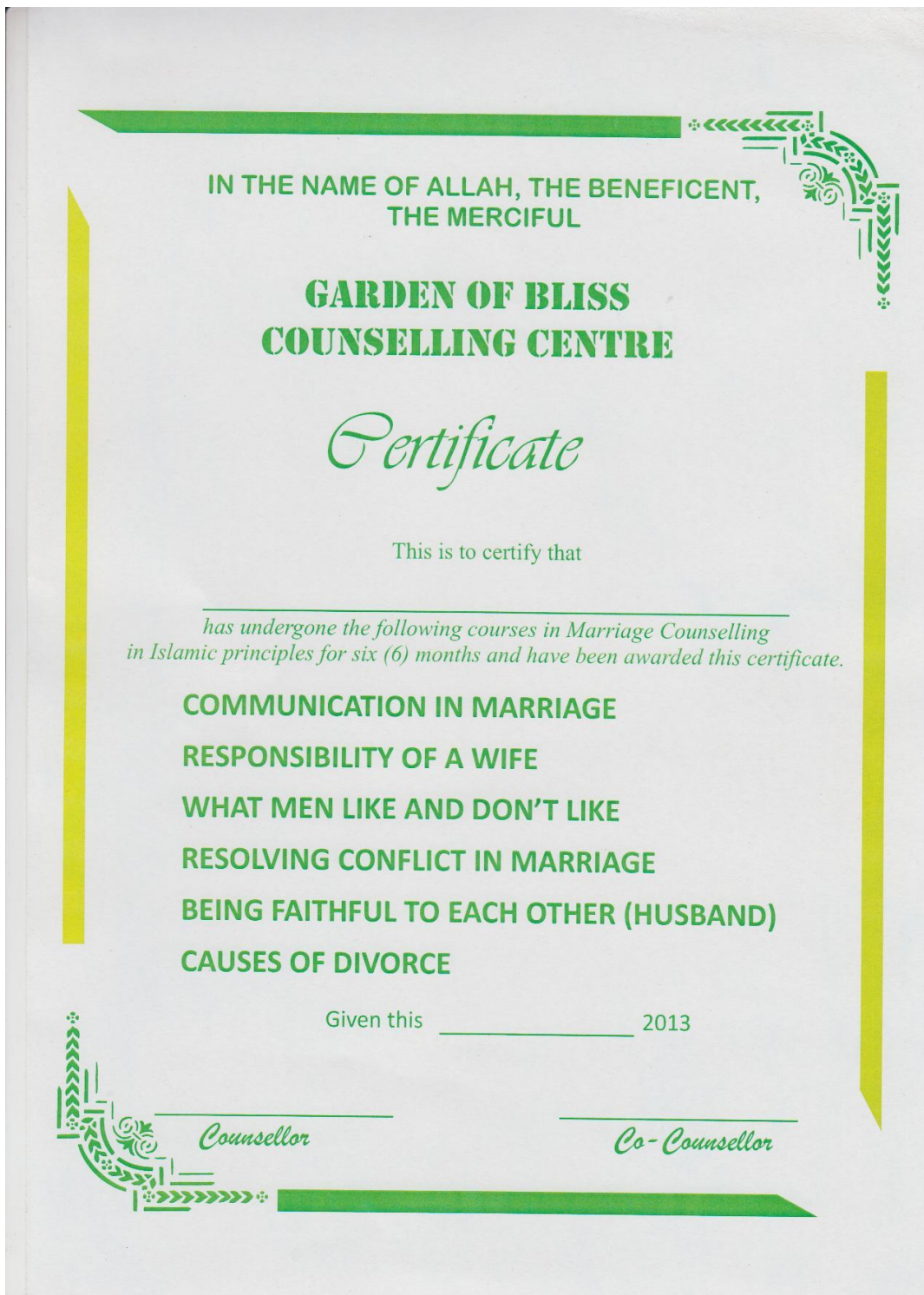
Records of complaints received from at the ASWAJ office in 2012.

Appendix I



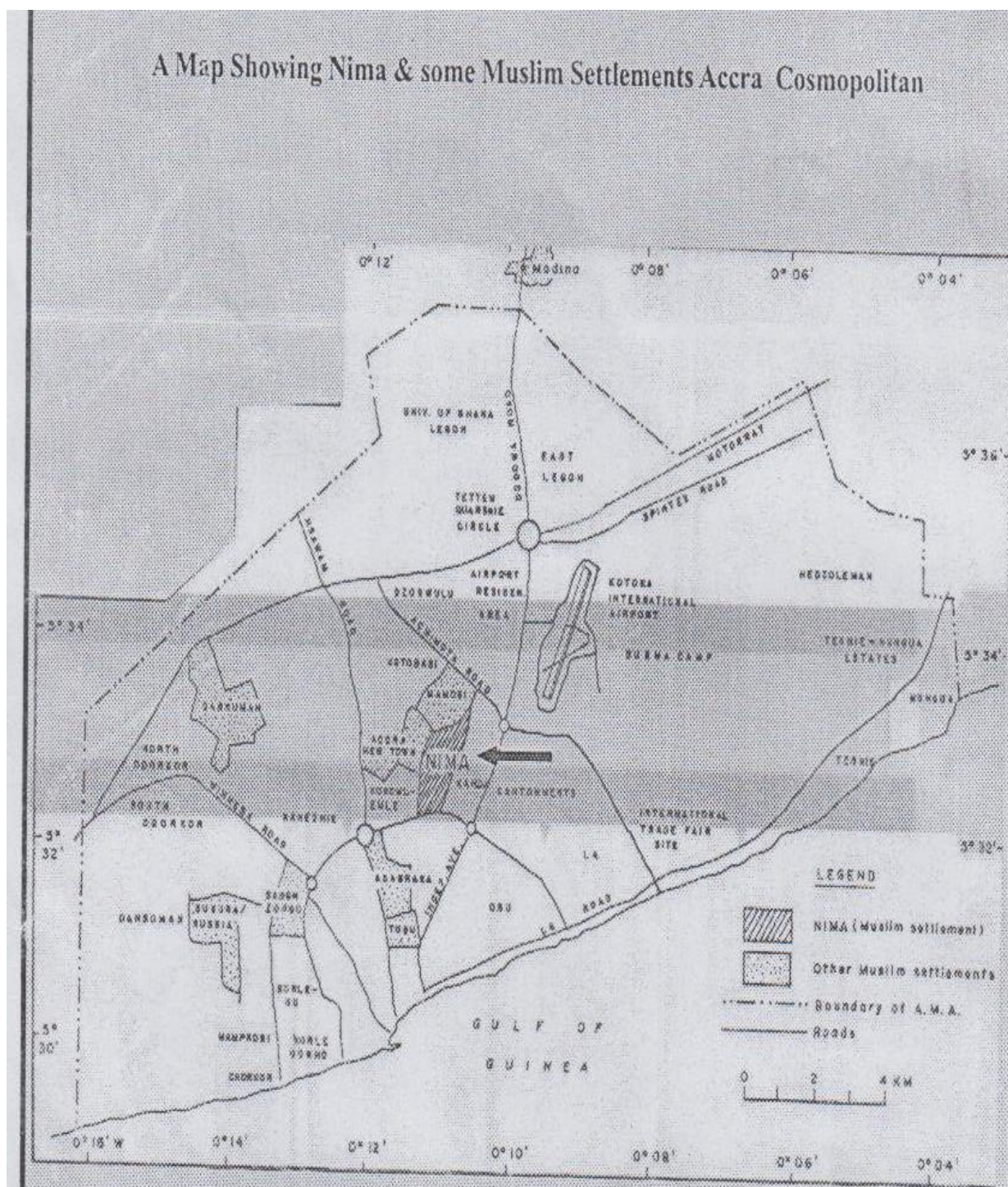
A testimonial for any one who goes through premarital counselling from Hajia Maliki

Appendix J



The GBMCC certificate for couples who have gone through premarital counselling.

Appendix K.



This map is from Bari's A Comprehensive History of Muslims in Ghana. Page 468.