

An Assessment of Attitude to Marital Counselling Among the Married: A Case Study of Grace Methodist Church, Sakaman - Dansoman Circuit

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Abstract: - Marital counselling offers the married enrichment for a healthy marriage. The purpose of the study was to assess attitude of the married towards marital counselling. Findings of this study hopes to provide evidences for the formulation of policies regarding marital counselling in the church and facilitate the understanding of marital counselling as a tool for maintaining healthy marriages.

The target population of this study was all married persons in Grace Methodist Church, Sakaman in the Accra Diocese. A descriptive approach was used to collect and analyze data. A pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 60 married persons purposively sampled. Microsoft Excel was used for the descriptive analysis while the themes and concepts in the narratives of respondents were qualitatively analyzed.

Findings of the study revealed that the attitude of the married towards marital counselling did not match their knowledge of marital counselling. Even though the married appreciated the importance of marital counselling they did not take the full advantage of its benefits because of the issue of confidentiality. Many preferred the attendance of marriage programmes to meeting a counsellor one-on-one with their issues. Also, majority followed various programmes in the media as means of enriching their marriage.

The study recommends among other things that the attitude of the married towards marital counselling would be much improved if the church addresses the issue of confidentiality and the media is used as a tool to reach out to members on issues concerning marriage and marital counselling.

I. INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Marriage is the most intimate of all human relationships. When this relationship is good and growing, it provides one of life's greatest satisfactions; But when it is unstable or monotonous, it can be a source of great frustration and misery, (Collins 2007, p.566).

Many enter marriage expecting to 'live happily ever after'. False assumptions and myths about marriage abound in the minds of many, both the married and the unmarried. This has contributed to the unrealistic expectations that make marriage more difficult (Olson & DeFrain, 1994, p.6). Olson and DeFrain (1994) are of the view that divorce is on the

increase because of these unrealistic expectations. According to them, marrying for the wrong person, marrying for the wrong reasons, or having few skills to deal with the many challenges of marriage account for the many cases of divorce in our society.

What would it then take for a couple to deal with their challenges in the marriage? At what point would a couple agree to seek marital counselling? Is it when they see the need to develop their problem solving skills? Or only when divorce has become an option because of their challenges? A couple who have gone through premarital counselling may have acquired certain skills to deal with challenges that may arise in the course of the journey of marriage. However, if a couple have fewer skills to deal with issues in their marriage many times divorce becomes an option (Olson & DeFrain, 1994, p.6).

Successful marriages are the very foundation of happy and healthy families which make a better society. The church as an institution has a role to play in curbing the high incidence of divorce cases in our society. Members need education on marriage and the need to enrich their marriages to make marriages healthy. "Christian counsellors do not wait for marriages to break down and then fix them" (Mwiti & Dueck, 2007). Mwiti and Dueck (2007) state that Marital counselling is not just for couples with problems, but also seeks to enrich marriages as well as keep healed relationships from backsliding into brokenness. Counselling for the married aims at helping married couples to understand that to build a healthy marriage the couple need to give priority to their marital relationship.

The Methodist church as a Christian organisation has a mandate to help maintain marriages. By the constitution of the Methodist Church Ghana (2000 revised edition), Standing Order 742(3), it is a requirement that all members contemplating marriage go through a form of premarital counselling. Also, ministers and leaders are to ensure that members are given regular and adequate instructions on Christian marriage. This highlights the need for continuous marital education for the married as well as instructions for the unmarried. In view of this, the Accra diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana under the leadership of Rt. Rev. Samuel K. Osabutey, in 2018, made available a book which is

a systematic teaching material on marriage for its members. The book titled Premarital Preparation and Counselling was edited by the Rt. Rev. Charles Konadu. This systematic teaching material is in three parts. It comprises the Leaders' Guide for counsellors, a workbook for the counselee and the handbook itself which is embedded with many essential topics. The Premarital Preparation and Counselling handbook is an input from many great resource persons, including seasoned Christian writers and professional counsellors who are specialist in their fields of writing and study.

One of the objectives of the handbook is to help those who are already married to review and renew their relationship. Though the book boldly has inscription of Premarital Preparation and Counselling on it, the rich content makes it undoubtedly an equally great resource for the married. Thus, whether one is married or not, knowledge will be gained on the biblical, social, cultural, medical, psychological, sexual, legal, inter-personal relations and other dimensions of marriage. The question now is, will the members of the church take full advantage of this book? Will they seek counselling in any of the topics treated in the book if they have a challenge? Also, are they willing to enrich their marriage with the resources available?

Statement of the Problem

Will the married willingly seek assistance for his/her marriage if there is a challenge beyond him/her? Is marital counselling only for couples encountering problems or facing the challenge of divorce? Does the married know the benefits of marital counselling? What efforts does the married put in to enrich his/her marriage? What has the church put in place in terms of marital counselling for its members to curb the high incidence of divorce cases in our society?

There could be several reasons why marriages fail. Can it be said that attitude of the married towards marital counselling could account for the high rate of divorce in Ghana?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess attitude of the married towards marital counselling. Through this assessment the attitude of the married would be revealed and the church would be in a better position to facilitate the understanding of marital counselling as a tool for maintaining healthy marriages.

Objectives of the Study

The objective for this research is to identify attitude of the married towards marital counselling.

Research Question

What is the attitude of the married towards marital counselling?

Significance of the Study

The outcome of this study would

1. Contribute to the knowledge on the effect of marital counselling on marriages. It will bring to light the role marital counselling play in enriching marriages and reducing divorce rate in the society.
2. Provide information to the reading public and especially married couples on the need to seek marital counselling and to continue their education about marriage even after the wedding.
3. Generate the evidence needed for the formulation of policies in the church regarding marital counselling as has been done for premarital counselling.
4. Guide the church to develop a policy that ensures that marital counselling programmes get inculcated into many church activities to encourage full participation of all members.

Key Words

1. *Marital Counselling:*

The kind of counselling given to the married to assist couples have healthier marriages and to equip them with tools for enriching the marriage.

2. *Healthy marriage*

It is a mutually satisfying relationship that is committed to continuing growth; where couples utilize skills such as effective communication and conflict management to achieve oneness and the marriage is characterised by mutual respect, trust and love for each other.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The term counselling is used in everyday life to mean many things. To some people, counselling is giving advice or making suggestions and recommendations. To others, it is influencing the client's values, attitudes, beliefs, interests, and decisions with or without any threat or admonition. Again, others see counselling as giving information, even though information may be given during counselling. These according to Adjei, Kagbetor & Steiner (2018) and Akinade, Sokan & Osareren (2005) are misconceptions. Adjei et al (2018) state that there is more to counselling than mere word of advice from helpers such as religious leaders, opinion leaders, parents, teachers, relatives, peers and others. They further indicate that the challenges encountered in this present world including emotional and marital challenges require professional assistance in bringing relief to the distressed.

The popular understanding of the term counselling and the technical and professional meaning of it make it difficult to have a single definition. However, attempts have been made by professionals to give it an operational definition. According to Kagbetor lecture notes (2018), the following authors' definitions of counselling reveal the

professional process involved in assisting people solve their problems of which marital issues are inclusive.

1. Blocher (1966), counselling is helping an individual become aware of himself or herself and the ways in which he or she is reacting to the behavioral influence of his or her environment; Counselling further helps an individual to establish some personal meaning for this behaviour and to develop and clarify a set goals and values for future behaviour.
2. Perez (1965) defines counselling as an interactive process co-joining the counselee, who is vulnerable and who needs assistance, and the counsellor who is trained and educated to give this assistance, the goal of which is to help the counselee learn to deal more effectively with himself and the reality of his environment.

These definitions points to the fact that counselling is an interactive process between a counsellor-counselee. It aims at bringing a voluntary change in the counselee. The counsellor who is a professionally trained person uses his knowledge and skills to facilitate the achievement of the desired change in the counselee. The aims of counselling however cannot be achieved if the issue of confidentiality is not handled appropriately. Adjei, Kagbetor and Steiner (2018) assert that a client must be able to trust that the personal information he or she shares with the counsellor will not be revealed to other people. This assurance is important for effective counselling. However, there are exceptions when confidentiality is not preserved. For instance, confidentiality is not preserved when the client makes threats of suicide or homicide. Again, confidentiality is waived when information disclosed is relevant to the abuse of children or the elderly. Also in some cases the counsellor might be required to reveal to a third party when the client has a life-threatening disease that could be communicated to said third party (Adjei et al, 2018). The counsellor makes the client aware of these exceptions and more during counselling. Confidentiality is an essential part of the counselling relationship and it lies on the counsellor to observe all confidential procedures.

From the definitions of the various authors, it can be said that counselling is the process by which counsees are assisted by counsellors to help themselves become better and effective in life. Mwiti and Deuk (2007) and Collins (2007) agree that the kind of assistance the married receives from marital counselling helps them to grow personally, interpersonally and spiritually, thus couples become better people and are effective in their marriage life.

Counsellors are guided by theories and principles. Understanding theories of counselling, their benefits and application help counsellors to relate to their clients better. By this, they are able to develop models that they use to deal with problems of their clients. Adei and Crabbe (2014) alerts counselors on the need to avoid the temptation of creating a carbon copy of their marriage but rather assist couples to

discover principles and how to apply them. Strong, Devault& Cohen (2005) has cited that theories help researchers to understand the philosophy behind a problem, by providing general principle or concepts which is used to explain phenomenon. A counselling theory therefore helps to solve problems. It provides the mode of practice (techniques, methods, attitudes and behaviour of the counsellor); as well as brings meaningfully all facts bearing on a client's issue in a holistic manner to guide the counsellor. A theory will therefore reveal facts about the client's personality, the malfunctioning personality, what should be done to assist the client and how the counsellor should go about counselling the client (Kagbetor lecture notes, 2017).

Benefits of Marital Counselling

According to Mwiti and Deuk (2007) and Collins (2007), time and effort are required on the part of couples going through counselling. The process may not be that simple for the couple or either spouse but the rewards are great if the marriage is given priority and both individuals work with the counsellor to help create new experiences. Some of the benefits counsees stand to gain when they offer themselves for counselling include the following;

- i. Couples are offered a safe place to express their feelings and frustrations.

In counselling the counsees are offered acceptance. There is warm acceptance of the client's experiences of painful, hostile or abnormal feelings (Kagbetor lecture notes, 2017).

- ii. They get the chance to assess their relationship and learn to make informed choices.

The results of an assessment provide insights to the relationship. Couples are able to identify areas they need growth as well as explore issues and feelings that help them to grow the relationship and deal with marital problems effectively (Olson & DeFrain, 1994).

- iii. There is enhancement of the relationship and this opens up lines of communication.

Research has shown that faulty communication accounts for 85% of all marital difficulties. Thus, an improvement in communication skills reflects a better relationship (Premarital Preparation & Counselling handbook of the Methodist Church, 2018).

- iv. The couple acquires conflict-management skills.

Conflicts come as a result of ignorance, misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The way a couple handles marital conflicts makes all the difference in the marriage. Through counselling, couples learn to deal with conflicts constructively by

using them as bases for growth and a stronger relationship (Olson & DeFrain, 1994).

- v. The couple gets to understand personality differences and maximize teamwork.

Through counselling a couple gains understanding in using their unique personalities to complement each other and learns to blend their personalities into a mutually compactible relationship (Collins, 2007).

- vi. Growth is gained in the marriage and couples acquire tools for enriching the marriage.

Skills acquired in counselling include problem solving skills, decision-making skills, communication skills and conflict resolution skills. These become great tools for enriching the marriage (Collins, 2007).

- vii. The awareness that a healthy marriage requires commitment and a need to give priority to one's marital relationship is created.

Through marital counselling a couple gets the understanding that a happy marriage does not just happen. The couple needs to make time to service the marriage and develop it for their own benefit and enjoyment (Adei & Crabbe, 2014).

Other ways the married have used to enrich their marriages

According to Olson and DeFrain (1994), it is unfortunate that most people don't seek help for problems until they are severe. Olson and DeFrain (1994) assert that 'even couples whose relationships are good need to learn how to maintain and enhance their strength'. Apart from marital counselling and therapy, which equips couples with tools for enriching their marriage, Olson and DeFrain (1994) give the following as some of the ways couples engage themselves to seek enrichment especially when there are marital issues;

- i. Seek informal advice from friends and family.
- ii. Engage in educational and enrichment programmes such as marriage assessments, marriage seminars, workshops and retreats.
- iii. Join self-help groups.
- iv. Engage in skill-building programmes such as conflict resolution skills and communication skills.
- v. Read marriage enrichment books.

Mwiti and Deuk (2007) believe marriages survived decades ago in Africa because 'African parents had a commitment to keeping the family healthy and strong. With divorce not an option, sheer determination kept some of these families working hard to enrich their marriages'. Mwiti and Deuk (2007) urge counsellors to help couples realize that, to build healthy marriages they need to give priority to their marital relationship. Harley (1986) could not agree more, stating that couples need to give full-time priority to their marriage and that one would have to kiss his or her marriage

good-bye if friends, relatives, career, finance, children, or anything else takes a higher priority than the feelings of his or her spouse. Mwiti and Deuk (2007) again states that boredom and monotony drain marriage of life and laughter. Couples therefore need to be creative and work on cultivating intimacy.

Summary

From the review of literature, it is evident that marital counselling is important for achieving a healthy marriage, whether there are issues of threat in the marriage or couples seem good with no issues. Many authors have stated that creating and maintaining a healthy or happy marriage takes efforts, yet most people don't seek help for problems until they are severe as stated by Olson and DeFrain, (1994). Some of the issues for which the married seek counselling include poor communication, money matters, infidelity, personality differences, divorce and parenting issues.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A descriptive approach was used to collect and analyse data. According to Best and Kahn (1989) descriptive survey affords the opportunity to select a sample from the population being studied and then generalizes from the sample of the study. This research uses descriptive approaches because it seeks to show a description of the phenomenon under study which is the attitude of the married towards marital counselling in the Grace Methodist church at Sakaman - Accra.

The descriptive survey design was used for this research in spite of the 'ineradicable shortcomings' as indicated by Leedy (1985), because it offers the advantage of providing a lot of information which is essential for this research. Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) emphasizes that the big advantage of the descriptive survey design is the potential to provide a lot of information. One of the outcomes of this study was to provide information to the reading public and especially married couples on the need to seek marital counselling. The use of the descriptive survey design for this study has been useful in achieving this outcome and more importantly has helped to assess the attitude of the married with regard to marital counselling.

Population

The target population of this study is all married persons in Grace Methodist Church at Sakaman. The divorced, widowed and singles were excluded from the survey. Also, the newly married were not included in the study. To be part of the survey one ought to have been married for at least six months. The reason for excluding the newly married comes from the fact that they may not be in touch with reality with regards to marital challenges as compared to those married for several months. The newly

married just like premarital couples may have idealistic distortions. According to Olson & DeFrain (1994) idealistic distortions are common fantasies or hopes and beliefs that are not based on reality. This makes couples present their marriage in a highly favourable manner. There is therefore the tendency of the newly married to answer questions in a socially desirable manner.

Out of a population of two hundred and seventy- five (275), sixty (60) were purposively sampled to form the sample size. The research setting is in Accra, the capital city of Ghana.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The style of sampling used for this research was purposive sampling technique. In purposive sampling, researchers select the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment of their typicality or particularly knowledgeable about the issues under study. The purposive sampling technique used for this study directed the researcher to those who were particularly fit to take part in the study. In this instance, only the married in the Grace Methodist Church with the subjects' marriage not less than six months were selected for the survey. This method gave the researcher the ability to speed up data assembling and provided answers to the research questions. Sixty (60) of the married were purposively sampled out of a population of two hundred and seventy- five (275) to form the sample size for this study.

Instrument

The instrument used for collecting data for this research is the questionnaire. The questionnaire developed and used to collect data for this research was based on the research questions, which were derived from related literature. The researcher's supervisor, an expert in the field of Guidance and Counselling read through to check the validity of the instrument. The questionnaire comprised of thirty (30) questions. It provided background information about the kind of respondents whose views are being sought during the study as well as tried to assess the attitude of the married towards marital counselling.

Pilot Testing

The questionnaire was tested among 15 married individuals who were not part of the study but attended church in Accra with similar congregations and way of worship as Grace Methodist church, Sakaman. The testing was necessary to check and enhance the content validity and reliability of the instrument. It gave the opportunity to find out if the answers would help the researcher to achieve the objectives of the study. Also, piloting helped to take away the questions that were poorly worded and reframed those that needed to be changed.

The researcher received all the 15 questionnaires administered, giving a return rate of 100%. Item analyses were conducted and items that needed revision such as item

number 27 which sought to find out what the married do to enrich their marriage, appeared ambiguous. The item was then revised to 'which of the following do you do to enrich your marriage?' To this the respondents were given options to choose from and also to state any other item if not found in the list.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and Reliability are critical to all measurement. According to Klufio (2003) validity is the extent to which the measurement measures the variable that the researcher wishes to measure. For this study, the instrument was validated and confirmed of its reliability through the pilot study. The researcher attests to the fact that the questionnaire was able to gather what it was supposed to gather; therefore the information was consistent and valid.

Data Collection Procedure

In the study, the researcher collected qualitative data for analysis through the use of semi - structured questionnaire. It is important that data is collected with a clear purpose in mind and the questions the research is expected to answer is also made clear, providing exactly what needs to be discovered about the population. According to Klufio (2003) "a conclusion is only as valid as the data on which it is based".

The questionnaires were given out to respondents at church on Sunday. Prior to the Sunday when the survey was done, the researcher contacted the minister in charge to explain the purpose of the study and to seek the assistance and cooperation of his congregation. This encouraged participation. The researcher personally administered sixty (60) copies of the questionnaire to respondents. The questionnaires were given out to respondents during the Bible class period. This is when church members are made to sit in smaller groups in their respective Bible classes. The researcher went to each Bible class to introduce the research and the questionnaire to members. Leaders of the various Bible classes were cooperative. They gave the researcher the platform and time to talk to the respondents, as well as allotted time for respondents to attend to the questionnaire. Those married were purposively given the questionnaire and assured of confidentiality. The divorced, widowed, singles and the newly wedded were excluded from the survey. Respondents were required to return the questionnaire to the researcher by close of church service. Many of the respondents were through with the questionnaire within 10-15minutes. Others however, returned the questionnaire after church service. The church secretary assisted the researcher in the collection of the responded questionnaires.

All except one of the filled questionnaire were returned to the researcher by close of church. The 60th filled questionnaire was returned to the researcher by the church secretary the following Sunday. Thus, there was 100% return rate of questionnaires.

Data Analysis

The initial step in analysis is to organise the data so that the researcher may be able to describe it (Klufio, 2003). The data collected using the questionnaire was first orderly arranged and examined individually. This was to check and confirm that there was an answer to every question asked in the questionnaire. Majority of the respondents answered all questions while a few did not have answers for certain questions and so stated “no comments” or made a dash (-) to indicate they had no idea about the question. All the returned questionnaires were found worthy to be added to the analysis. The data collected using the questionnaire was then categorized after various text segments on each questionnaire were assigned a code word or phrase. The data was subsequently analysed based on the themes and concepts in the narratives of the respondents. Microsoft Excel was also used as a tool for descriptive analysis and interpretation.

Summary

A descriptive approach was used to collect and analyse data. The researcher collected qualitative data for analysis through the use of semi - structured questionnaire. The questions were pre-tested to check and enhance the content validity and reliability of the instrument. Microsoft Excel was used for the descriptive analysis while the themes and concepts in the narratives of respondents were qualitatively analysed.

The target population of this study was all married persons in Grace Methodist Church, Sakaman - Dansoman circuit, which is part of the Accra diocese of the Methodist church, Ghana. The divorced, widowed and singles were excluded from the survey. Out of a population of two hundred and seventy-five (275), sixty (60) were purposively sampled to form the sample size. The research setting was in Accra, the capital city of Ghana.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background information of Respondents

Respondents were required to provide some demographic information for the study. This includes their gender, age, educational level, employment status and the number of years of marriage.

Table 1: Background Characteristics of the Married of Grace Methodist Church, Sakaman (n=60)

Variable		Observations (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group (Years)	<30	3	5
	30-39	23	38.33
	40-49	23	38.33
	50-59	6	10
	>60	5	8.34

Sex	Male	26	43.33
	Female	34	56.67
Educational Level	Basic	3	5
	Secondary	6	10
	Tertiary	51	85
Employment status	Self Employed	15	25
	Public Sector	22	36.67
	Private Sector	18	30
	Unemployed	5	8.33
Years of Marriage	<5	16	26.67
	5 to 10	13	21.67
	11 to 20	17	28.33
	21 to 30	9	15
	>30	5	8.33

Gender of Respondents

The study did not specifically seek any correlation between the subject matter and gender; however the study indicates that there are more females in the congregation sampled. Out of the sixty (60) respondents thirty-four (34) were females, representing 56.67% whiles twenty-six (26) were males, representing 43.33%.

Age of Respondents

Discussions on respondents' age are to know the age distribution of the subjects used in the analysis. Out of the total number of respondents, 5% of the respondents were below thirty (30) years while about 18% were above fifty (50) years. The majority of the respondents were between the ages of thirty (30) years and forty-nine (49) years representing 76.66% of the sample size as indicated in Table 1.

Educational level of Respondents

The research indicates that 85% of the respondents have gained tertiary education. Those who have attained up to Basic Education were only 5%. Out of the sixty (60) respondents, six (6) have attained up to secondary education, representing 10% of the total respondents. This indicates that majority of the respondents had understanding of the questions and therefore responding to the questions after briefing by the researcher was not a challenge.

The need to involve respondents' educational levels is in attempt to ensure that the respondents cut across various educational level of society and that the views expressed is not necessarily that of particular educational attainment.

Education may play a key role in counselling since educated people can read or research on topics that they know will help enrich their marriage.

Employment Status of Respondents

The employment status of respondents was grouped into four. They include self-employed, public sector, private sector and unemployed which included those on retirement. Of the total respondents, 25% undertake their own businesses while 8.33% were unemployed. The remaining 66.67% of the respondents work in the public and private sectors of the economy. The nature and type of work an individual engages in could determine the amount of time available to him/her for marital counselling sessions and certain marriage enrichment programmes. For instance, six (6) out of the nine (9) respondents who indicated that they are unable to attend marriage enrichment programmes organized by the church, stated unfavorable time schedules due to their work. Such individual may fall on the other forms of enrichment activities to enrich their marriages as the nature of their work permit.

Years of Marriage

As shown in Table 1, years of marriage for respondents were grouped into five. The group with the highest number of respondents were those married within the range of eleven (11) and twenty (20) years, representing 28.33%. The group of respondents close to this percentage was those whose marriages were less than five (5) years, which capture 26.67%. Those married within the range of five (5) and ten (10) years were thirteen (13), representing 21.67%. Five (5) of the respondents had marriages that were above thirty (30) years representing 8.33% while fifteen percent (15%) of the respondents had been married within the range of twenty-one (21) and thirty (30) years.

As stated earlier in the research methodology, the newly married were not included in the study. Respondents ought to have been married for at least six months. This was to avoid idealistic distortions which according to Olson & DeFrain (1994) are common fantasies or hopes and beliefs that are not based on reality. It is therefore expected that subjects of this survey were in touch with reality with regards to marital challenges and the issue of marital counselling and marriage enrichment would be more relevant to them.

Analysis and Discussions of Research Question

What is the attitude of the married towards marital counselling?

The study sought to identify the attitude of the married by asking the following questions; First, respondents were asked about their knowledge of premarital counselling and marital counselling. Out of the sixty (60) respondents, fifty-nine (59) answered yes to the knowledge of premarital counselling, representing 98.33% and fifty-seven (57) answered yes to the knowledge of marital counselling, representing 95%.

Secondly, respondents were required to indicate whether they received counselling before marriage, and if yes, in which form did they receive the counselling. Fifty-six (56) of the sixty (60) respondents representing 93.33% indicated they received counselling before marriage. Of the form in which premarital counselling was received, 88.33% indicated that they received the counselling as a requirement by the church and 6.67% indicated that they received counselling from a counsellor outside the church. Also, 25% specified they read marriage books, 23.33% received counselling from friends and family while 16.67% received some form of counselling from the media, which included television and radio programmes.

The research findings revealed that respondents' knowledge of premarital counselling as well as marital counselling is high. The research further sought to compare such knowledge with their attitude towards marital counselling. Respondents were therefore asked to indicate whether they have received counselling after entering into marriage and whether they would recommend others to seek marital counselling if they came to them for counselling. Although all respondents, representing 100% indicated that they would recommend marital counselling to others if they came to them for counselling, it was observed that more than half of the respondents have not actually received marital counselling from a counsellor after entering into marriage. Twenty-eight (28) out of the sixty (60) representing 46.67% indicated having received marital counselling from a counsellor in marriage while thirty-one (31) representing 51.67% indicated they have not received counselling from a counsellor in marriage. Why would some married individuals recommend marital counselling for others and not seek such services themselves? Could it be said that even though the married is aware of the benefits of marital counselling they still fail to take advantage of it? Olson and DeFrain, (1994) had stated that most people don't seek help for problems until they are severe. It is likely the 51.67% of the respondents who indicated that they have not received counselling from a counsellor in marriage, perceive marital counselling as needful for only couples who are struggling in their marriage. The assertion by Mwitwa and Dueck (2007) that marital counselling is not just for couples with problems, but also seeks to enrich marriages as well as keep healed relationships from backsliding into brokenness should indeed be given emphases among the married.

To further identify the attitude of the married towards marital counselling, this research asked respondents whether they knew any of the counsellors in their church and also whether the respondent will go to any of the counsellors in the church if he/she had issues in marriage and needed assistance. The research revealed that fifty-three (53) out of the sixty (60) respondents representing 88.33% knew a counsellor in the church; yet not all of them indicated they will go to a counsellor in the church if they had issues in marriage and needed assistance. Those who indicated that

they will not go to a counsellor in the church if they had issues and needed assistance represent 25% while 75% indicated they will go for assistance if they had issues in their marriage. Figure 1 gives a pictorial view of this.

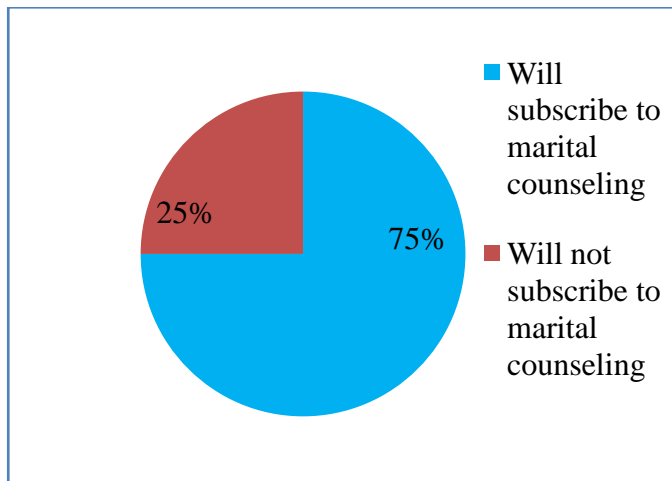


Figure 1: Willingness to subscribe to Marital Counselling from a Counsellor in the church (n=60)

Top among the themes given as reasons for not going to a counsellor in the church is confidentiality issues. Some stated they would prefer professional counselling outside the church while others stated they would handle their issues privately. Other responses included “I don’t know the counsellors” and “I see most counsellors in the church as trained for premarital counselling”. Obviously these reasons given by respondents point to the fact that there are misconceptions about counselling in the church and also doubts with regards to confidentiality. Addressing such issues could make counselling attractive to some church members who have doubts. The assertion therefore by Adjei, Kagbetor and Steiner (2018) that the assurance of confidentiality is essential for the counselling relationship is true. If some members of the church do not trust that their personal information is safe with a counsellor, effective counselling would be a challenge for the church.

It is more likely that the 75% of the respondents who indicated that they will go to a counsellor in the church if they had issues in marriage and needed assistance have experienced the benefit of marital counselling or have knowledge of the benefits. The reasons given by the respondents affirm the benefits of marital counselling as reviewed in this research report. Respondents’ knowledge on the benefits of marital counselling addresses research question 2.

Other questions that revealed the attitude of the married towards marital counselling were;

- When the church organizes programmes for the married, are you able to attend?
- Have you on your own engaged the services of a counsellor with regards to marital counselling?

- Can you give any reason why some people do not seek the services of marriage counsellors in the church?

Out of the sixty (60) respondents, forty-seven (47) representing 78.33% stated they are able to attend programmes for the married organised by the church. Those who were unable to attend gave reasons such as;

- i. Unfavourable time schedules
- ii. Unaware of such programmes
- iii. Poor management of time on the part of organisers of such programmes.

It is interesting to discover from the survey that seven (7) respondents representing 11.67% did not give any reason for not attending programmes organised for the married in the church. Even though majority stated they are able to attend the programmes, the concerns of the few need to be taken into consideration to encourage full participation of such programmes. The married needs to know that the marriage journey requires effort and these programmes provide the strength for growth as knowledge is gained. Negative attitude towards these programmes for the married therefore does not promote growth. Adei & Crabbe (2014) have stated that couples need to make time to service the marriage and develop it for their own benefit and enjoyment. Reasons the majority gave for attending programmes for the married reflects their commitments towards their marriages which Adei & Crabbe (2014) affirm would be beneficial to them.

Again, the survey revealed that majority of the respondents that is 80% have not engaged the services of a counsellor before on their own with regards to marital counselling. This suggests that majority prefer to attend programmes for the married rather than engage a counsellor one-on-one. Earlier, respondents who indicated that they would not go to the church counsellor for assistance have stated the issue of confidentiality as their main reason. Similar reasons came up when all respondents were asked why people do not seek the services of marriage counsellors in the church. Their responses included the following;

- i. Confidentiality issues
- ii. Couples deal with issues privately without third parties.
- iii. Embarrassment/shyness as couple may be seen as failures.
- iv. Ignorance of the importance of marital counselling.
- v. Counsellors in the church are not known.

As revealed in the study, the issue of confidentiality is a major concern for the married. The Christian counsellor therefore could show commitment in this area by offering assurance whenever there is an opportunity to engage the married in the church. Many writers including Collins (2007) have indicated that the commitment of the Christian counsellor is a key factor in helping marriages become

healthier. The assurance of confidentiality should indeed be part of this commitment.

Summary

Respondents' knowledge of marital counselling with its benefits was high, yet more than half of the respondents have not actually received marital counselling from a counsellor one-on-one after entering into marriage. The issue of confidentiality was a major concern with regard to marital counselling. Many respondents preferred to attend marriage programmes organised by the church rather than meeting a counsellor one-on-one.

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study has been to assess attitude of the married towards marital counselling. The rationale for this study was based on efforts and initiatives the leadership of the Methodist church Ghana, Accra Diocese was making to ensure that marital counselling becomes attractive to its members. The initiatives included the introduction of the Premarital Preparation and Counselling handbook to equip both the unmarried and the married; and also, the training of many lay counsellors in collaboration with the Ghana Psychology Council to augment the efforts of professional counsellors in the church. The church expects members to take full advantage of these initiatives and seek counselling to enrich their marriages. Will the married take full advantage of these initiatives and seek counselling to enrich their marriages?

Summary of Key Findings

The findings from the study suggested that respondents' knowledge of marital counselling with its benefits was high. However, many have not taken the full advantage marital counselling offers. For instance, 80% of the respondents have not engaged the services of a counsellor on their own after entering into marriage, yet, all respondents, representing 100% indicated that they would recommend marital counselling to others if they came to them for counselling. In spite of the high knowledge about marital counselling and its benefits among the married, there were a few misconceptions. Thus, while 75% indicated they will go to a counsellor in the church for assistance if they had issues in their marriage, 25% indicated that they will not go to a counsellor in the church if they had issues. The study revealed many respondents preferred to attend marriage programmes organised by the church to meeting a counsellor one-on-one. The issue of confidentiality was a major concern for the married. Many indicated it was a reason some of the married had negative attitude towards marital counsel.

The assertion by Adjei et al (2018) that the assurance of confidentiality is essential for the counselling relationship is true. Also, Mwititi and Dueck (2007) affirm that marital

counselling is not just for couples with problems, but also, seeks to enrich marriages as well as keep healed relationships from backsliding into brokenness. With the assurance of confidentiality and misconceptions cleared, attitude towards marital counselling among the married would be much improved.

Marital counselling offers counselees the benefits of an enriched marriage. The married get the chance to assess their marriage and learn to make informed choices. According to Olson & DeFrain, (1994), couples who subscribe to marital counselling are able to identify areas they need growth as well as explore issues and feelings that help them to grow the relationship and also deal with marital problems effectively. Respondents' views on the benefits of marital counselling revealed their knowledge on the subject matter. Fifty-six (56) out of the sixty (60) respondents representing 93.33% indicated that they think marital counselling is important for all married couples. Among the themes respondents gave as reasons why marital counselling is important for all married couples include;

- i. Couples would gain knowledge to enrich their marriage.
- ii. Couples would obtain solutions to problems.
- iii. Couples would be helped in decision making.
- iv. Marital counselling creates self-awareness and promotes personal growth.
- v. Couples who offer themselves for marital counselling reaffirm their commitment to their marriage and this creates intimacy between the couple.

The issues the married would seek counselling for include divorce, communication, personality issues, unfaithfulness, parenting, in-laws/third parties, childlessness/infertility and sexual dissatisfaction. The issue of divorce received the highest response as the most critical issue for the married to seek the services of a counsellor. This is represented by 43.33%. Olson and DeFrain (1994) affirm that when a marriage is threatened by divorce and the married has to deal with vast range of emotions amidst legalities, the counsellor's support becomes paramount. The next issue of greater concern to the married as revealed in the survey was communication which is represented by 31.67%. It was however surprising the findings indicated that the issue of sexual dissatisfaction was the least of critical issues for the married to seek marital counselling. It received a response of 10%. The researcher concludes the married may have other ways of dealing with the issue.

According to Olson and DeFrain (1994), there are other means the married enriched their marriage apart from engaging the services of a counsellor one-on-one. These other means include;

- i. following programmes on the media
- ii. reading of books on marriage

- iii. seeking informal advice from friends and family
- iv. attending marriage workshops and seminars
- v. subscribing to marriage assessment programmes
- vi. joining of marriage groups and
- vii. enrolling in skill-building programmes specific for marriages.

The survey revealed that greater number of respondents followed various programmes in the media to enrich their marriage. This is represented by 70%. Whiles some respondents indicated they follow specific marriage programmes on radio or television, others were non-specific. The internet with applications such as Whatsapp and You tube were also used by respondents to seek information to enrich their marriages. The reading of books on marriage was the second highest means the married enriched their marriage whiles attendance of marriage workshops and seminars was the third highest means the married enriched their marriage. The least means the married enriched their marriage according to the survey was enrolling in skill building programmes specific for marriage.

Conclusions

The benefits marital counselling offers the married is enrichment for a healthy marriage. From the study it was evident that the attitude of the married towards marital counselling did not match their knowledge of marital counselling. Even though they appreciated the importance of marital counselling and the worth of the counsellor in assisting build healthy marriages, majority had not taken the full advantage marital counselling offers in enriching their marriages because of the issue of confidentiality.

The attitude towards marital counselling among the married would be much improved if the church could address the issue of confidentiality and also take advantage of the opportunities the media offer to channel out right information for its members.

Recommendations

- i. The church should ensure that the policy regarding confidentiality is adhered to at all times and counsellors receive the necessary training to inspire confidence in the members. Counsellors should assure members of confidentiality whenever they get the opportunity to interact with them.
- ii. Misconceptions about marital counselling should be addressed regularly for all members. This can be achieved through teachings and educational campaign with the various groups and organisations in the church.
- iii. The church should take advantage of the media to channel out the right information for its members as well as create social media platforms that encourage members to seek the right information regarding marriage and marital counselling.

- iv. Educative marriage programmes that catch the interest of the married and address topical issues trending in the media should be organised frequently through marriage seminars and workshops.
- v. The church should encourage members to seek one-on-one counselling with counsellors by introducing counsellors to members on a regular basis and also have their contacts visibly displayed on notices.
- vi. There should be policies regarding marital counselling just as has been done for premarital counselling in the church. Counsellors who prepared couples for marriage with premarital counselling should have scheduled sessions with the couple at least once or twice before their first anniversary. Establishing marital sessions sixth months after marriage could be beneficial for a couple since they could be more objective with issues and in touch with realities of married life.

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