

Premarital Counselling and Family Stability among Christians in Bweranyangi Deanery West Ankole Diocese Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of pre-marital church counselling in promoting family stability among Christians in Bweranyangi Deanery Specifically West Ankole Diocese. Uganda. Using a mixed-method approach, quantitative data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to 50 married respondents, while qualitative insights were gathered from in-depth interviews with church leaders and counsellors. Quantitative findings revealed that pre-marital church counselling positively affect family stability. Qualitative results underscored the vital role of spiritual teachings in grounding couples' commitment, the importance of communication strategies for conflict resolution, and the emerging inclusion of sexual education as a tool for marital satisfaction. The study concluded that comprehensive pre-marital counselling encompassing spiritual, communicative, and sexual dimensions is essential for fostering stable and fulfilling Christian marriages. The study recommended strengthening counselling programs, continuous counsellor training, and expanding post-marital support.

Key words: Premarital counselling and Family stability

INTRODUCTION

Family stability is a critical element in the social, emotional, and spiritual well-being of individuals, particularly in Christian communities where marriage is regarded as a sacred covenant. Globally, however, the institution of marriage is increasingly under pressure, with rising rates of divorce, marital conflict, and emotional detachment affecting family structures. According to Amato and Patterson (2017), instability in marriage often leads to negative outcomes such as poor child development, increased stress, and breakdowns in community cohesion. Among Christians, the situation is particularly concerning because it contradicts the biblical model of family unity, love, and lifelong commitment (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:22–33).

THEORETICAL REVIEW

The study was guided by the Social Exchange Theory (SET), originally developed by George Homans in 1958 and subsequently expanded by Peter Blau in 1964. Homans, often regarded as the founder of SET, conceptualized social interactions as a series of exchanges where individuals sought to maximize rewards and minimize costs (Homans, 1958). Peter Blau further advanced this framework by exploring how social structures and power dynamics influenced these exchanges in interpersonal relationships (Blau, 1964). The theory fundamentally asserted that human relationships, including marriages, were sustained through a continuous evaluation of perceived benefits and costs, with individuals motivated to maintain relationships that offered greater rewards than burdens.

In the context of marital relationships, SET suggested that spouses strived to gain emotional support, love, companionship, and stability, which were viewed as rewards, while aiming to reduce conflicts, dissatisfaction, and stress, which represented costs (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This theory had been widely applied in marital and family studies to explain why some relationships endured while others dissolved (Rusbult, 1983; Sprecher, 1998).

Within this study, the Social Exchange Theory provided a useful lens to understand how pre-marital church counselling impacted family stability among Christian couples in Bweranyangi Deanery. Pre-marital counselling programs were designed to equip couples with essential skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution, sexual education, and financial planning (Stanley, Markman & Whitton, 2002). These skills were conceptualized as valuable rewards that enhanced marital satisfaction and commitment. Couples who underwent such preparation were better able to manage the costs associated with marriage such as misunderstandings, emotional stress, and unmet expectations—thus reducing the risk of instability and divorce.

Conversely, the absence or inadequacy of pre-marital counselling increased the perceived costs of marriage by leaving couples unprepared to handle conflicts and relational challenges (Halford et al., 2003). SET thus helped explain why couples who received structured pre-marital church counselling were more likely to experience enduring, fulfilling marriages. This theoretical framework was particularly relevant in a Christian context like Bweranyangi Deanery, where marriage was not only a social contract but a sacred covenant, and where spiritual and relational rewards were highly valued.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Effect Of Premarital Counselling On Family Stability Among Christians

The study conducted by Barongo and Onderi (2020) titled "Pre-Marital Counseling and Marital Conflicts among Christian Couples in Sameta Sub-County, Kisii, Kenya" employed a descriptive and correlational cross-sectional survey design involving 400 Christian spouses. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression techniques. The findings revealed that while premarital counselling was generally rated highly by respondents (mean = 3.49), marital conflict levels were also high (mean = 3.60). However, a moderate but statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.310$, $p = 0.035$) was observed between counselling and conflict. Specifically, communication, financial, sexuality, and biblical teachings within counselling significantly predicted reduced marital conflict. The study concluded that premarital counselling plays a vital role in minimizing marital conflicts and recommended strengthening these core modules in church-based counselling programmes.

The study conducted by Kariuki (2018) titled "Effectiveness of Premarital Counselling Programs on Marital Stability Among Selected Couples in Nairobi County" adopted a quantitative descriptive research design and sampled 105 married members of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA). Using the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS), the study assessed marital satisfaction and found a strong relationship between the number of premarital counselling sessions attended and marital stability. Couples who participated in 18 to 20 structured sessions reported higher levels of satisfaction, improved communication, and better problem-solving skills. The study concluded that premarital counselling positively affects marital quality and recommended that churches offer extended counselling programs starting at least six months before the wedding, focusing on communication, financial management, and personal development.

The study conducted by Namale et al. (2021) titled "Premarital Counselling for Marital Stability: A Case Study of Pentecost Church, Kade, Ghana" utilized a qualitative approach involving interviews with five Christian couples selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed thematically to explore the impact of premarital counselling. The study found that counselling improved understanding between spouses, enhanced communication, and prepared couples for handling finances, in-laws, and sexual relations. It concluded that premarital counselling contributed significantly to marital stability and recommended that churches formalize these sessions by integrating topics on conflict resolution, financial literacy, and sexual preparedness to support young couples more effectively.

The study conducted by Dauda Akwai Saleh (2023) titled "Prevalence and Impact of Marital Sexual Relationship-Focused Premarital Counselling on Sexual Satisfaction Among Married Women" employed a cross-sectional survey approach targeting married women. The study tested three hypotheses and found that women who had received premarital counselling with a focus on sexual education reported significantly higher levels of sexual satisfaction in marriage. The study concluded that preparing couples for sexual intimacy

during premarital counselling enhances marital harmony and emotional connection. It recommended that churches prioritize sexual education as a key module in their counselling curriculum and develop standardized materials to assist lay counsellors in delivering such content effectively.

The study conducted by Nyamahunge Kyokuhair and Kiyangi (2024) titled "Influence of Conflict Management Counselling on Marriage Stability of Couples in Pentecostal Churches in Kampala, Uganda" employed a quantitative cross-sectional correlational design. Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires and analyzed using Pearson correlation. The study revealed that the mean level of conflict management counselling was high (4.65), and a weak but statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.440$; $p < 0.05$) was found between counselling and marital stability, accounting for 19.3% of the variance in marital stability. The study concluded that conflict management counselling contributes to stable marriages and recommended that Pentecostal churches continue and enhance their premarital counselling programs with a focus on conflict resolution skills.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design combined with a mixed methods approach to comprehensively explore the relationship between pre-marital church counselling and family stability among Christians in Bweranyangi Deanery, West Ankole Diocese. The descriptive design was appropriate as it allowed for an in-depth examination and accurate portrayal of existing conditions regarding pre-marital counselling practices and their effects on family stability without manipulating any variables (Kothari, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The mixed methods approach involved the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. Quantitative methods provided measurable evidence on aspects such as the prevalence of marital challenges and the effectiveness of counselling sessions, while qualitative methods offered rich, contextual insights into couples' experiences, perceptions, and the nuanced impact of spiritual preparation, communication skills, and sexual education received during pre-marital counselling (Creswell, 2014; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). By combining these methods, the study aimed to capture a holistic understanding of how pre-marital church counselling influenced marital outcomes, ensuring that statistical trends were complemented by detailed personal narratives and explanations. This approach enhanced the validity and reliability of the research findings, making them more robust and actionable for church leaders, counsellors, and policymakers (Bryman, 2016).

Sample Size and sampling technique

In this study, a sample size of 50 respondents were selected from the total study population of 60 individuals. This selection is guided by the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Table for Determining Sample Size as shown in table 3.1 below:

Table 2: Study Population, Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Categories	Population	Sample size	Sampling techniques
Church leaders	05	05	Purposive sampling
Christians in Bweranyangi Deanery	55	45	Simple random sampling
Total	60	50	

Sampling Techniques

Simple Random Sampling: This technique will be utilized to select Christian respondents, ensuring that every individual has an equal chance of being included in the study.

Purposive Sampling: This non-probability sampling method were employed to select church leaders based on specific characteristics relevant to the study.

Data analysis

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between pre-marital church counselling and family stability among Christians in Bweranyangi Deanery

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0, which enabled the researcher to generate descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. These statistics summarized respondents' views regarding aspects such as spiritual preparation, communication skills, and sexual education provided during pre-marital counselling, and their perceived impact on marital stability. The use of SPSS facilitated efficient data entry, coding, and analysis, allowing for the clear presentation of patterns and trends (Field, 2013; Pallant, 2016).

Qualitative data, collected through interviews with church leaders and married couples, were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process included transcribing the interviews verbatim, reading through the transcripts to gain familiarity, coding significant statements, and grouping the codes into key themes. This approach enabled the researcher to extract deep insights into participants' experiences, beliefs, and perceptions regarding pre-marital counselling and family dynamics. Selected quotations from participants were included to highlight and substantiate the identified themes. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and ability to uncover rich, detailed data about lived experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2014).

This combination of quantitative and qualitative methods strengthened the validity and reliability of the study findings, offering both measurable trends and in-depth narratives for a balanced interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 3: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	24	48%
Female	26	52%
Total	50	100%

Table 3 presents the gender distribution of respondents who participated in the study. Out of the total sample of 50 respondents, 24 (48%) were male, while 26 (52%) were female.

This distribution indicates a fairly balanced representation of both genders, with a slight majority of female participants. The inclusion of 24 males (48%) and 26 females (52%) ensures that the study captures the views and experiences of both men and women regarding pre-marital church counselling and its impact on family stability. Such gender balance enhances the credibility of the findings and supports more inclusive and generalizable conclusions about the Christian community in Bweranyangi Deanery

Table 4. Age Group of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–25	6	12%
26–35	18	36%

36–45	14	28%
46 and above	12	24%
Total	50	100%

Table 4 presents the age distribution of the respondents. The results indicate that 6 (12%) of the respondents were aged between 18–25 years, 18 (36%) were within the 26–35 years age group, 14 (28%) fell into the 36–45 years category, and 12 (24%) were aged 46 years and above.

These findings suggest that the majority of respondents were within the productive and marriage-active age groups, particularly 26–35 years (18 respondents, 36%), followed by 36–45 years (14 respondents, 28%). This distribution is significant to the study as it indicates that most participants are within the age range that is likely to engage in or reflect on experiences related to pre-marital counselling and family life. The diversity across age brackets also ensures a broader understanding of perceptions and experiences across different life stages in Bweranyangi Deanery

Table 5. Marital Duration

Marital Duration	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 year	8	16%
1–3 years	16	32%
4–6 years	14	28%
7 years and above	12	24%
Total	50	100%

Table 5 shows the marital duration of the respondents. The findings indicate that 8 (16%) of the respondents had been married for less than 1 year, 16 (32%) had been married for 1–3 years, 14 (28%) had a marital duration of 4–6 years, while 12 (24%) had been married for 7 years and above.

This distribution reveals that the largest proportion of respondents had been married for 1–3 years (16 respondents, 32%), suggesting that many participants were relatively early in their marital journey. A significant portion, 14 (28%), had also been married for 4–6 years, which indicates enough experience to reflect on the long-term effects of pre-marital counselling. The presence of respondents with both short and long marital durations enriches the study by providing a variety of insights into how marital stability evolves over time among Christians in Bweranyangi Deanery

Table 6 Level of Education

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	6	12%
Secondary	14	28%
Tertiary	18	36%
University	12	24%
Total	50	100%

Table 6 presents the educational background of the respondents. The results show that 6 (12%) had attained primary education, 14 (28%) had completed secondary education, 18 (36%) had reached the tertiary level, and 12 (24%) had university education.

This distribution indicates that the majority of respondents had at least post-secondary education, with 18 (36%) having attained tertiary education and 12 (24%) holding university qualifications. This suggests a

relatively educated sample population, which is crucial for informed perspectives on pre-marital counselling and family stability. The presence of respondents across all educational levels also contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how education influences attitudes and experiences within Christian families in Bweranyangi Deanery

Table 7: Occupation of Respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Employed	18	36%
Self-employed	16	32%
Unemployed	10	20%
Other (Specify)	6	12%
Total	50	100%

Table 7 illustrates the occupational status of the respondents. The findings reveal that 18 (36%) were employed, 16 (32%) were self-employed, 10 (20%) were unemployed, and 6 (12%) fell under other occupations not specified.

The data suggests that the majority of respondents were engaged in either formal or informal economic activities, with employed (36%) and self-employed (32%) individuals making up a combined 68% of the total. This indicates a relatively active workforce among the participants, which may influence their perspectives on financial stability, responsibility, and the role of pre-marital counselling in fostering stable Christian families. The inclusion of unemployed and unspecified occupations also reflects a varied socioeconomic background, adding depth to the study's analysis of family dynamics in Bweranyangi Deanery

Effect Of Pre-Marital Counselling On Family Stability

This section examines how pre-marital counselling influences family stability, focusing on the spiritual preparation aspect as experienced by respondents. The questionnaire included five Likert-scale statements addressing spiritual preparation and its impact.

Table 8: Respondents' Perceptions on Spiritual Preparation and Family Stability

Statement	1: SD	2: D	3: N	4: A	5: SA	Mean	Std. Dev
1. Pre-marital counselling helped me understand Christian values in marriage	1(2%)	0(0%)	3(6%)	20(40%)	26(52%)	4.42	0.66
2. Spiritual preparation deepened our commitment to marital vows	0(0%)	2(4%)	4(8%)	22(44%)	22(44%)	4.30	0.72
3. The church counselling enhanced our prayer life as a couple	2(4%)	3(6%)	5(10%)	20(40%)	20(40%)	4.14	0.81
4. Biblical principles discussed during counselling guide our marriage	1(2%)	1(2%)	4(8%)	23(46%)	21(42%)	4.36	0.68
5. Spiritual preparation reduced chances of separation or divorce	2(4%)	4(8%)	7(14%)	20(40%)	17(34%)	4.10	0.88

Table 8 summarizes respondents' perceptions regarding the role of spiritual preparation in family stability. On the statement that pre-marital counselling helped them understand Christian values in marriage, 1 (2%) strongly disagreed, 0 (0%) disagreed, 3 (6%) were neutral, while a large majority of 20 (40%) agreed and 26 (52%) strongly agreed. This reflects strong overall agreement, supported by a high mean score of 4.42 and a low standard deviation of 0.66 indicating consistency in responses.

Regarding the statement that spiritual preparation deepened their commitment to marital vows, none strongly disagreed, 2 (4%) disagreed, 4 (8%) were neutral, 22 (44%) agreed, and another 22 (44%) strongly agreed. The mean of 4.30 and standard deviation of 0.72 reflect positive and consistent perceptions.

For the statement that church counselling enhanced their prayer life as a couple, 2 (4%) strongly disagreed, 3 (6%) disagreed, 5 (10%) were neutral, 20 (40%) agreed, and 20 (40%) strongly agreed. The mean score was 4.14 with a slightly higher standard deviation of 0.81, indicating some diversity in opinions but overall agreement.

When asked whether biblical principles discussed during counselling guide their marriage, 1 (2%) strongly disagreed, 1 (2%) disagreed, 4 (8%) were neutral, 23 (46%) agreed, and 21 (42%) strongly agreed. This yielded a mean of 4.36 and a standard deviation of 0.68, showing strong agreement.

Finally, on the statement that spiritual preparation reduced chances of separation or divorce, 2 (4%) strongly disagreed, 4 (8%) disagreed, 7 (14%) were neutral, 20 (40%) agreed, and 17 (34%) strongly agreed. This item had a mean of 4.10 and the highest variability with a standard deviation of 0.88, indicating more varied opinions on this issue. The responses indicate that spiritual preparation through pre-marital church counselling is largely perceived as important and effective in promoting family stability among Christians in Bweranyangi Deanery.

During interviews, Church leaders emphasized that spiritual preparation is the cornerstone of pre-marital church counselling in Bweranyangi Deanery. Reverend, a senior clergy member, shared:

“We begin with prayer and scripture. Couples are taught that marriage is ordained by God, and they must treat it as a holy covenant—not a casual union. That perspective changes everything.”

Sessions include teachings on Christian virtues such as faithfulness, humility, forgiveness, and sacrificial love. These align with the biblical foundations of marriage as found in Ephesians 5:25-33 and 1 Corinthians 13. Participants highlighted that when couples internalize these teachings, they are more likely to remain committed during difficult times.

This aligns with Sandra Schneiders (2003), who explains that Christian spirituality involves integrating one's life around self-transcendence toward God. Similarly, Don Browning (2000) argues that spiritually grounded marriages are sustained by shared religious narratives and moral commitments. David and Vera Mace (1992) also emphasize the importance of spiritual maturity in promoting marital resilience.

Church elders also noted that couples who lacked spiritual preparation often struggled with commitment and conflict resolution. Pastor Grace noted:

“Many of those who divorce today never went through spiritual counselling. They entered marriage casually and lacked the spiritual tools to persevere.”

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that pre-marital church counselling plays a vital role in promoting family stability among Christians in Bweranyangi Deanery by addressing key areas such as spiritual preparation, communication skills, and sexual education including intimacy. Pre-marital church counselling contributes to stable and fulfilling marriages by strengthening couples' commitment to Christian marital values, enhancing effective communication and conflict resolution, and preparing couples for realistic expectations around intimacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended that church leaders and counsellors strengthen and expand pre-marital counselling programs to comprehensively cover all aspects of marriage preparation, with particular emphasis on

communication skills, spiritual growth, and sexual education. It further recommended that churches provide ongoing post-marriage support and counselling to help couples navigate challenges and sustain family stability. Additionally, counsellors should receive regular training to update their skills and knowledge in order to better serve the evolving needs of couples.

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