

Content of Premarital Counselling and Family Stability in Owerri Municipality

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Abstract

This study examined the content of information provided by premarital counsellors for married couples and areas of the content that are most beneficial to the couples in Owerri municipality. It adopted ex-post-facto design and was guided by two research questions and one null hypothesis. Couples in the municipality form the population. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Hypothesis was tested using t-test. Results indicated, among others, that the content of premarital counselling information provided by counsellors could influence family stability among couples. It was recommended that premarital counselling should be administered to intending couples to help avert breakup among others.

Keywords: Content, Premarital Counselling, Family, Family Stability.

Introduction

Marriage institution is said to be as old as the history of man and his creation. According to Gbenga and Akume (2002), marriage is a divine situation which should be a special relationship for life and harmoniously integrate the husband and wife into becoming "one flesh". Undiyaundeye and Ugal (2006) described marriage as the cohabitation of heterosexual adults who engage in socially approved sexual relationship having children, engaging in economic co-operation and sharing a common residence. Typically, those entering into

the institution of marriage are expected to go for counselling in order to learn more about each other and acquire healthy problem-solving skills.

Counselling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education and career goals. Counselling deals with personal growth, career education and empowerment concerns (American Counselling Association, 2005). Counselling affects several aspects of family living including supporting

families grieving a common loss of a family member, loss of a job, or other loss that is having an impact on the whole family. Counselling also assist family members and couples to deal with depression, anxiety, fear, anger, addictive behaviors, parenting issues, divorce, among other struggles that prevents them from living a fulfilling life (Family Life Counselling, 2017; Living Life and Loving It Consulting, Counselling and Nursing Services, 2012). Through a variety of approaches and techniques (such as couple therapy, cognitive restructuring, structural family therapy), counselling impacts on these aspects of family living and thus assist couples create a family that is stable.

Family stability connotes family working satisfactorily in its functions towards its members. According to Adesanya (2002), family stability is the relationship in which couples live together in marriage enjoying the closest possible loving and fulfilling relationship without any intention to break up. Stability in the family is very important in bringing about commitment among couples in particular, in caring for their children's upbringing and discipline. Stability within the family unit significantly predicts couples putting into practice those skills they have learnt through marital counselling programme before or after marriage (Cavanagh &

Houston, 2006). In addition, Edwin (2010) stated that accounting for family stability is crucial because the positive effect of the traditional family may be in part due to stability rather than family structure. Family stability, according to Adams and Chase-Lansdale (2002), simply means a family in which there is not a lot of change. In addition, these families are typically families where there is predictability and consistency. Similarly, George and Ukpong (2013) observed that family stability minimizes stress and undue pressure brought upon the society by family disorganization. On the other hand, Onwuamanam and Osakinle (2005) observed that family instability in homes could lead to separation and divorce. Ambakederemo and Ganagana (2006) found that family instability is caused by sex-related issues, love and trust, social-cultural factors, antisocial vices and economic factors. The rate of family instability and divorce among couples seems to be on the increase in many parts of Nigeria (Idakwo, 2016). However, premarital counselling could be initiated to help couples prepare for marriage. Premarital counselling is the greatest antidote to avoid marriage counselling or potential divorce. Almost half of all first marriages end in divorce, and couples that marry without going for premarital counselling are at much higher risk of divorce (Family Life Counselling, 2017).

Premarital counselling came into prominences in the twentieth century. It is a therapy that prepares couple who intend to be married before their wedding (Naylor, 2014). It constitutes services that are made available by professional counsellors to individuals who are intending to or desiring to venture into marriage relationship. The categories of individuals that mostly appear for premarital counselling in the society are the unmarried youths who are just at the verge of preparing for marriage. They are already young adults who are to be assisted with useful information about what obtains in the marriage institution, how to prepare for it and enter into marital relationship on a desired note. Stahmann (2002) defines premarital counselling as a process designed to enhance and enrich premarital relationships leading to a more satisfying and stable marriage with the intended consequences being to prevent divorce. The researchers would like to add that premarital counselling helps ensure that both partners have a strong, healthy relationship and better chance for an unwavering and satisfying marriage. Premarital counselling, according to Khulman (2007) aim to prevent distress and breakages in relationships by touching those areas that will equip couples to have skills and knowledge which will help them display higher relationship,

Khulman further opined that premarital counselling provide information for intending couples on those areas with basic foundations which will enable them solve marital issues that arise.

The status of premarital counselling for intending couples in many parts of Nigeria including in Owerri Municipal appears to be discouraging. In Owerri Municipality which is made up of five villages, according to the records obtained from the Owerri Municipal Social Welfare Case Register (2012), majority of marriages that break-up or separate is as a result of not being exposed to premarital counselling and skills where intending couples are taught and exposed to the rudiments of marriage and relationships and various skills needed to keep a relationship. Out of the 54 divorced and separated couples, records at the welfare office showed that only 16 out of the 54 receive premarital counselling, while the rest 38 did not avail themselves such opportunity. This lack of premarital counselling for intended couples could have contributed to the high rate of divorce and separation. This sad phenomenon therefore calls for premarital counselling for intending couple for a stable family and marriage. Marital instability is a serious crisis which disrupts the functioning of all members of the family. However, premarital counselling offers intending

couples opportunities to learn about crucial issues and acquire skills they many need in marriage. When couples lack the skill required of them to enhance their relationship in their family, family instability may result. The problem of the study therefore, put as question is: do premarital counselling services provide information to proposed couples to ensure family instability amongst families in Owerri Municipality?

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of this study was to examine the content of premarital counselling and family stability in Owerri Municipality.

Specifically, the study determined:

- 1) The content of information provided by premarital counsellors that could influence family stability among couples in Owerri Municipality.
- 2) Areas of premarital counselling that could influence family stability among couples in Owerri Municipality.

Research questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

- 1) What is the content of premarital counselling information provided by counsellors that could influence family stability among couples in Owerri Municipality?

- 2) What areas of premarital counselling that could influence family stability among couples?

Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study and will be tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho₁: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female couples on the content of premarital counselling information provided for them that could influence family stability in Owerri Municipality.

Methodology

Design of the study: This study employed descriptive survey design to examine premarital counselling and family stability among married couples in Owerri Municipality. This design enabled the researchers to investigate the content of information provided by premarital counselors that could influence family stability among couples as well as areas of premarital counselling that could influence family stability among couples in Owerri Municipality. Thus, the researchers considered it the most appropriate design for a study of this nature.

Population of the study: This consisted of married men and women within the five villages that made up Owerri Municipality totaling 720. Statistics made available by National Population

Commission Owerri Municipal (NPCOM, 2013), shows that between 2012 and 2013, there are 227 married men and women in Umuororonjo village, 104 married men and women in Umuoyima villa, 157 married men and women in Umuonyeche village, 167 married men and women in Amawom village, 65

Sample of the Study: The sample was randomly selected through a proportionate stratified sampling technique: out of the 720 couples, 200 respondents were used as the study sample; 100 drawn from married men and 100 drawn from married women.

Instrument for data collection: Questionnaire was used for data collection. It was a twenty-eight items questionnaire titled "Content of Premarital Counselling and Family Stability of Couples Questionnaire (CPCFSCQ)". The instrument was divided into two sections. Section one consist of the personal data of the respondents while section two consist of twenty-two items built under two clusters. Cluster A focuses on how premarital counselling provides information for couples. Cluster B attempts to identify areas premarital counselling is most beneficial to couples. The items were structured on a four point rating scale of "Strongly agree" (SA), 4-points, "Agree"(A) 3-points "Disagree"(D) 2-points, "Strongly disagree" (SD) 1-point. The

items on the questionnaire were generated from literature review and previous experience of the researchers. The instrument was validated by three experts. The experts were requested to examine the instrument for comprehensiveness of the items, appropriateness of the content measuring what are supposed to measure. Their comments and suggestions were taken into considerations in the final modification of the instrument. Reliability of the instrument was established through trial-testing with thirty couples who were not part of the sample for the study. Couples responses were collected and analyzed using Cronbach Alpha co-efficient which gave Alpha co-efficient value of 0.80 for cluster A and 0.92 for Cluster B and or overall value of 0.72 for the instrument. The high Alpha estimate value of 0.72 indicates that the instrument is reliable to be used for the study.

Data Collection: A total of 200 copies of the instrument were distributed by hand and 200 copies were retrieved representing one hundred percent (%) return.

Data Analysis Technique: Data were analyzed using mean score (\bar{X}) to answer research questions and t-test to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Real limit of the numbers was used to arrive at decision and it was determined by using the mean

range as follows: real limit of numbers; 3.5-4.00 (Strongly Agree/Very Great Extent), 2.5-3.49 (Agree/Great Extent), 1.5-2.49 (Disagree/Low Extent) and 0.5-1.9 (Strongly Disagree/Very Low Extent).

Results

The results are presented according to the research questions and null hypotheses.

Research Question 1: What is the content of premarital counselling information provided by counsellors that could influence family stability among couples in Owerri Municipality?

Table I: Mean rating (\bar{X}) and standard deviation of respondents on content of premarital counselling information provided by counsellors that could influence family stability among couples.

S/N	Premarital counselling provides information on:	Mean	Mean	Mean	SD	Decision
		(\bar{X}) Men	(\bar{X}) Women			
1.	Health conditions and issues.	3.10	3.08	3.09	.758	Agreed
2.	Environmental health concerns.	3.07	3.06	3.13	.776	Agreed
3.	Intimacy/sexual relations.	3.25	3.21	3.46	.648	Agreed
4.	Parental roles.	3.24	3.18	3.42	.788	Agreed
5.	Family values.	3.14	3.13	3.27	.687	Agreed
6.	Couple's personality differences.	3.15	3.15	3.30	.643	Agreed
7.	Conflict management in the family.	3.20	3.16	3.36	.649	Agreed
8.	Financial matters in marriage.	3.04	3.12	3.16	.741	Agreed
9.	Skills and etiquette in marriage and life.	3.02	3.05	3.07	.815	Agreed
10.	Family origin.	2.44	2.55	2.99	.870	Agreed
11.	Genotype	3.07	3.10	3.17	.771	Agreed
12.	Religious activities for family and couples.	3.12	3.20	3.32	.714	Agreed
13.	Communication skills in marriage.	3.15	3.16	3.31	.717	Agreed
14.	Couple's compatibility.	3.10	3.13	3.23	.781	Agreed
15.	In-law relationship.	3.12	3.10	3.22	.765	Agreed
16.	How to protect and nurture children.	3.14	3.12	3.26	.765	Agreed
Grand Mean (N=200)				3.22	.721	Agreed

Table 1 indicates that out of 16 items on the content of premarital counselling information provided by counsellors that could influence family stability among couples in Owerri Municipality, the respondents affirmed to all the factors (items 1-16), with the grand mean of 3.22 and standard deviation of 0.721. This implies that marriage counsellors renders their services by

providing vital information needed by the couples for family stability since all the mean rating are not below the decision point of 2.50.

Research Question 2: What areas of premarital counselling that could influence family stability among couples?

Table 2: Mean (\bar{X}) rating and standard deviation (SD) of areas of premarital counselling that influence family stability among couples.

S/N	Areas of premarital counselling:	Mean (\bar{X}) Men	Mean (\bar{X}) Women	Mean (\bar{X})	SD	Decision
1.	Improving in communication skills.	3.10	3.14	3.24	.765	Agreed
2.	Resolving conflicts in healthy manner.	3.10	3.15	3.25	.737	Agreed
3.	Deepening couple's intimacy	3.10	3.11	3.21	.847	Agreed
4.	Understanding household roles.	3.15	3.15	3.30	.759	Agreed
5.	Managing financial matters.	3.10	3.10	3.20	.761	Agreed
6.	Rearing children in a proper way.	3.01	3.02	3.03	.750	Agreed
Grand Mean (N=200)				3.20	0.77	Agreed

Table 2 indicates the respondents' mean scores on the areas of premarital counselling that could influence family stability among couples in Owerri Municipal. Item 17-22 have mean scores of 3.24, 3.25, 3.21, 3.30, 3.20, 3.03 and grand mean of 3.20 respectively. All the mean scores are above the decision point of 2.50; therefore the items are accepted and important for the study. This implies areas such as communication skills, conflict resolution, couple's intimacy

understanding of household roles, financial management and child rearing are crucial areas of premarital counselling that could influence family stability among couples.

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female couples on the content of premarital counselling information provided for them that could influence family stability in Owerri Municipality.

Table 2: t-test of the mean responses of married men and women in Owerri Municipality on premarital information provided them.

Group	N	Mean (X)	SD	DF	Sig.	Decision
Married men	60	90.283				NS
Married women	140	91.235			0.08	
		7	11.60105	107.448		

Key: n=Number of respondents, sd=Standard deviation, df=degree of freedom, ns=Not significant at 0.05 probability level

Table 2 above indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female couples on the content of premarital counselling information provided for them that could influence family stability in Owerri Municipality is not significant. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted. The fact is that significant level of 0.08 at 198 degree of freedom is greater than the P-value of 0.05. Therefore, there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female couples on the content of premarital counselling information provided for them that could influence family stability in Owerri Municipality is not significant.

Discussions

Responses to research question one revealed that the respondents accepted that all 16 factors are the information provided to married couples to ensure family stability in Owerri municipality. This shows that premarital counsellors provide information on health

condition, environmental health, intimacy/sexual relations, parental roles, courtship, personality differences, conflict management among others. The findings is in agreement with Stahmann (2002) who noted that premarital counselling is a process designed to enhance and enrich premarital relationships leading to a more satisfying and stable marriage with the intended consequences being to prevent divorce. Stahmann further asserts that couples who are acquainted with this information are more committed to building a successful relationship. The study also supports Gladdings (2007) who opined that premarital counselling helps intending couples to enhance the relationship before they get married and help them acquire skills and realistic expectations. The result also agrees with Naylor (2014) who affirmed that premarital counselling constitutes information and services that are made available by professional counsellors to intending couples.

In table two, the result of the findings indicated that such areas as communication skills, conflict resolution, couples intimacy, understanding household roles, financial management and child rearing are crucial areas of premarital counselling for family stability. This result is in agreement with Khulman (2007) who stated that premarital education program goal is to prevent distress and breakages in relationships by touching those areas that will equip couples to have skills and knowledge which will help them display higher relationship satisfaction. Stahmann (2002) also noted that premarital counselling helped to prepare couples for different areas of married life such as financial management, family planning, sexual relation, genotype, environmental health family values among others.

The result of the hypothesis revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female couples on the content of premarital counselling information provided for them that could influence family stability in Owerri Municipality. This means that both married men and women respondents accepted the fact that premarital information is a big step in the right direction for every good marriage.

Conclusion

Premarital counselling can improve the stability of families and also reduce the risk of marriage breakup. The findings of the study revealed that married men and women perceived premarital counselling from the same perspective. Premarital counselling provides couples with information and measures that will help them enjoy a higher relationship satisfaction. This issue of family stability can be improved if couples are willing to participate actively in premarital programme which will pave way to a positive dimension towards their marriage. In conclusion, premarital counselling could influence couples to achieving a satisfactory relationship by providing those vital information such as information on health conditions and issues, intimacy and sexual relations, parental roles, family values among others. Premarital counselling can be most beneficial to married couples in the areas of improving their communication skills, resolving conflict in healthy manners, deepening couples intimacy among others.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

- 1) Premarital counselling should be administered to intending couples

- to help them avoid marriage breakup.
- 2) Premarital counselling should cover all the areas of premarital information these couples needed to be able to live up to expectation in their married life.
 - 3) Religious bodies should teach and encourage couples to attend premarital counselling program by exposing them to those premarital information that will help them build a lasting relationship.
 - 4) Professional counsellors who deal in behavior modification should help couples with personality differences in modifying their negative marital attitude which may likely disrupt their marriage.
 - 5) The government should periodically organize sensitization workshops, public lectures, seminars for couples by crating awareness on the relevance of premarital counselling.

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