The Perception of Married People about Premarital Counseling.
A Survey in the Techiman Municipality of Ghana

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Abstract
This study was an investigation into the perception of married people in Techiman Municipality about premarital counseling. The purposive and the disproportional stratified sampling methods were used to select eight churches and 259 respondents (married people) respectively in the Techiman Municipality for the study. The instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire. It consisted of five-point likert scale items designed by the researcher and was administered to married people in the municipality. The researcher had three research questions to work with. The major finding from the study was that premarital counselling has positive impact on marriages and Techiman Municipality married people have positive perception about premarital counselling .It was suggested that premarital counselling should be maintained and encouraged in all churches. All these can be a reality if more counsellors are trained. This means that universities should increase their intake of students in guidance and counselling so that more professional counselors could be turned out to help in this direction
Keywords: Premarital Counseling, Perception, Married Couples, Counseling

1. Introduction

Marriage, also called matrimony or wedlock, is a socially or ritually recognized union or legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between them, between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws. (Haviland, Prins, Bunny and Dana ,2011). The definition of marriage varies according to different cultures, but it is principally an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually sexual, are acknowledged. In some cultures, marriage is recommended or considered to be compulsory before pursuing any sexual activity. When defined broadly, marriage is considered a cultural universal. Individuals may marry for several reasons, including legal, social, libidinal, emotional, financial, spiritual, and religious purposes. Who they marry may be influenced by socially determined rules of incest, prescriptive marriage rules, parental choice and individual desire. In some areas of the world, arranged marriage, child marriage, polygamy, and sometimes forced marriage may be practiced as a cultural tradition. Conversely, such practices may be outlawed and penalized in parts of the world out of concerns for women's rights and because of international laws. (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2008). It appears that in developed parts of the world, there has been a general trend towards ensuring equal rights within marriage for women and legally recognizing the marriages of interracial, interfaith, and same-gender couples. Oftentimes, these trends have been motivated by a desire to establish equality and uphold human rights.

Marriage can be recognized by a state, an organization, a religious authority, a tribal group, a local community or peers. It is often viewed as a contract. Civil marriage, which does not exist in some countries, is marriage without religious content carried out by a government institution in accordance with the marriage laws of the jurisdiction, and recognised as creating the rights and obligations intrinsic to matrimony. Marriages can be performed in a secular civil ceremony or in a religious setting via a wedding ceremony.

The act of marriage usually creates normative or legal obligations between the individuals involved, and any offspring they may produce. In terms of legal recognition, most sovereign states and other jurisdictions limit marriage to opposite-sex couples and a diminishing number of these permit polygyny, child marriages, and forced marriages. Over the twentieth century, a growing number of countries and other jurisdictions have lifted bans on and have established legal recognition for interracial marriage, interfaith marriage, and most recently, same-sex marriage.

Despite the sanctity of marriage and its recognition in society today, divorce rates are on the ascendancy. Many studies on divorce such as the one conducted by Amoateng and Heaton (1989) and cited by Abra (2001) show a trend of increase in divorce rate in Ghana. The authors stated thus; "overall, we find prevalence of high rate of divorce in Ghana" (Pg. 93). Choosing a mate therefore is one of life's critical decisions and few couples can approach the matter objectively.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Premarital counselling is an intervention believed to help stem the tide of high divorce rate in the system. Premarital counseling, which is an innovative strategy to improve marriages has also suffered some hindrances. It has been criticized by many that it does not do any good to marriages and therefore it is not important for would – be couples to go through it (Senediak, 1990). According to the critics, many marriages are still breaking apart despite the numerous premarital counseling.(Senediak, 1990)

In Ghana, data from Techiman Municipality Registry (2012). indicates that within seven years, divorce rate has risen by 44%. Again, research during the past several years has shown that more people seek counselling for marriage problems than other issues. Preventive counselling therefore is better remedial counselling (Collins, 1988, Edwards & Booth, 1976) against the high rate of divorce today.

The study therefore sought to find out from married people whether the various sessions of premarital counselling organized by professional counsellors, ministers and non-professional counsellors really have had impact on their marriages.

In undertaking the research, the researcher hopes to find answers to the following research questions:

(1) What is the content of premarital counselling offered by churches in the Techiman Municipality?
(2) What are the perceptions of married people in Techiman Municipality about premarital counselling?
(3) What do married people who went through premarital counselling perceive about such counselling?

1.2 Significance of the Study

The primary significance of the study lies on the fact that it will help people see and understand what premarital counseling is and what goes into it. Second, it will point out whether in actual fact premarital counseling has any impact on married couples. Third, the result will also help counselors in general and marriage counselors in particular to effectively handle premarital counseling in that the findings and recommendations will make them more informed.

2. Meaning of Premarital Counselling

Premarital interventions include counselling and education of would-be couples. The terms counselling and education will be used interchangeable throughout this paper. Premarital counselling or education is a therapeutic intervention that occurs with couples who plans to marry. Premarital education according to Senediak, (1990) is a skills training procedure which aims at providing couples with information on ways to improve their relationship once they are married.

It appears that couples often approach premarital counselling with mixed feelings. While many recognize its potential value, there also is the feeling that our love is unique, we do not need this especially now when we are so busy". Others may come with trepidation and defensiveness, afraid that the counsellor will suggest that the marriage is unwise.

2.1 The Usefulness of Premarital Counselling

A 1997 paper by Suvillivan and Bradbury entitled "Are premarital prevention programmes reaching couples at risk for marital dysfunctions?" in the Journal of Consulting and Clinical psychology show that "while couples who experienced premarital counselling claim to be more satisfied in their marriages than couples who did not, in the end there is no difference in marital outcomes between those couples who have had extensive premarital counselling and those who have not".

In another study by Brandbury (1994) it came out that premarital counselling does not work. Their study found that two years after marriage, 25% of couples were worse off than they were at the start of their marriage, and after four years, up to 38% had divorced. Many counselling Strategies used today, like teaching people to listen and communicate better and to behave in more positive ways can help couples for up to a year, say social scientists who have analyzed the effectiveness of different treatments. But they are insufficient to get couples through the squalls of conflict that inevitably recur in the long term. At the same time, experts say, many therapists lack the skills to work with couples who are in serious trouble.

In another study by Sullivan and Brandbury (1997) it was found that approximately 90 percent of couples who undertook premarital training would choose to do so again though there were no differences between those who had premarital counseling and those who did not have premarital counselling on marital outcomes.

2.2 The content of premarital counseling

The following general format for premarital counselling has been suggested by Rodgers and Rodgers (2006).

2.2.1 Toxic Subjects

A good pre-marital counseling program will acquaint couples with the six areas of conflict that often lead to divorce. In therapy, we call these "toxic subjects" because they can become toxic for couples to discuss

them. These issues are:
   Money/finances
   Sex
   In-laws
   Child-rearing
   Roles (delegation of responsibilities and jobs in managing the home)
   Religion/spiritual leadership.
In premarital counseling, couples are given ample time to discuss these issues thereby aiding them in resolving conflicts that might ensue.
2.2.2Conflict Resolution
Another key to a successful marriage is healthy conflict resolution. Premarital counseling helps couples develop their conflict-resolution style. Relationship researchers have found certain conflict-resolution styles that can lead to divorce. These are:
   Stonewalling (withdrawal)
   Defensiveness
   Criticism
   Contempt.
Finding these marital parasites early and developing a healthier method of interaction gives couples a strong start to marriage that will benefit them for a lifetime.
2.2.3Communication
The next important issue that relationship counseling should cover is communication. During the blissful, phenylethlamine stage of a relationship, it is quite natural for couples to "read each other's minds" -- even finish each other's' sentences. How many times have you heard young couples say, "We just think alike", "She knows me so well", "I feel whole in his presence"? Once again, we find this feeling aided by the couple's brain chemistry. No wonder so many pre-marital couples think they don't need counseling to aid in communication! It's all too shocking when these mystical mind-reading processes come to a halt – and this often occurs incidentally at our four-year critical mark. Then, couples really have to learn to communicate.
Good pre-marital counseling teaches couples tools to do just that. Communication techniques that promote understanding, foster empathy, bring about insight, and facilitate forgiveness are essential parts of a solid program.
        In addition to providing all of these helps for young couples, pre-marital counseling can help you with any unresolved individual baggage you may knowingly or unknowingly carry into your marriage. Issues such as low self-esteem, unresolved issues in your family of origin, unresolved guilt, and others can rear their ugly heads and wreak havoc on a new marriage. More than anything pre-marital counseling gives couples the confidence that they can beat the odds and become the soul mates God intended them to be.

3. Methodology
3.1Research design
The descriptive survey design was used for the study. According to Gay (1992), the descriptive survey design involves the collection of data in order to test hypotheses or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of study.   A descriptive survey determines and reports existing conditions. This design was considered the most appropriate because the issues of study already existed and the researcher needed to collect data to bring them to bare.

3.2 Population
The population of the study consisted of all married people in selected churches in Techiman Municipality. They numbered 2,399. Married people in churches were mainly used for the study since churches are very particular about premarital counselling and therefore a lot of their members go through it before marriage.

3.3 Sample and sampling technique
The sampling procedures employed for the study were purposive sampling and the disproportional stratified sampling. The purposive sampling brought out churches which actually offer premarital counselling and the disproportional stratified sampling gave equal chances to all the churches.
        The Sample size for the study was 330 married people who were from eight selected churches. The 330 married people were selected based on the table developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). On the table, when a population size is 2,400, the sample size should be 331. The researcher therefore chose 330 as a sample size since her population size is 2,399.
        To arrive at the figure 330, 14% of the total population of each church was sampled. According to Alreck and Settle (1985) a sample size of 10% or more of a population is enough to obtain adequate confidence.

It is important to indicate that 259 out of the 330 returned their questionnaires, representing 78 percent retrieval rate. One hundred and twenty six (126) respondents out of the 259 respondents who returned their questionnaires went through premarital counselling prior to marriage while the rest did not.

3.4 Instrumentation
Questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection in the study. It was also used as interview schedule for subjects who could not read and write. The questionnaire was designed based on the review of related literature and the research questions. All items on the questionnaire were on a five point likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Don't Know, Disagree and Strongly Disagree of which respondents were to tick one for each item.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure
Respondents were requested to respond to all the items on the questionnaire. In scoring the questionnaire, each of the 259 questionnaires which were retrieved was given a code to facilitate easy identification. Responses to the various items were coded and tabulated. All the items were assigned the weights of 5,4,3,2, and 1for Strongly Agree, Agree, Don't Know, Disagree and Strongly Disagree respectively.

The research questions were answered using descriptive statistics showing the means and standard deviations of suggested responses outlined in the questionnaire. Suggested responses with means greater than 3.00(3.10-5.00) indicated agreement on the part of respondents to the item on the questionnaire while suggested responses with means less than 3.0 (1.00-2.99) indicated disagreement on the part of respondents to that item. A mean of (3.00) indicated "don't know", which meant respondents, had no idea about the item on the questionnaire. It should be noted that a mean of 3.00 served as the separation point for agreement and disagreement on the part of respondents.

4. Data Analysis And Discussion Of Findings
4.1Content of Marital Counselling
Table 1 gives the means and standard deviations of the scores obtained by respondents who went through premarital counselling on the suggested content of premarital counselling outlined in the questionnaire. This was based on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, agree, don't know, disagree and strongly disagree.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Scores on Content of Premarital Counselling

Content	N	Mean	Std Deviation
1. Sex in marriage	126	3.54	0.836
2. Communication in marriage	126	3.54	0.766
3. Financial management in marriage	126	3.49	0.701
4. Dealing with conflict in marriage	126	3.39	0.800
5. Purpose of the marriage	126	3.33	0.937
6. Coping with each other's differences	126	3.32	0.882
7.Couples' expectations	126	3.31	0.916
8. Extended family relationships	126	3.30	0.842
9. Each other's future aspirations	126	3.26	0.931
10. Children and parenthood	126	3.25	0.987
11. Divorce prevention	126	3.24	1.084
12. Religious differences	126	3.14	1.086
13. Previous marriages and children, if applicable.	126	2.57	1.546

Comparing the means of the scores on the suggested contents in Table 1 to the weights assigned to the options under the Likert Scale, it could be concluded that the respondents disagreed to the inclusion of previous marriages and children, if applicable, as a content of premarital counselling offered in the Techiman Municipality. This is because this has a mean score of 2.57 which is less than 3. The content of premarital counselling in the Techiman Municipality therefore includes:

Sex in marriage, Communication in marriage, Financial management in marriage, Dealing with conflict in marriage, Purpose of the marriage, Coping with each other's differences, Couples' expectations, Extended family relationships, Each other's future aspirations, Children and parenthood, Divorce prevention, Religious differences.

Table 2 gives the means and standard deviations of the scores obtained by all respondents who did and did not benefit from premarital counseling concerning their perceptions about premarital counselling.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Scores on Perceptions about Premarital Counselling

Perception	N	Mean	Std Deviation
1. Premarital counselling is necessary and must be continued.	259	3.44	0.802
2. Premarital counselling is not necessary and must be discarded.	259	1.53	0.841
3. Premarital counselling must be made compulsory in all churches.	259	3.25	0.971
4. Premarital counselling should begin as soon as the man and woman are sure they want to marry	259	3.25	0.967
5. Premarital counselling helps the couple to know what goes into marriage and the differences they must deal with in each other.	259	3.34	0.797
6. There should be a follow up after premarital counselling.	259	2.26	1.039
7. The issues discussed in premarital counselling sessions must not be revealed to other people.	259	3.22	1.034
8. Apart from going through premarital counselling, the success or failure of the marriage can also depend on the extent of knowledge the couple have from books, magazines and film.	259	3.00	0.950
9. The success or failure of a marriage can also depend on the pieces of advice from friends or other people who can be of help.	259	3.12	0.847
10. The success or failure of the marriage can also depend on pieces of advice from parents.	259	3.17	0.836
11. Premarital relationships have the potential of building the confidence of the would-be couples.	259	3.05	1.088
12. Premarital counselling brings out problems of the would-be couples that have not been previously noticed.	259	2.92	1.061
13. Effective premarital counselling should deal with critical issues that could influence the success or failure of the marriage than mere pre-ceremonial meetings with counsellors.	259	3.30	0.902
14. Premarital counselling provides an opportunity for a couple to talk about their responsibilities in the marriage.	259	3.09	0.921

From Table 2, the issues that can be included in the list of perceptions of married couples about premarital counselling are the following.

1. Premarital counselling is necessary and must be continued.
2. Premarital counselling must be made compulsory in all churches.
3. Premarital counselling should begin as soon as the man and woman are sure they want to marry.
4. Premarital counselling helps the couple to know what goes into marriage and the differences they must deal with in each other.
5. The issues discussed in premarital counselling sessions must not be revealed to other people.
6. Apart from going through premarital counselling, the success or failure of the marriage can also depend on the extent of knowledge the couple have from books, magazines and films.
7. The success or failure of the marriage can also depend on the pieces of advice from friends or other people who can be of help.

8. The success or failure of the marriage can also depend on pieces of advice from parents.
9. Premarital relationships have the potential of building the confidence of the would-be couples.
10. Effective premarital counselling should deal with critical issues that could influence the success or failure of the marriage than mere pre-ceremonial meetings with counsellors.
11. Premarital counselling provides an opportunity for a couple to talk about their responsibilities in the marriage.

This is because these perceptions, according to Table 2, have means of greater than 3, indicating agreement with them on the part of the respondents.

Table 3 gives the means and standard deviations of the scores obtained by respondents who received premarital counselling concerning their perceptions about premarital counselling.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Scores on Perceptions of Premarital Counselling Recipients about Premarital Counselling

Perception	N	Mean	Std Deviation
1. Premarital counselling is necessary and must be continued.	126	3.60	0.761
2. Premarital counselling is not necessary and must be discarded.	126	1.38	0.768
3. Premarital counselling must be made compulsory in all churches.	126	3.44	0.796
4. Premarital counselling should begin as soon as the man and woman are sure they want to marry.	126	3.43	0.720
5. Premarital counselling helps the couple to know what goes into marriage and the differences they must deal with in each other.	126	3.49	0.690
6. There should be a follow up after Premarital counselling.	126	2.68	0.937
7. The issues discussed in premarital counselling sessions must not be revealed to other people.	126	3.27	1.054
8. Apart from going through premarital counselling, the success or failure of the marriage can also depend on the extent of knowledge the couple have from books, magazines and films.	126	3.08	0.796
9. The success or failure of the marriage can also depend on the pieces of advice from friends or other people who can be of help.	126	3.17	0.791
10. The success or failure of the marriage can also depend on pieces of advice from parents.	126	3.15	0.820
11. Premarital relationships have the potential of building the confidence of the would-be couples.	126	3.21	0.891
12. Premarital counselling brings out problems of the would-be couples that have not been previously noticed.	126	3.11	0.878
13. Effective premarital counselling should deal with critical issues that could influence the success or failure of the marriage than mere pre-ceremonial meetings with counsellors.	126	3.34	0.859
14. Premarital counselling provides an opportunity for a couple to talk about their responsibilities in the marriage.	126	3.15	0.868

From Table 3, it could be concluded that married people in Techiman Municipality who received premarital counselling prior to marriage disagreed with the following statements:

1. Premarital counselling is not necessary and must be discarded, and
2. There should be a follow up after premarital counselling.

This is because these perceptions have means of less than 3. The perceptions of married people who received premarital counselling about such counselling therefore are:

1. Premarital counselling is necessary and must be continued.
2. Premarital counselling must be made compulsory in all churches.
3. Premarital counselling should begin as soon as the man and woman are sure they want to marry.
4. Premarital counselling helps the couple to know what goes into marriage and the differences they must deal with in each other.
5. The issues discussed in premarital counselling sessions must not be revealed to other people.
6. Apart from going through premarital counselling, the success or failure of the marriage can also depend on the extent of knowledge the couple have from books, magazines and films.
7. The success or failure of the marriage can also depend on the pieces of advice from friends or other people who can be of help.
8. The success or failure of the marriage can also depend on pieces of advice from parents.
9. Premarital relationships have the potential of building the confidence of the would-be couples.
10. Premarital counselling brings out problems of the would-be couples that have not been previously noticed.
11. Effective premarital counselling should deal with critical issues that could influence the success or failure of the marriage than mere pre-ceremonial meetings with counsellors.
12. Premarital counselling provides an opportunity for a couple to talk about their responsibilities in the marriage

4.2 Recommendations

In light of the findings and the conclusions outlined above, the following recommendations are made:

1. It is recommended that the premarital counselling should not be limited to only the Christian churches, but also Muslim mosques.
2. There should also be a lot of trained counsellors to help in this direction.
3. Premarital counselling is very necessary and must be encouraged. If possible, it must be made compulsory before marriage.

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