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An Assessment of the Nature and Content of Premarital Counselling in the Bantama Assembly of Christ Apostolic Church International, Ghana

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Abstract:

The study assessed the nature and content of premarital counselling in Bantama Assembly of the Christ Apostolic Church International (CACI), Kumasi. A sample of 196 premarital counselled spouses were randomly sampled for the study. Sequential explanatory mixed methods design was used. Instruments for the study were self-developed close-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide. The questionnaire included 25 items employing a Likert scale. Five (5) open-ended questions were also used to interview Nine premarital counselled spouses. The items yielded an internal reliability coefficient (Cronbach alpha) of 0.9. The statistical tools used to analyze data were descriptive statistics. Two research questions were formulated and guided the study. The results of the study revealed that general practice of effective premarital counselling and ethical issues were violated. Also, the findings revealed that some topics were sufficiently discussed than others. Based on the findings, it is recommended that a counselling unit be created by churches, fully furnished with resources and manned by knowledgeable persons in counselling, who will ensure that effective premarital counselling will be conducted and not violate ethical issues during premarital counselling sessions. Counsellors will also ensure that all topics are given the needed attention during premarital counselling.

Keywords: Premarital counselling, nature of premarital counselling, content of premarital counselling

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

All over the world, marriage is seen as a very important institution which is given special attention in society, therefore it is essential that before one enters this institution, he must be abreast with it and prepare very well to avoid failure. Commenting on marriage as a basic institution in every human society, Gyekye (1998) acknowledged that it is a recognized social institution, not only for establishing and maintaining the family, but also for creating and sustaining the ties of kinship. Without the institution of marriage there would be no family, nuclear or extended and therefore no kinship ties. It is also an essential institution because it is one of the stages of growth and development. Indeed, some scholars argue that marriage is one of the markers of adulthood, particularly in the African context (Awuah, 2013).

Marriage has been defined in several ways depending on the background and orientation of the author as well as what he or she wants to convey. In his views on marriage, Saxton (1980) expressed the opinion that in all the thousands of societies that have been investigated by sociologists and anthropologists, marriage has three universal characteristics although there are rare exceptions.

Firstly, marriage is legitimate sexual relations between two persons who recognize and agree to some form of civil or sacred contract that verifies the expected performance of the marriage and spells out the reciprocal obligations of each toward the other and toward their future offspring. Secondly, the marriage and contract are publicly recorded in some ceremonial observance, usually a wedding and a feast. Thirdly, each partner shares a division of labour much of which is gender based, although the nature of the gender-based role behaviour varies from society to society. According to Nukunya (2003) marriage is a union between a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation. Olson and Defrain (2000) also saw marriage as the emotional and legal commitment of two people to share emotional and physical intimacy, various tasks and economic resources. They argued that the emotional and legal commitment of the persons involved in the marriage relationship leads to the total fulfilment of each individual.

Essuman (2004) giving a religious definition of marriage from the Christian perspective perceived it as a union or a covenant between a man and a woman in which the couple legitimately share their bodies in physical (sexual) intimacy, have emotional, social, economic and spiritual commitments or relationships aimed at the total fulfilment of each spouse as a whole human being. The definitions above imply that certain goals and responsibilities must be achieved in marriage to enhance its growth, stability and satisfaction. This also suggest that individuals entering into marriage must be given education to prepare them before they get initiated into it. It is in the light of this that premarital counselling is imperative for every would-be married couple in other to avoid chaotic and discouraging rate of marital dissatisfaction.

In support of the above, Heward-Mills (2011) saw marriage as an institution ordained and ordered by God, thus the process of entering into this institution should be critically looked at before an individual enters into it. This ultimately calls for preparations through education and orientation by expert in the field of marriage. Also, seeing marriage as an essential component to the development and enlargement of kinship ties, which are a characteristic feature of African society, Gyekye (1998) was of the opinion that marriage is so important that every man or woman who reaches adulthood is expected to marry and bear children. He opined that as part of the puberty rites that usher young people into adulthood in the African traditional setting, these young people are educated in matters of sex, marriage, and family life and are thus made aware of the responsibilities of adulthood. This form of education was seen as a preparation period for marriage in the traditional setting in Africa and that before one enters into it, the person knows what is expected of him in terms of his roles in a marriage relationship.

Notwithstanding the views of the African traditional society on marriage preparation, Christians all over the world attach much importance to marriage preparation programmes. Teaching on the biblical principles about marriage, Collins (2007) was of the view that Christians have a believe that God who created both male and female and initiated marriage has given guidelines for marriage in the pages of the scriptures. These guidelines need to be taught clearly at home and church during marriage preparation stage before one gets initiated into the marriage. Observations made around the world shows that churches have instituted marriage preparation programmes and even have different names but synonymous like marriage schools, marriage preparatory classes, singles classes, pre-marriage school, pre-marriage classes or premarital counselling for it. However, only a small percentage of couples seek formal marriage preparation (Stanley & Markman, 1996).

Premarital counselling and/or education is a therapeutic couple intervention that occurs with couples who plan to marry (Murray & Murray, 2004). It is "a skill training procedure which aims at providing couples with information on ways to improve their relationship once they are married" (Senediak, 1990, p. 26). Typically, couples who participate in premarital counselling demonstrate overall positive psychological health (Stahmann, 2000) and do not have serious relationship problems (Senediak, 1990). Collins (2007) reported that the first mention of premarital counselling was in 1928 and had the purpose of teaching about marriage, assessing readiness for marriage, exploring possible problem areas and planning the wedding. Collins was of the belief that premarital counselling seeks to prevent marital problems and personal differences that could make life difficult, unfulfilled and unproductive after marriage. It is likewise meant to prepare the couple to have happy and stable marital life.

Goerz and Goerz (2004) asserted that premarital counselling is largely learning and discovery counselling. There is a body of knowledge that counselees likely do not know which they need to know. They opined that the goal of premarital counselling is to help the would-be couple to learn to know each other better and to ascertain whether they are the right or suitable partners and whether the timing is right for them to marry. Premarital counselling is a type of therapy that helps couples prepare for marriage and ensure that a spouse and his partner have a strong, healthy relationship - giving them a better chance for a stable and satisfying marriage.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Marriage is a shared responsibility between the couple, the family and the church. Therefore, any problem that affects the marriage affects the church and the larger society. Married partners face challenges like infidelity, financial constraints, and external family pressure due to barrenness and incompatibility due to social class difference before marriage and unemployment leading to over dependence on one of the couples. It is against this background that some churches have instituted mechanisms to curb problems that may erupt before and during marriage. Interventions such as prayers and advice from the church members and leaders appear inadequate in dealing with the problem. Owing to this the church has introduced a premarital counselling and marriage preparatory programmes to assist it members to have a fruitful and more satisfying marriage. Yet some married members in the church are still battling with marital dissatisfaction after going through the premarital counselling.

Notwithstanding the premarital counselling and other marriage preparation programmes put in place by some churches to prevent marital dissatisfaction, divorce rate seems to be in the ascendancy. Ashdown, Hackathorn, and Clark (2011) explaining the National Vital Statistics Reports (NVSR) of 2009, stated that approximately 50% of marriages in the United States end in divorce, and this trend of high divorce rates is apparent in countries around the world. The situation in Ghana is not different. For instance, the 2010 Population and Housing Census (PHC) of the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) indicated that the national divorce rate is 4.2 percent for population 18 years and older, with a total number of 573,235 divorced cases recorded. Out of this total number, Ashanti region alone recorded 124,406 divorced cases. The report also specified that Kumasi metropolis which is part of the Ashanti region recorded 3.0 percent of divorce cases during the 2010 census (GSS, 2012).

Adjassah(2015) reported by quoting the GSS report which indicated that about 600,000 marriages contracted in Ghana in the year 2014 collapsed. Okyere (2015) further reported of mad rush for divorce as more cases pile up in Ashanti region. He stated that statistical records from the legal department of the Registrar of Marriages and divorce at the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (K.M.A) of the Ashanti Region pointed to a rather disturbing fact where a lot of divorce cases were recorded. Supporting these assertions with figures, the report further indicated that, the declaration of customary divorce at the law courts increased from 200 in 2009 to 268 in 2013. These figures sound alarming because churches including the Christ Apostolic Church International have introduced premarital counselling and other marriage preparatory programmes to curtail this menace. This ultimately calls for an assessment into the nature and content of premarital counselling in the Church.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to assess the nature and topics discussed during premarital counselling sessions.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To assess the nature of premarital counselling in churches for spouses before marriage
- To assess the content of premarital counselling in churches before marriage

1.5. Research Questions

In other to fulfill the objectives of the study the following research questions were raised:

- What is the nature of premarital counselling in Bantama Area of Christ Apostolic Church International before marriage?
- What is the content of premarital counselling in Bantama Area of the Christ Apostolic Church International?

1.6. Significance of the Study

This research is expected to add to already existing knowledge on premarital counselling. The findings of this study could serve as a guide for counsellors during premarital counselling session to put much emphasis on things that will sustain and bring satisfaction in marriages. The information obtained from the study will go a long way to improve upon the practice of premarital counselling in the studied church as well as most churches in Ghana.

The study is also significant because it brings to light the contents of premarital counselling. These will inform important policy issues concerning the practice of premarital counselling in churches, especially the Christ Apostolic Church International. That is, there will be a modification of the existing policy on the practice of premarital counselling based on the findings of the study.

1.7. Delimitation

The study focused on premarital counselling even though there are other equally important areas or types of counselling such as vocational and educational counselling. This area is being considered because premarital counselling concentrates on preparing would-be married couple on major or all areas of life which may include education, vocational or personal social developmental issues.

The study was also concentrated on one of the "four leading Classic Pentecostal Churches" (Larbi, 2001. p. 69) in the Kumasi Metropolis. That is the Christ Apostolic Church International, Bantama Assembly. This is because, the church has a doctrine on marriage and marriage preparation and have put in place structures for preparing their members for marriage. For instance, the church has a policy of allowing their prospective couples to go through days of marriage education before the marriage ceremony is conducted in the church. There is also a marriage/counselling committee, and other structures meant to prepare their members for marriage.

1.8. Operational Definition of Terms

1.8.1. Assembly

Refers to a local branch church in the Christ Apostolic Church International

1.8.2. Content of Premarital Counselling

This refers to the various topics expected to have been sufficiently discussed during premarital counselling

1.8.3. Nature of Premarital Counselling

This involves the place for the premarital counselling, who offers it and how it is offered, as well as adhering to the ethical issues such as confidentiality and privacy, which is geared towards making informed decision by the prospective spouse concerning the future of the marriage.

1.8.4. Premarital Counselling

Premarital counselling is a process by which a trained married and family life counsellor form a trusting relationship with a person(s) who is/are preparing to marry; learn to know the partner better, prepare for marriage and ensure that there is a strong and healthy relationship in their future marital life.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

Sequential explanatory mixed method was employed by the researcher. Creswell (2009) pointed out that sequential explanatory mixed method procedures are those in which the researcher seeks to elaborate on or expand on the findings of one method with another method. Creswell further posited that the study may begin with quantitative method in which a theory or concept is tested, followed by a qualitative method involving detailed exploration with a few individuals. This approach is in two phases. That is, it is characterized by a collection and analysis of quantitative data using questionnaire in the first phase, followed by a collection and analysis of qualitative data using interview in the

second phase. The purpose for using this approach was to use qualitative results of the interview to assist in confirming, explaining and interpreting the findings of a quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire.

2.2. Population

The target population from the Bantama Assembly were all married spouses and they were estimated to be about 400. This estimation was done in consultation with the Head pastor who was in-charge of the Church. These respondents from the church were chosen because; the researcher was only dealing with spouses or the married who went through premarital counselling before marriage. It was noted that the entire church's population does not only contain the latter but also includes children, the youth who are unmarried as well as adults who are unmarried, separated or divorced.

2.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

2.3.1. Sample

The sample for the study was 196 premarital counselled spouses. The 196 premarital counselled spouses were selected based on the table developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). On the table, when a population size is 2600, the sample size should be 335. The researcher therefore chose 196 as a sample size for the quantitative data since his population size was 400. Arriving at the 196-sample size, it is noted that 16.1% of the total population of the married in the 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.

2.3.2. Sampling Technique

A lottery random sampling technique was used to select all the respondent from the church. This method was appropriate because according to Amedahe and Gyimah (2000), it gives all units (premarital counselled spouses) of the target population an equal chance of being selected. Also, the participants of the study were similar in characteristics of interest because they all went through premarital counselling in the same church. The lottery was done by the researcher by writing down the names of the premarital counselled spouses on pieces of paper and then put in a container. They were completely mixed and then the names were picked up from the container without looking into it one after the other. When a paper was selected and the name of the person recorded, it was thrown back into the container before the next one was picked. When an already drawn, paper was selected for a second time or third time it was ignored and thrown back into the container.

Purposive sampling technique was also used to select those who went through premarital counselling from the church for the interview. The researcher towed to Sarantakos (1997) assertion that the researcher will choose subjects who in his opinion are thought to be relevant to the research topic. Supporting Sarantakos (1997), Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) were of the view that purposive sampling is used in order to access 'knowledgeable people'; those who have in-depth knowledge about a particular issue, maybe by virtue of their expertise or experience.

2.4. Instrumentation

2.4.1. Questionnaire

The researcher used a self-developed closed-ended questionnaire to obtain information on the subject under consideration. The closed-ended questionnaire was used by the researcher because it "promises a wider coverage since he could approach respondents more easily than any other method" (Amedahe & Gyimah, 2000. p. 175) and the issue of no contact with the respondent and therefore no information could be obtained dealt with. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section involved items that sought to report the nature of premarital counselling taking place in the Bantama Assembly of the Christ Apostolic Church International before marriage. This consisted of ten (10) items. The items were grouped into two categories – general practice of effective premarital counselling and ethical issues on one part as well as the Counsellor's personality and subject-matter knowledge on another part. Items 1, 2, 4, 7 and 9 of the questionnaires were classified under the general practice of effective premarital counselling and ethical issues while items 3, 5, 6, 8 and 10 were also classified under counsellor's personality and subject-matter knowledge. The researcher used a Likert scale. This consisted of a set of items of equal value which included set of response categories constructed around a continuum of agreement/disagreement to which subjects are asked to respond. The researcher employed the four-answer response categories which ranges from 'strongly agree' through 'agree' and 'disagree' to 'strongly disagree', including numerical values, for example from 1 to 4 respectively. The researcher used the four-point Likert scale because according to Lozano, García-Cueto, and Muñiz (2008) the number of response options employed may range from two to nine; thus, the scale used in this study is within the range. The researcher further agrees with Lozano, García-Cueto and Muñiz assertion that, as the number of response alternatives increases, both reliability and validity are improved. The optimum number of alternatives is between four and seven. With fewer than four alternatives the reliability and validity decrease.

2.4.2. Interview

Also, a semi-structured interview guide was prepared to elicit information from the purposively sampled nine respondents who had earlier responded to the questionnaire to express their view, feelings and experiences freely. Their responses were used to help in explaining and validating the response of the questionnaire. The interview guide consisted

of five items which addressed the nature of premarital counselling before marriage and the content of issues sufficiently discussed during premarital counselling.

2.5. Data Collection Procedures

To collect quantitative data, a questionnaire was prepared. This was face and content validated by the researcher and other researchers in the field of counselling. The validated questionnaire was pilot tested before used for the study. Its administration was done by the researcher. The questionnaires and the interviews were administered after church services on Sundays.

2.6. Data Analysis

2.6.1. Analysis of Quantitative Data

The quantitative data was carefully edited, coded and entered into the computer and analyzed statistically using Predictive Analytics Software (PASW) version 22.0 software. The editing was done by the researcher to ensure completeness. Agreeing with Amedahe and Gyimah (2000), to check for completeness means the researcher must check and ensure that there was an answer to every item on the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were considered during the analysis of the nature of premarital counselling and the topics discussed during the premarital counselling. Also, mean and standard deviation were also used to help in explaining the nature of premarital counselling as well as the topics discussed during the premarital counselling sessions.

3.6.2. Analysis of Qualitative Data

In analyzing the qualitative data, themes were developed based on the research questions. In support of this, Kusi (2012) is of opinion that this analytical strategy requires the researcher to organize or prepare the data, immerse oneself in and transcribe that data, generate themes as well as describing them. Transcription is a process of converting audio tape recordings or field tapes into text data (Avoke, 2005). The transcribed data was used to develop themes in the research questions raised. Verbatim quotations of respondents that were consistent with the themes were used in the presentations and discussions. To ensure that the responses of the participants were kept confidential, verbatim quotations were labelled as PMCS 1, PMCS 2, and PMCS 3 and so on. This acronym - PMCS simply stands for Pre-Marital Counsellor Spouse. The 1, 2, 3, Show the number of respondents.

3. Results and Findings

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Results of Quantitative Data

3.1.1.1. Research Question One

What is the nature of premarital counselling in Bantama Assembly of Christ Apostolic Church International before marriage? In answering this, section one of the questionnaire was used and thus Table 1 below shows the results of the responses.

	Items	Agree		Disagree		Mean	Std Dev.
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
1	Given of advice, suggestions and recommendations.	194	99.0	2	1.0	3.39	.511
2	Provision of conducive atmosphere for counselling	150	76.5	46	23.5	3.04	.713
3	Professional competence and subject-matter knowledge of counsellor	179	91.3	17	8.7	3.20	.571
4	Ensured privacy and confidentiality.	23	11.7	173	88.2	3.11	.691
5	Counsellor helped clients to understand topical issues.	191	97.4	5	2.6	3.36	.502
6	The Counsellor had patience	183	93.4	13	6.6	3.32	.791
7	Admonishing and warning by the counsellor.	158	80.6	38	19.4	3.01	.904
8	Official termination of counselling sessions	126	64.3	70	35.7	2.57	.667
9	Interacted with Counsellor for number sessions.	123	62.8	73	37.2	2.76	.832
10	Satisfied with the counselling services rendered.	144	73.5	52	26.5	2.93	.729

Table 1: Nature of Premarital Counselling

Source: Field Data, 2018. Premarital Counsellor Spouses (N=196)

Table 1 shows the nature of premarital counselling in the study area. In summary, the table reveals that majority of respondents agreed to items 1, 2, 7 and 9. They also disagreed with item 4 of the questionnaire. These items were classified under the general practice and ethical issues in counselling. More so, majority of the respondents agreed to items 3, 5, 6, 8 and 10 which were also classified under counsellor's personality and subject-matter knowledge in premarital counselling. Items 1, 2 and 7 shows that advice, suggestions and recommendations were given, a conducive atmosphere was provided by the counsellor, admonishing and warning were also given by the counsellor as well as privacy and

confidentiality of issues during the premarital counselling were not safeguarded. Further, the counsellor's personality and subject-matter knowledge encouraging based on the results as indicated by responses to items 3, 5, 6, 8 and 10. These items include professional competence and subject-matter knowledge of counsellor, counsellor helping clients to understand topical issues, the counsellor having patience, the counsellor officially terminating counselling sessions and the counsellor helping client to be satisfied with the counselling services rendered.

3.1.1.2. Research Question Two

What is the content of premarital counselling in Bantama Assembly of the Christ Apostolic Church International? Responses from the participants based on section two of the questionnaire were used to answer this question. Table 2 below shows the responses:

	Items	Mean (M)	Std Deviation (SD)
1	Planning the wedding	2.89	.911
2	Communication in marriage	3.38	.527
3	Pregnancy, Labour and Childcare in marriage	2.79	.828
4	Parenting and child upbringing in marriage	2.87	.805
5	How to cope with marital stress	2.96	.640
6	Emotional management in marriage	2.74	.696
7	Financial management in marriage	2.92	.844
8	Marital roles	3.23	.779
9	Romance and Sexual issues in marriage	3.11	.795
10	Religiosity	2.93	.725
11	How to deal with In-law issues	2.85	.731
12	Fun and leisure with partner	2.61	.750
13	Commitment to the marriage	3.21	.579
14	Respect, appreciation and understanding in marriage	3.32	.707
15	Conflict resolution in marriage	3.03	.665

Table 2: Topics Sufficiently Discussed During Premarital Counselling Sessions
Source: Field Data, 2018. Premarital Counselling Spouses (N=196)

Table 2 depicts the topics sufficiently discussed during the premarital counselling. In summary, the table gives the impression that topics were discussed and more so, some topics were sufficiently discussed during premarital counselling than others. Further, the table indicated which topic was discussed more based on the respondents. The bar graph below clearly depicts which topic was highly or sufficiently discussed.

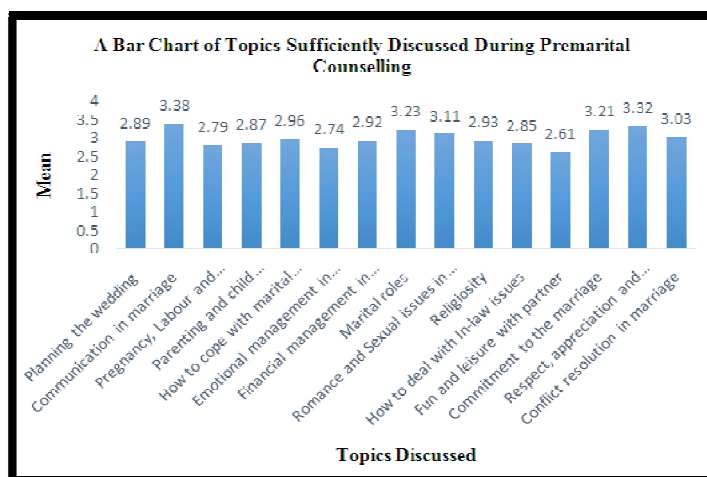


Figure 1: A Bar Chart of Topics Sufficiently Discussed During Premarital Counselling

3.1.2. Results of Qualitative Data

The qualitative data was collected based on the interview conducted. Below are the results of the interview which is based on the themes developed from the research questions:

3.1.2.1. Nature of Premarital Counselling

On the nature of premarital counselling in Bantama Assembly of the Christ Apostolic Church International before marriage, participants have various opinions. The responses from the respondents indicated that their premarital counselling was not done in privacy as they had wished. This is evident by what a respondent said:

"We did our counselling outside the church auditorium. The church counsellors brought the chairs outside and the process took place. These made me feel uncomfortable because, I felt people around the church premises will hear and know what we were discussing. I'm the type who feels shy about certain things. They talked to us by advising us on certain issues in marriage". [PMCS 2]

This response shows that the counselling process did not take place in any counselling room devoid of external interference and that people passing by could see and hear what was going on. This assertion confirms what the quantitative results gave. According to the quantitative data, majority (88.2%) of the respondents stated that, their premarital counselling was not conducted in privacy and the discussion was not confidential.

Further, majority of the respondents were of the view that the counsellors patiently offered them advice, suggestions and recommendations concerning the future of their marriage. Where they needed to warn them, they did so. The following quotation from a respondent suggests the above views:

"The counsellors brought the chairs outside the church premises and the process took place. They talked to us by advising us on certain issues in marriage. The talking was not orderly as we had wished it should be. But they patiently dealt with every issue concerning the future of our marriage in detailed. They cautioned and warned us about some challenges in marriage" [PMCS 3]

These results also suggest that the counselling was not done in an enclosed place. Also, even though the counsellors had the patience to take the prospective spouses through the counselling process, there was advice, suggestions and recommendations. These views validate the quantitative data that the counsellors, offered advice, suggestions and recommendations with vast majority of respondents agreeing to this assertion. Also, most of the respondents were of the view that the counsellors understood them and moreover made them understand issues concerning their marital life. This was expressed when most of the respondents said they showed naivety of certain essential issues in marriage. The following verbatim quotation showed some opinions expressed by a respondent:

"...Hmmm, at a point in time during our premarital counselling, we did not understand certain fundamental issues. In fact, we were totally ignorant, but the counsellors understood our naivety and helped us to understand ourselves and the issues as well". [PMCS 4]

This excerpt puts the personality of the counsellors in focus. It suggests that the counsellors understood the clients and further made them understood the issues concerning their future marital life. The above quotations additionally confirm what the quantitative data revealed. It showed that majority 191 (97.4%) constituting a mean of 3.36 of respondents agreed that they understood the issues concerning the future of marriage.

3.1.2.2. Contents of Premarital Counselling

In another development, the researcher further elicited from the respondents, topics sufficiently discussed during their premarital counselling in Bantama Assembly of the Christ Apostolic Church International; varied views were expressed. Below is how a respondent expressed his views:

"... I could remember they talked to us about the need to forgive each other if a partner offends the other. I remember they once taught us that, proper communication can help resolve all issues bothering the marriage. They also talked to us about constantly reading the word of God (Bible).They also talked about respecting our in-laws, because they are all stakeholders to ensure that the marriage stands. If couples will enjoy peaceful marriage, in-laws should be treated well with high dignity and respect. Also, they helped us to plan our wedding. I quiet remember they asked us how much we were spending in the wedding. In fact, I nearly got irritated because, I thought the counsellors were treading beyond their boundaries. Furthermore, issues of child-bearing were briefly considered. For instance, they asked us how many children we will like to give birth to and even if there is no child, what will be our reactions in the marriage. How will we respond to societal and family pressures on child-bearing?" [PMCS 7]

Based on the above quotation, it could be realised that communication, forgiveness, respect, in-law issues, planning the wedding and childbearing were some of the issues discussed. This further validates the results of the quantitative data. The quantitative results reveal that topics such as communication in marriage, respect, how to deal with in-law issues, planning the wedding, parenting and child upbringing in marriage among other topics were discussed.

On the contrary, some respondents expressed different opinion to the above. They are of the view that no specific topic was considerably and orderly discussed during their premarital counselling. The extract below shows the response of an interviewee:

"...there wasn't any issue or a specific topic to discuss. It was in a form of informal and usual communication amongst us. For example, there wasn't anything like discussing about financial life, sex life and others as its being done in another jurisdiction. In our situation, it didn't happen. I will say it was a mixture of many things. Moreover, even though so many things were talked about, the issues were not adequately discussed so that we can make an informed decision concerning the future of our marriage" [PMCS 8]

The quote gives the impression that the issue of taking one topic and sufficiently discussing it exhaustively did not happen. It also shows that the stages of counselling in a more professional manner were not followed. The excerpt suggests that the couples might have benefited from views of other couples from other churches concerning premarital counselling. It may also have been that they might have attended other marriage programs outside their church and thus, might have known that during premarital counselling, topics such as financial life, sex life and others need to be discussed to equip the prospective spouses.

Further, some respondents claimed that topics discussed were based on the questionnaire they completed before the premarital counselling. They were of the view that the counsellors took the questions from the questionnaire thus,

they saw the entire counselling process as a form of questions and answer stage. This is expressed in a quotation below by a respondent:

"...All the issues were in the form of questions and answers. That is, he asks questions then I will answer; as if he is looking out for specific response. After my response, he will only advice or warn me on certain dos and don'ts in marriage". [PMCS 9]

This quote further puts the stages, phases or process of counselling in perspective. It revealed that the counsellors did not follow the counselling process also known as the stages of counselling; but questions and answers process. Even though the process is viewed as questions and answers by the respondents, it could be deduced that the questions were framed around a specific subject or topic. The qualitative data further confirms the responses of the quantitative results that some topics were sufficiently discussed during premarital counselling in the Bantama Assembly of the Christ Apostolic Church International.

3.2. Key Findings of the Study

The following were the key findings of the study. It came to light that general practice of effective premarital counselling and ethical issues under the nature of premarital counselling were violated. Also, the personality and the subject matter knowledge of the Counsellors were considerably good. The study also revealed that some topics were sufficiently discussed during premarital counselling and that some issues were highly discussed or given more preference than others.

4. Discussion of the Results

It emerged from the study that certain fundamental issues such as general practice of effective premarital counselling and ethical issues need to be addressed. This is because to a greater extent, majority of the respondents were of the view that they were given advice, suggestion and recommendations which violate what effective counselling stands for. This trend suggests that something fundamental was not being done properly in the study area to promote effective premarital counselling.

Commenting on the effectiveness of premarital counselling, McGeorge and Carlson (2006) indicated that suitability for marriage and marriage desire are advanced for individuals who partook in premarital counselling programs, in comparison to the individuals who were placed in control groups. Thus, if premarital counselling is effective, potential spouses learn from each other very well. Giving advice, suggestion and recommendations to prospective spouses is a one-dimensional way of communication in counselling and does not promote learning. Also, giving advice, suggestions and recommendations makes the premarital counselling leave the prospective spouse idle without contributing to the counselling process. This practice in the study area which is being part of the nature of premarital counselling, contravenes what Taylor and Buku (2003) stated that in offering counselling, the process should not be advice giving, suggestion or recommendation.

It also came to light that, there was admonishing and warning by the counsellor concerning the future of marriage. This practice also violates Bedu-Addo (2014) assertion on what counselling is not when he was commenting on the nature of counselling. Bedu-Addo is of the view that counselling is not influencing behaviour by admonishing, warning, threatening or compelling with or without the use of physical force or coercion. Admonishing warning and threatening may put some sort of fear in the prospective spouses and may result in developing bad perception about an entire marital life. Also, in line with the nature of premarital counselling, the study revealed that the counselling was not conducted in privacy and discussions also not confidential. This was confirmed by some respondents in the qualitative results:

"...We did our counselling outside the church auditorium. The church counsellors brought the chairs outside and the process took place". [PMCS 2]

"...The counsellors brought the chairs outside and the process took place". [PMCS 3]

The above responses or results further suggest that certain fundamental and ethical issues such as confidentiality and privacy were violated. This practice also goes contrary to the assertion by Bedu-Addo (2014) that counselling is conducted in privacy and the discussion is confidential. More so it contradicts the belief of Bedu-Addo that "confidentiality is the prima facie of counselling" (p. 131). To him, counselling thrives on the ability of the counsellor to keep whatever he is told by the client within the precincts of the counselling room.

Corey (2009) tends to agree to the above discussions about confidentiality as a basic ethical issue that needs to be considered to enhance counsellor-client relations. Corey stressed that confidentiality is central to developing a trusting and productive client-therapist relationship. Because no genuine counselling can occur unless clients trust in the privacy of their revelations to their counsellors, professionals have the responsibility to define the degree of confidentiality that can be promised. Counsellors have an ethical and legal responsibility to discuss the nature and purpose of confidentiality with their clients early in the counselling process. This enables the client and other subsequent clients to have a lot of confidence in the counsellor.

In view of the above, it could be said that the prospective spouses in the study area did not feel comfortable by opening up to the counselling process. This may be because, since the counselling was done in the open, the assumption was that by passers may hear what was being discussed as well as the responses of the would-be spouses. This might have affected their responses to any voluntary change the counsellor would have wished it occurs.

Undeniably, other aspect of the nature of the entire premarital counselling in the study area looks encouraging. It is gratifying that overwhelming majority of the respondents agreed that the personality and the subject-matter knowledge of the counsellors were satisfactory. This is evident in their responses to items such as: The counsellor providing the

conducive atmosphere for the spouses to make informed decision concerning the future of their marriage, the counsellor demonstrating professional competence and subject-matter knowledge, the counsellor understanding spouses and made them understand issues concerning the future of their marital life, having patience in dealing with every topic, official termination of the entire counselling sessions before the marriage ceremony was conducted, and interaction with the counsellor for number sessions even before the wedding ceremony. This result suggests that, what Assoah (2013) stated as the nature of counselling which premarital counselling is not an exception is valid. According to Assoah, counselling is concerned with influencing voluntary behaviour change on the part of the client/ counsellee. His claim that the purpose of counselling is to provide conditions that facilitate voluntary change has been confirmed by spouses in their response to the interview and the questionnaires.

In addition, the study sought to find out the content of premarital counselling. In other words, which topics are sufficiently discussed during the counselling sessions was assessed. The study revealed that out of the 15 items or topics which are to be discussed during premarital counselling, almost all the topics were said to have been discussed according to the respondents. These topics were: Communication in marriage; Commitment to the marriage; Respect, appreciation and understanding in marriage; Conflict resolution in marriage; Marital roles, Romance and Sexual issues in marriage; In-law issues; Religiosity; Parenting and child upbringing in marriage and Planning the wedding. Most of these topics were among the five topics or items rated by Murray (2006) as the most important to address in premarital counselling. According to Murray, the five topics are: (a) commitment to the marriage, (b) communication skills, (c) attitudes and feelings toward marriage, (d) conflict resolution, and (e) the importance of spending time with one's spouse. Amato and Previti (2003), Munroe (2012) tend to agree and support Commitment to the marriage and communication skills as most important to be discussed during premarital counselling.

In support of the above discussions, Amato and Previti (2003) stressed that the major reason for marital breakdown is communication conflict between spouses. This confirms why communication in marriage should be a topic or an issue to be discussed during premarital counselling. More so, confirming why commitment should be an issue of concern during premarital counselling, Munroe (2012) added that lack of commitment is among the reasons why many marriages do not last. This further suggests that commitment in marriage should not be disregarded by counsellors during premarital counselling. It should be discussed thoroughly so that couples will see its relevance and put in every effort to be committed to this "life -blood of marriage" (Munroe, 2012, p. 64). To this effect, Cabrera and Aya (2014) explained that commitment may contribute to a more lasting relationship. This observation shows that topics adequately discussed during premarital counselling could affect the marital relationship in future.

The study further revealed that some topics were sufficiently discussed than others. This implies that some specific topics were given preference over others. In effects, topics which were given less attention by the counsellors during premarital counselling sessions unknowingly might contribute tremendously to marital life than assumed. This further suggests that all topics should be given equal preference in their discussion during premarital counselling.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings and suggestions made by participants, the following recommendations were made: The research findings showed that general practice of effective premarital counselling and ethical issues under the nature of premarital counselling were violated. This involves how and where the counselling is conducted as well as who is offering it. In view of this, it is therefore recommended to churches that a counselling office be created and furnished with resources so that the premarital counselling could be held there. This will enhance or improve upon issues of confidentiality and privacy of clients. In a long term, would-be spouses will open-up to the counselling and be willing to contribute to the premarital counselling.

Also, the findings revealed that topics like: Communication in marriage, respect, appreciation and understanding in marriage, marital roles, commitment to the marriage, romance and sexual issues in marriage, conflict resolution in marriage, how to cope with marital stress, religiosity, financial management in marriage, planning the wedding, parenting and child upbringing in marriage, dealing with in-law issues, pregnancy, labour and childcare in marriage, emotional management in marriage, fun and leisure with partner were discussed during premarital counselling. It further showed that some topics were sufficiently discussed than others. To this effect, it is recommended to marriage counsellors that such topics could be discussed during premarital counselling. Also, during premarital counselling, counsellors should prioritize, and adequate time should be allotted for the discussion of the various topics.

Churches should engage effective and professional counsellors in managing issues of the counselling unit as well as the services. Effective marriage counsellors must have adequate knowledge in premarital counselling and should be in the best position to carry out premarital education to would-be married spouses

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