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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PREMARITAL COUNSELLING PROGRAMS AND CHRISTIAN FAMILY STABILITY IN KISUMU CENTRAL SUB REGION, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Background: Christian families are under threats in Kisumu central sub-Region of Kenya due to destabilization of the covenant of Matrimony, which if practiced would extol family stability. This follows rampant marital instabilities occasioned by among others; inadequacy or lack of premarital counselling programs. In the recent years, Christian premarital counselling programs have proven to be a significant determinant for Christian Family stability. Demand for marriages of covenantal nature have continued to diminish despite the Church's propagation and teachings on the sanctity of marriage and the need for premarital counselling programs. The government's policies against all forms of illegal and unregistered marriages; the insistence that permanent separation and divorce could only be granted by courts on the evidence that all other forms of spousal mediation, counselling notwithstanding, had been exhausted, were consequently enacted to mitigate matrimonial instabilities. These were meant to foster family stability; which has not been the case. **Objective:** This study sought to examine the relationship between premarital counselling programs and family stability. **Methods:** It adopted a mixed methods design involving correlational and descriptive approaches. The target population was obtained from 26 Churches under the National Council of Churches of Kenya, with a target population of 10,997. The sample size was 462 respondents obtained using the fisher's formula. Snowball as a form of purposive sampling was adopted to identify respondents. Stratified sampling was used to get the number of respondents in every Church. Semi-structured questionnaires, key informant interview schedules and Focus Group Discussions were adopted. Pilot study was conducted among similar Church families from Kakamega on a sample consisting of 10% of the respondents to establish reliability of the instruments. Responses in the questionnaires were tabulated, coded and processed using computer Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) program version 22 for quantitative data analysis. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were employed, together with inferential statistics such as Pearson's Correlation and Multiple Linear Regression. **Results:** The study established a positive relationship between response of premarital counselling programs and family stability. **Conclusion:** In conclusion, the relationship between the Covenant of Matrimony and stability of Christian families in Kisumu Central Sub-Region was found to be positive.

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INTRODUCTION

Pre-Marital Counselling Programs and Christian Family Stability: The covenant of matrimony is a noteworthy concern to the Church as manifested in her pastoral family ministry. This ministry is aimed at a progressive contribution to the life of the Christian families (Plumb, 2011). Christian marriage emphasises four intrinsically related elements. These elements include unity, fidelity, indissolubility and openness to fertility (Randy, 2016).

The elements endorse sustainability of stable family lives, making the world a better place to live in (Mitchel, 2019). In the context of Christian faith, God detests divorce, separation, sexual liberation, prostitution and bastardism. He commands a godly offspring, who are brought up in stable, functional families, comprised of both parents for an emotionally balanced society (Mal. 2:14-16). To underscore the momentous role of both parents for perpetuity of their matrimonial affinity, in an indifferent modus, God prohibited bastards and all illegitimate children from joining His assembly, up to the tenth generation (Deut 23:2; Gen: 19:36-38; Gen: 38:12-30). Similarly, in obedience to the divine command, Old Testament Jews regulated all forms of premarital intercourse. Non marital procreation was an absolute prohibition (Mal. 2:14-16).

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Jewish statutes further demanded that children should bear their paternal names and inherit property from such paternal ancestry as enshrined in the scriptures; virtues that could be emulated by contemporary Christians (Prov. 19:14, 13:22; Job 42:15). These sentiments accentuate the connotation of Christian marital stability to establish the well-being of family lives in the society (Mitchel, 2019).

In the US, studies by Becvar (2013), Boss, Bryan & Mancini (2017), Masten & Monn (2015) and Walsh (2016) indicate that families often suffer from effects of traumatic loss. They also suffer from violence, separations, injury, torture and homelessness. Families consequently reel under the weight of other consequences of economic, natural, and political influential circumstances and persuasions; rudiments which all undermine religious, social and family stability. These adverse dynamics generate dysfunctionality within families. They also exacerbate an increase in a number of children being raised in non-traditional family backgrounds; a fundamental which is not healthy for the development of such children (Brown *et al.*, 2016).

Premarital counselling programs therefore, play a greater role in ensuring marital sustenance for family stability. They are founded on the fact that all families do have their low and high moments. Such programs are aimed at imparting knowledge and skills to couples on how to manage marriage and family challenges, sustain the marriage and family and finally, to improve the relationship among married couples themselves; with their children, and also with their immediate family members (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). KruegelFarr, *et al.* (2013) argues that premarital counselling programs nurture positive change of attitude among participating members. Such virtues become beneficial to their future marriage commitment and families. However, Pre-marital counselling can also provide a pedestal for marriage disqualification. This is firmly stated by Stanley (2001) who says: Delay and deliberation can help some couples discover dynamics that may lead them not to marry at all, saving them from the agony of marital distress and divorce later. In whichever case, premarital counselling programs prepare couples to embrace marriage and the challenges entailed in it, providing them with an enabling environment for the realization of their marriage vocation (Duncan, Childs, & Larson, 2010). This is because, sometimes couples enter into a marriage relationship with different expectations that may be contrary to the Christian covenant of marriage itself and, therefore, they need to be guided to cultivate the true values of marriage for the success of their relationship and families (David, & Stafford, 2015). These programs are further preventative measures that address marriage and family challenges in addition to risk factors like extramarital affairs, violence, anger, etc. (Sauerheber & Bitter, 2013; Stahmann, 2000).

Couples are counselled to resolve and lessen possible conflicts, while creating awareness of unresolved issues that can cause unnecessary pain and agony in their upcoming marriage commitments (Davis, 2015). This is well captured by Mobegi, *et al* (2016), who observe that Christian premarital counselling involves training couples on good communication skills, financial management, and sexual intimacy under the frame of biblical determination in the facilitation of their marriages.

Schmidt, *et al.*, (2016) contest that early premarital counselling helps to prevent formation of bad relationship habits among partners. They also uphold maintenance of healthy relationships. Moreover, couples who take up premarital counselling sessions learn about intimacy, communication skills, family issues, finances, respectful and satisfying conflict resolution measures. Scott's, (2013) argument, however, is of the purview that premarital counselling is an educational platform for couples. That it is a future-oriented measure; geared toward helping couples develop, enhance, and advance eminent relations and interpersonal skills in their future marriages, such that unhealthy relational differences are addressed before the wedding ceremony. On the contrary, a study by Cobb and Sullivan (2001), established that wives who participated in relationship education reported having experienced a decline in marital satisfaction as opposed to wives who did not participate. This means that marital and family education imparted in the premarital programs do not necessarily imply quality and satisfaction in marriage and family relations; education has little or no significant impact on the success of marriage and family relationships.

Joshua & Shannon (2015), postulate that Christian premarital counselling increases marital happiness. This is also captured by (Murray & Murray, 2004) who claim that Christian couples who embrace premarital counselling demonstrate positive psychological health, which contribute to less divorce chances since they are less affected by relationship distress. In support of this, Tambling & Glebova (2013) claim that Christian premarital counselling reduces chances of predisposing factors to marital problems and thus, moderate family instabilities. Within the context of this religious purveyance, Ezenweke & Kanu (2012) observed that Christian premarital counselling sets standards, and encourages cultivation of marital virtues. This is in particular, the theological virtue of love and the cardinal virtues of prudence of character, honesty, modesty and integrity. These elements influence and shapes the moral conscience of those in marriage. Carla, *et al.*, (2014) in a specific way proclaims that Christian premarital counselling assist women to develop gender and religious-based values of engagement, compassion, selfsacrifice, obedience and humility. While in a general way, Rokach & Philibert-Lignieres (2015), emphasized that Christian virtues are significant in guiding married couples to desist from any destructive behaviours such as extramarital affairs, abusive relationships, etc. They nonetheless, champion intimacy and bonding among married couples. On extramarital affair, Duggal, *et al.*, (2001) contends that it is one of the most lethal venoms in families and causes a breach of trust and a violation of marriage vows, necessitating a call for premarital counselling for stable families. Thus, a study by Ansah-Hughes, *et al.*, (2015) in Ghana and Nganga and Wasanga (2010) among PCEA Church members in Kiambu, Kenya, both established that over 90 percent of the respondents considered pre-marital counselling sessions useful in equipping members with interpersonal skills related to many factors that predispose extramarital affairs, including finances, sexuality and communication. These programmes were also found to be effective in discouraging family instabilities and extramarital affairs by enhancing marital quality and exposing Christians to moral messages through spiritual counselling (Burdette, Ellison, Sherkat & Gore, 2007).

Problem Statement: Christian families, perceived as sacrosanct institutions for perpetuity of human race (Malachi, 2:14-16; Gen. 1:26-31; 2:24), are under imminent threats of marital disruptions. This follows persistent marital instabilities, evidenced by a trail of divorce, separations and family breakdown cases in the family law courts (Noebel, 2016). Demand for covenantal marriages continue to diminish despite the Church's propagation and teachings on the need for premarital counselling, sanctity of marriage and the need for stable families. The government's policies against unregistered marriages; formulation of family mediation mechanisms (counselling) to precede a grant of divorce by courts, were meant to mitigate matrimonial instabilities. Little progress has been realized toward this course. Consequently, marriage is losing its covenantal significance to the influence of modernity; the traditional and biblical goals of marriage notwithstanding. Among the issues at play are; inadequacy or lack of premarital counselling programs, which undermines the Christian doctrine on matrimonial perpetuity. Premarital counselling programs are certainly, significant determinants for Christian Family stability. If marriages were to endure as divine covenants, family stability would be extolled. These issues are central to the role of premarital counselling programs in matrimony. These gaps, therefore, necessitated the need for this study; to investigate the relationship between matrimony and Christian family stability and specifically, to examine the relationship between premarital counselling and Christian family stability in Kisumu Central Sub-region.

Objective of the Study: To examine the relationship between premarital counselling programs and Christian family stability in Kisumu Central Sub-region.

Theoretical Framework: The study was informed by two theories: the divine command theory and sound house relationship theory.

The Divine Command Theory: The study was guided by Divine Command Theory, proposed by Quinn (2001). Paul Copan advanced the Christian version of this theory; however, the theory had earlier been presented by medieval Theologians such as Augustine of Hippo, William of Ockham, and Robert Adams and recently by Philip Quinn (Evans, 2004). This theory claims that God's commands determine actions to be right or wrong. This, therefore, provides an objective assessment of what is regarded by Christians to be ethical or moral in relation to marriage in the Christian determination or standpoint (Evans, 2004). The theory uses God as the source and inspiration for all principles that guide human relationships in the Christian unit of society.

This theory was applied in this study to establish the level of obedience to matrimonial divine command in underlining individual responses to matrimonial covenants. Adams (1999) posits that during the process of interpretation, we are actually exercising our own sense of morality; which means that we must rely on our own understanding of God's goodness and act on moral laws we deem as consistent with God's commands.

Sound Relationship House Theory: Sound Relationship House Theory is credited to Gottman (1999). It grew out of many years of study on couple interactions, particularly the

elements that ensure sound relationships like friendship, fondness, admiration and an emotional support for the stability of marriage relationships (Henderson, *et al*, 2013). This theory rests on research findings identifying the risk and protective factors related to family stability and satisfaction in marriages, while arguing that affection in the couple relationship is very important in determining the stability and functionality of a marriage (Ibid). Gottman (1999) demonstrated that happiness and positive attitude are primary elements in marriage. He notes that, while unhappy couples and marriages exhibit negativity, happy and stable marriages are not without negativity, but instead, are characterized by positive attitudes that enable them to function. The objectivity of this theory is that it acknowledges the existence of weak and negative moments in marriage relationships; there are no marriages without problems. But it also goes further to address ways in which such moments are handled. Married couples, apart from being together, they are also to nurture values that bring them together and which should not be compromised.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design: This study adopted a mixed methods approach involving both quantitative and qualitative elements. Correlational research approach for quantitative data was embraced to establish the cause-effect relationship between the covenant of matrimony and Christian family stability. This is in agreement with Waters (2017) who demonstrated that a correlational study is a quantitative method of research in which two or more quantitative variables from the same group of participants, are used to determine existence of a relationship (or co variation) between the two variables. Kombo and Tromp (2006) illustrated that quantitative research methods are important where data analysis is mainly statistical. This also informed the choice of this approach for the study.

Target Population: The study target population was obtained from 26 registered Churches in Kisumu Central Sub-Region, with a total target membership of 10,997 (National Church Council of Kenya, 2020). It included married, divorced, separated couples; Church ministers and other deacon leaders of both men and women ministries, married for at least one year. These clusters of informants were all from registered protestant Churches in Kisumu Central sub region as illustrated in table 3.1.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques: Following Rahi (2017), a sample is a small proportion of a population selected for observation and analysis. This study adopted the Fishers Formulae (Glenn Israel, 1992) to determine the sample size. This formulae was employed for its suitability for populations exceeding 10,000.

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

$$= \frac{(1.96)^2 (0.5) (0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$= 384$$

n = desired sample size when the desired sample is greater than 10,000.

Z = the standard normal deviate at the required confidence level (in our case 95%).

p = the proportion in the target population estimated to have characteristics being measured (in our case 0.5)

$q=1-p$.

d = the level of statistical significance set (in our case 0.05 since the confidence level is 95%). One lead minister in each Church was sampled by Census, making the total number of Church ministers 26. A total of 52 other Church deacons (Men and Women leaders respectively) were further censored to participate in FDGs. Therefore, the total sample size was 462 as illustrated in table 3.2 and table 3.3. Snowball was used to identify respondents by marital status, while stratified sampling was used to identify respondents in each of the three strata, in the specific churches. The strata were based on marital status such that the married, divorced and separated couples were each categorised per stratum. This was to ensure equitable distribution as illustrated in table 3.2 above. Married couples were the unit of analysis in this study and thus 50% of the expected sample size, which translated to 192 respondents were considered from this stratum, while the other 50% were each shared equally between divorced and separated couples. In each church, 26 men and women leaders (Deacons) of respective men and women groups were each censored to participate in the focus group discussions. The head ministers in each Church were also censored, making a total of 26 head ministers who were identified as key informants.

RESULTS

Relationship between Pre-Marital Counselling Programs and Christian Family Stability: The study sought to examine the relationship between pre-marital programmes and family stability of Christians in Kisumu Central Sub-region, Kenya. This was informed by the sound relationship house theory, which helped to unwrap values that are vital to the stability of marriage and family relationships. A five point Likert scale was adopted such that: Not at all=1; Small extent=2; Medium extent=3; Large extent=4; Very large extent=5. The respondents were asked indicate their level of agreement to show the relationship between faith-based counseling and stability of Christian marriages and family relationships in the study area. The findings were as shown in table 4.6. From the table, a mean of 3.0980 denoting medium extent was obtained. As a result, it can be concluded that faith-based counseling enables Christian marriage and family stability. This is consistent with the findings of the study by Allgood, *et al* (2008), which established that Christian premarital counselling programs represent the core as they promote high levels of marriage religious values, thus positively influencing the couples' marriage relationships. The finding further agrees with those of Plumb (2011) who established that incorporating religious values in counselling can help married couples experiencing marital problems in their healing process. Further this finding is consistent with those of Worthington, *et al* (2007), who agree that allowing Christ to intervene in marriage conflicts enables spouses to love and forgive one another, thus promoting intimacy with one another and with Christ. The interviews carried out with the key informants considered premarital counselling as important and positively influencing Christian family stability. On this, respondent 2 said: There is a direct relationship between spouses who undergo premarital counseling; couples who go through premarital counseling

are taught how to relate in their marriage, responding to likes and dislikes of their spouses, they are taught on possible marriage challenges and how they can be dealt with and many other teachings like how to bring up their children up with the knowledge of God (KII.2).

While Informants 13 and 16 reiterated that:

.... It is clear that couples who go through premarital counseling are taught how to relate in their marriage, responding to likes and dislikes of their spouses, they are taught on possible marriage challenges and how they can be dealt with and many other teachings like how to bring up their children up with the knowledge of God (KII.13). Premarital counseling is very good because in whatever form my colleagues have said, it still has the same aim of equipping couples with enough skills to defend their marriage stability in adverse situations way before those situations attack (KII.6).

The sentiments were captured in the FDGs. The respondents noted:

...I feel there is direct relationship between spouses who undergo premarital counseling and stability of Christian families. It is clear that couples who go through premarital counseling are taught how to relate in their marriage, responding to likes and dislikes of their spouses, they are taught on possible marriage challenges and how they can be dealt with and many other teachings like how to bring up their children in the knowledge of God which provides a pedestal for mentorship (P13).

....I think there is a good relationship because many people I have seen go for pre-marital counseling end up wedding in church. Premarital counseling is for couples who are strong in faith and most people who go through it enjoy more stable Christian families than those who do not (P1).

.... In my opinion, there is a direct relationship such that spouses who undergo premarital counseling have more stable Christian marriages. My reasons are first because in premarital counseling they are taught how to live their Christian marriage, second they are also prepared of possible challenges and how to deal with them should they arise in future (P2).

Premarital counseling has a direct positive relationship with Christian family stability. It is true that pastors should follow up the values in the children and ensure they retain those values, but parents have also badly failed because they have the children from Monday to Friday or Saturday, during the holidays and the churches only have them one day a week. Failed parenthood is what is killing our society (P14).

The participants, therefore, considered premarital counselling as imperative and positively related to Christian family stability. These findings resonated well with the assertions of Joshua and Shannon (2015) that Christians are found to respond positively towards premarital programs; believing religiosity moderates the likelihood of divorce by increasing levels of marital happiness, more so among those who attend premarital Programs. However, the findings from a minority of the key informants during interviews and FDGs disagreed with the hypothesis that premarital counselling leads to

Christian family stability. Key informant 6, and participant 1 from the FGDs contested that:

Table 3.1 Target Population Distribution

Protestant Churches	Membership
Africa Brotherhood Church	216
African Christian Church	442
African Church of the Holy Spirit	178
African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa	670
African Interior Church	118
African Nineveh Church	793
Church of Africa Simai Mission	245
Church of God in East Africa (Kenya) - Kima Mission	347
Episcopal Church of Africa	143
Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya	466
Friends Church in Kenya	347
Full Gospel Churches of Kenya	833
Kenya Assemblies of God	819
Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya	305
Lyahuka Church of East Africa	87
Maraatha Faith Assemblies	291
Methodist Church in Kenya	303
National Independent Church of Africa	110
Overcoming Faith Center Church of Kenya	407
Pentecostal Evangelistic Fellowship of Africa	551
Reformed Church of East Africa	199
Anglican Church of Kenya	1473
Salvation Army	347
Scriptural Holiness Mission	198
Zion Harvest Mission	633
Redeemed Christian churches	476
Total	10,997

Source: NCKK (2020)

Yes, but it is not automatic. I have even witnessed wedded couples parting ways shortly after the wedding ceremony (KI.6). It is difficult to say because some start the premarital counseling, but do not even complete. Others also do it to please their parents or Church leaders (P1). The findings that disagreed are consistent with Garzon & Tilley (2009), who questioned the efficacy of Christian premarital counselling. They established that Christian counseling cannot be said to definitively work due to various factors like experience of the counsellors, the methods used in counselling, the attitude of the counsellors, which all contribute to the success of the counselling process. While Plumb (2011) established that such Christian values if not carefully presented can also hinder the healing process of couples undergoing marital challenges.

Further, Christian premarital counselling is challenged by Ngundu (2010) who argued that African Christian couples are faced with three major counselling issues of concern; the traditional African culture, the legal or civil world and finally the westernized Christian culture that the Church opts to embrace in total disregard to traditional mechanisms for counselling and marriage systems. African Christians are

torn between the three corners of a triangle thereby making it difficult to experience effective outcomes of Christian premarital counselling programs.

Table 3.2. Respondents Sample size per Church

Protestant Church	Population	Sample size
Africa Brotherhood Church	216	08
African Christian Church	442	15
African Church of the Holy Spirit	178	06
African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa	670	23
African Interior Church	118	04
African Nineveh Church	793	28
Church of Africa Simai Mission	245	09
Church of God in East Africa (Kenya) Kima Mission	347	12
Episcopal Church of Africa	143	05
Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya	466	16
Friends Church in Kenya	347	12
Full Gospel Churches of Kenya	833	29
Kenya Assemblies of God	819	29
Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church Kenya	305	11
Lyahuka Church of East Africa	87	03
Maraatha Faith Assemblies	291	10
Methodist Church in Kenya	303	11
National Independent Church of Africa	110	04
Overcoming Faith Center Church of Kenya	407	14
Pentecostal Evangelistic Fellowship Africa	551	19
Reformed Church of East Africa	199	07
Jesus Celebration Center	1473	51
Salvation Army	347	12
Scriptural Holiness Mission	198	07
Zion Harvest Mission	633	22
Redeemed Christian churches	476	17
Total	10,997	384

Source: Researcher, 2020

Table 3.3: Number of Respondents, FGDs participants and Key Informants per Cluster

Strata	K.I & FGDs	Sample size	Sampling method
Divorced		96	Fishers Formulae
Separated		96	Fishers Formulae
Married		192	Fishers Formulae
Men		26	Census
Women		26	Census
Overseers		26	Census
Sub-Total		78	
Total		462	

Source: Researcher, 2020

The same sentiments are recapitulated by Ngundu (2010), who argued that Christian pastoral counsellors have failed to deal with or address issues affecting African couples embracing traditional African marriage systems. On Hope-based Premarital Counselling, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement in relation to Christian family stability in the Sub-region. A mean of 3.0343 was obtained. This mean denotes that hope focused counseling has a direct relationship with Christian marriage and family stability. A key informant 12 explained that:

Church counselling goes beyond hope alone to faith in God so I feel it may help in stabilizing Christian marriages than other forms of counseling, even though the hope centered

It is our role to sell counselling to the Christian married couples and give them options even of professional counselling or clinical counselling (P35).

Table 4.6. Pre-Marital Counselling Programs and Christian Family stability in Kisumu Central Sub-region, Kenya

	1	2	3	4	5	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Faith-based counselling	3.9	21.1	40.7	29.9	4.4	204	3.0980	0.91522
Hope Focused counselling	4.9	18.1	48.0	26.5	2.5	204	3.0343	1.58102
Professional counselling	5.4	22.5	42.2	27.0	2.9	204	2.9951	0.91241
Group Marriage Therapy	2.9	17.6	36.8	39.2	3.4	204	3.2255	0.88119
Composite Mean							3.0882	

Source: Researcher, 2020

Table 4.7: Correlation of Pre-Marital Counselling Programs and Christian Family Stability

	Premarital Counselling	Stability
Premarital Counselling	Pearson Correlation 1	.755
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.083
Stability	Pearson Correlation .755	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.083

Source: Researcher, 2020

Table 4.8: Coefficient of Determination for Pre-Marital Counselling Programs and Family Stability

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.755 ^a	.570	.462	.31337398

a. Predictors: (Constant), Premarital Counselling Programs

Source: Researcher, 2020

Table 4.9: Model Summary for Pre-Marital Counselling Programs and Family Stability

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	.772	1	.772	7.867	.083 ^b
Residual	.223	4	.098		
Total	0.995	5			

a. Dependent Variable: Stability

b. Predictors: (Constant), Premarital Counselling Programs

Source: Researcher, 2020

Table 4.10: Regression Coefficient for Pre-Marital Counselling Programs and Family Stability

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-7.962	4.933		-1.614	.182
	Premarital programmes	3.650	1.585	.755	2.302	.083

a. Dependent Variable: Stability

Source: Researcher, 2020

counseling and professional counseling are also good in making Christian marriages stable (KII.12).

The concerns were reiterated by participants from the FGDs, who noted that:

I feel that there is a strong relationship between pre-marital counselling and Christian marriage stability in Kisumu Central Sub-Region. It is critical that premarital counselling should be part of our preaching apostolate. Christian family marriages have to be protected; they should be given preventive measures than to wait to cure marriage problems when they start happening (P36).

These findings were consistent with Worthington, *et al* (2007) who argued that Hope focused Counselling is one of four empirically supported approaches to marriage enrichment.

Also correspond with the findings of study by Hawkins, *et al* (2008), which established that interpersonal skills like communication received from hope-based counselling help to build satisfying and fulfilling relationships in a marriage which in turn increases marital satisfaction among married couples. Some informants argued that religious leaders seem to lapse in their family and marriage ministry. Informant 31 from the FGDs and key informant 19 noted the following: Pastors have lapsed in their teaching and rebuking role, which should be constant from straight from childhood to

adulthood. If they straighten these up, then things will certainly be better (P31).

I support that religious leaders have failed in their duty to teach people about marriage, especially those who are young in marriage to help them sustain their marriages even in times of difficulties; they should be taught the principles of Christian marriage following the teachings of Christ who rejected divorce (KII.19).

The reaction on the laxity of religious leaders to prioritize marriage apostolate is pegged on the understanding and experience that pre-marital counseling is provided within Church settings and is provided by the clergy or lay ministers of the Church (Sauerheber & Bitter, 2013). On professional counselling, the responses from the study informants indicated a mean of 2.9951, denoting medium extent, consequently, the study concluded that professional counseling related positively to a medium extent to Christian family stability. This finding is consistent with Jacobi (2017) who established that professional counselling teaches participants to be better communicators. At the same time counselling helps participants to seek collaborative conflict resolution mechanism in the management of their anger, thus building satisfying relationships. The study further pursued to find the relationship between group marriage therapy and Christian family stability. It established a mean of 3.2255 denoting medium extent. This indicated that group marriage therapy positively contribute to Christian family stability in Kisumu Central Sub-region, Kenya. A key informant 23 in the interview acclaimed that:

Due to the many benefits of counseling in enhancing stability of Christian marriages, there should not only be premarital counseling but also other types of counseling like peer counseling, group counseling, family therapy among others (KII, 23). The findings agree with Goddard (2010) who argued that group marriage therapies such as marriage seminars and workshops give access to new insights to Christians, by providing great opportunities for learning and growing in the role of being a spouse and how to maintain marital stability among groups of married couples. On the same note, Moeti (2015) explains that many Churches organize group therapy seminars as part of their marriage and family apostolate that enrich their flock on marriage and family issues, thus alleviating the possibilities of family breakages, as a result of family vices like extramarital affairs, violence, disagreements, et cetera. The findings were inconsistent with the stance of Cowan & Cowan, (2014) who posit that the long term effectiveness of premarital counselling programs do not yield positive effects and with Kanyowa (2003) who postulated that interactions under family therapy may have negative influences on the family system. Ngundu (2010) also expressed divergent opinions to the findings of this study.

In general, the composite mean obtained was 3.0882, denoting medium extent. This fundamentally implied that the relationship between pre-marital counselling programs and Christian family stability is to a medium extent and therefore, indicating a positive relationship. Premarital counselling is preventive (Sauerheber & Bitter, 2013), educational, brief, future-oriented measure geared toward helps couples develop, enhance, and improve relationship quality and interpersonal skills in their future marriages (Scott, 2013).

It helps in the discernment process of couples and capacitates couples to solve any differences in a couple before wedding (Scott, 2013); they give realistic expectations of married couples, giving them conflict management skills (Davis, 2015), and conflict resolution in mutually respectful ways. Premarital counselling is an effective tool in discouraging family instabilities and extramarital affairs by enhancing marital quality and exposing Christians to moral messages through spiritual counselling (Burdette, *et al.*, 2007).

Despite diverse positions, the study concluded that premarital programs as part of church marriage apostolate are of great importance in sustaining the stability of marriage. This is in line with Duncan *et al.*, (2010) that the main objective of premarital counseling programs is to foster stable families by preparing couples to develop appropriate mechanisms that can be used in responding to problems affecting them. The respondents also proposed that owing to the changing times and changing needs, premarital counseling could be tailored to meet the needs of couples in the contemporary times. Some innovative participants saw opportunities for other types of professional counselling that could also see to it that the Christians in general, and young married couples in particular, are helped through peer counseling, family therapy and group counseling.

Correlation and Regression of Pre-Marital Counselling Programs and Family Stability: Using Pearson's correlation and regression model to determine the relationship between pre-marital programs and Christian marriage and family stability, the findings are demonstrated in tables 4.6, 4.7, 4.8 and 4.7. Table 4.7 illustrates that pre-marital Counselling programs recorded a Pearson's correlation of 0.755 to family stability. Hence, the study concluded that pre-marital counselling programs have a direct positive associations with marriage and family stability in Kisumu Central Sub-region, Kenya. Table 4.8 displays the coefficient of determination for pre-marital counselling programs and family stability. The coefficient (R^2) obtained was 0.57, which is 57%. This implies that pre-marital counselling programs caused a 57% deviation on family stability. Hence, the study concluded that pre-marital counselling programs caused a moderate deviation on Christian family stability for Christians in Kisumu Central Sub-region. Since premarital counselling programs promote emotional development among couples involved, the theory of sound relationship House is relevant in this data analysis. Sound relationship House Theory gives couples an opportunity to build fondness, friendship and emotional management in their marriage and family relationships (Gottman, 1999) and thus informs the deviation of premarital counselling programs on family stability. Table 4.9 displays the model summary for pre-marital counselling programs and family stability. The F statistic obtained (7.87) is greater than the F-critical which is 7.71. This implies that the model was statistically significant. Therefore, the study concluded that relationship of pre-marital counselling programs and family stability for couples in Churches in Kisumu Central Sub-region, Kenya was statistically significant. Table 4.10 displays the regression coefficients for pre-marital counselling programs and family stability. From the findings, the resulting equation was:

$$Y=3.65X-7.962$$

Therefore, the study concluded that there exists a positive relationship between pre-marital counselling programmes and Christian family stability in Kisumu Central Sub-region, Kenya.

DISCUSSION

Sound relationship House Theory informed the analysis of the findings on pre-marital counselling programs. This theory gave couples in the various informant clusters an opportunity to express themselves. The composite mean of 3.0882 of respondent's correlation level of agreement was obtained, which indicated a positive relationship between pre-marital counselling programs and Christian family stability. Premarital counselling programs are future-oriented. They give couples measures that help them grow and enrich their relationships, through building progressive attitudes and values that favour the progress of marriages and families. The programs aid couples in their discernment process and capacitates them in solving family and marital differences. Further, they orient and give realistic expectations to married couples, equipping them with conflict management and resolution skills. The study also noted that premarital programs, despite their contribution to matrimonial and family stability, those running these Church programs are not adequately trained to equip them to dispense this important service to families and marriages.

Conclusions

On the relationship between premarital counselling programs and the covenant of matrimony for the stability of Christian families in Kisumu Central Sub-Region, the study findings showed to be positive. These programs should be encouraged and improved as they are rooted deep in the reality of the domestic Church. The success of marriages and families will be determined by the engrained participation of married and non-married Christians to take up such programs. The study also concludes that these programs are sometimes managed poorly and ineffectively, which questions the preparedness of the Church in launching of such programs.

In line with the study objective and findings;

The study recommends creation and strengthening of an independent Christian matrimony association to strategically create premarital counselling programs to advocate, administer and promote best practices for fostering stable families. This body will monitor, evaluate and promulgate Church premarital counselling policies to establish marital sustenance programs. Further Christian counselling and training institutions should be established, equipped and promoted to oversee the much needed training programs for premarital and matrimonial counselling. This was found necessary because of the lapses identified in the manner in which those programs are implemented. The study noted the reality of the manifestation of negative attitude and ineptitude of those engaged in helping married couples, which suggests lack of proper training and evaluation that is based on Christian principles of marriage and family apostolate. The study also recommends the creation of information technology (IT) database to spear head preservation, management, retrieval and ease of access to data related to family, marriage life as well as their counselling needs. This is because, it was a challenge to find Church information regarding the covenant of marriage and

related areas. Premarital counselling programs are casually managed to the effect they seldom give accurate information in many Churches within Kisumu Central Sub-region. Such database will further expedite early detection of premarital issues worth documenting to mitigate mechanisms that ensure and propel Christian family stability.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors of this publication do not consult for any entity on religious matters. The terms of this publication have been reviewed and approved by Kisii University in Kenya in accordance with its policy on objectivity in research. Consequently, no conflict of interest was identified based on the overall scope of the research project.

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ABBREVIATIONS

FGD: Focus Group Discussion
NCCK: National Church Council of Kenya
NIV: New International Version
NSO: Negative Sentiment Override
SDG: Sustainable Development Goal

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