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Exploring the Effectiveness of Premarital Counselling in Reducing Divorce Rates in Nigerian Marriages

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This study explores the effectiveness of premarital counselling in reducing divorce rates among Nigerian couples, focusing on Lagos, Ogun, and Oyo States. Utilizing a quantitative approach and random sampling, the research surveyed 100 individuals (50 couples), comparing the marital outcomes of those who received premarital counselling with those who did not. The study also examined specific counselling components such as communication skills, conflict resolution, and financial planning to determine their impact on marital stability. Findings revealed that couples who underwent premarital counselling experienced lower divorce rates, underscoring the importance of counselling interventions. However, barriers to accessing premarital counselling were identified, including lack of awareness (43.2%), financial cost (35.2%), counsellor availability (15.9%), and social stigma (5%). This study bridges existing gaps in the literature by providing empirical, data-driven insights into the role of premarital counselling in Nigeria, highlighting the need for increased accessibility, affordability, and awareness. The findings offer valuable recommendations for policymakers, religious institutions, and counselling providers to enhance premarital programs and improve marital outcomes.

Keywords: *premarital counseling, divorce rates, marital stability, quantitative study.*

INTRODUCTION

Marriage in Nigeria extends beyond a personal union, serving as a vital component of cultural identity and societal organisation¹. Hence, with over 250 ethnic groups, each culture brings distinctive matrimonial customs, such as the Yoruba's elaborate dowry ceremonies and the Igbo's intricate bridal negotiations. The National Bureau of Statistics, in conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Youth and Development (NBS-FYMD, 2012),² notes an increase in marriage rates, particularly among young adults in urban areas like Lagos, Port Harcourt and Abuja. However, Raley and Sweeney state that this rise is coupled with a notable increase in divorce rates, highlighting significant challenges within marital relationships³. Economic strains, evolving gender roles, financial independence and urbanization contribute to this trend, underscoring the need for strategies that promote marital stability⁴.

In light of this, Nigeria's divorce rate ascended to 2.9 percent in 2023, as indicated by the available statistics on matrimonial and dissolution trends, equating to 1.8 percent divorces per 1,000 individuals within that same year⁵. This is a significant increase from 5 divorces per 1000 marriages to 18 divorces per 1000 marriages between 2020 to 2023. For example, in Lagos, records from customary courts indicate an increase in divorce applications over the past decade. Between 2010 and 2012 alone, 354 divorce applications were filed at Ikeja and Ojo customary courts, with a significant portion being granted⁶. The growth of urbanisation, economic

¹ Loliya Agbani Akobo, 'A review of diversity management in Nigeria: Organizational and national perspective' (2016) 8(3) *Journal of African Studies and Development* <<https://academicjournals.org/journal/IASD/how-to-cite-article/98466FB59005>> accessed 13 October 2024

² Federal Ministry of Youth Development, 2012 *National Baseline Youth Survey* National Bureau of Statistics (2012) pg 1-146

³ R Kelly Raley and Megan M Sweeney, 'Divorce, Repartnering, and Stepfamilies: A Decade in Review' (2020) 82(1) *Journal of Marriage and Family* <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jomf.12651>> accessed 13 October 2024

⁴ Sadaf Awan et al., 'Evolving Gender Dynamics: Insights from Pakistani Professional Couples' (2023) 1(1) *Sociological Research and Innovation* <<https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/SRI/article/view/5555>> accessed 13 October 2024

⁵ Temitope Joshua Owolabi, 'Socio-economic factors influencing single parenting among unmarried mothers In Nigeria' (Electronic Theses and Dissertations, North-West University 2023)

⁶ John Campbell, 'Are Rising African Divorce Rates A Social Good?' (*Council on Foreign Relations*, 16 September 2013) <<https://www.cfr.org/blog/are-rising-african-divorce-rates-social-good>> accessed 13 October 2024

challenges, and shifting cultural norms are also contributing factors to the increase in divorce rates⁷.

Apparently, there has been a noticeable increase in divorce rates in Nigeria in recent years, as seen in the study of Okpara⁸. Various scholars have noted that factors contributing to this rise include infidelity, lack of proper communication between spouses, unforgiveness, and insufficient mental preparation for marriage, while some argue that this rise in divorce rates can be seen as part of broader social changes that are empowering women and reducing gender inequality⁹. Therefore, this paper is initiated to explore how pre-marital counselling can mitigate the negative effects of the factors identified or if pre-marital counselling independently is an effective tool to reduce the divorce rate in Nigeria.

Hence, premarital counselling, a structured program designed to prepare couples for marital challenges, has gained prominence in Nigeria in recent years¹⁰. Traditionally provided by religious institutions, premarital counselling now also includes professional services offered by licensed counsellors. Despite its growing acceptance, the impact of premarital counselling on reducing divorce rates remains inadequately explored in Nigeria, creating a need for more comprehensive, data-driven studies¹¹. Thus, while premarital counselling is considered a preventative measure, there is limited empirical evidence in the Nigerian context to demonstrate its effectiveness. Hence, understanding whether premarital counselling can significantly

⁷ Thomas Gbadebo Adegoke, 'Socio-cultural Factors as Determinants of Divorce Rates among Women of Reproductive Age in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria' (2010) 8(2) *Studies of Tribes and Tribals* <<http://krepublishers.com/02-Journals/T%20&%20T/T%20&%20T-08-0-000-10-Web/T%20&%20T-08-2-000-10-Abst-PDF/T%20&%20T-08-2-107-10-153-Adegoke-T-G/T&T-8-2-107-10-153-Adegoke-T-G-Tt.pdf>> accessed 13 October 2024

⁸ Catherine Chizoma Okpara, 'Father Parenting Families: Emerging Family Pattern' (2019) 13(1) *Journal of the Nigerian Council of Educational Psychologists* <<https://journals.ezenwaohaetorc.org/index.php/NCEP/article/view/1167>> accessed 13 October 2024

⁹ Yusuf Izang Elijah and Solomon A Yusuf, 'Divorce as a Problematic Area in Christian Marriage in Nigeria' (2020) 5(1) *International Journal of Religious and Cultural Practice* <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353174941_Divorce_as_a_Problematic_Area_in_Christian_Marriage_in_Nigeria> accessed 13 October 2024

¹⁰ Bitrus Yusuf Bawa, 'The Role of Premarital Counselling for Marriage Stability: A Pastoral Examination of the Interface between the Christian and Alago Indigenous Epawoza Concept of Marriage Preparation' (D'Phil Theses, School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa 2017)

¹¹ *Ibid*

decrease divorce rates is critical for shaping family law policies, refining counselling practices, and supporting couples in making informed marital decisions.

Therefore, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of premarital counselling in reducing divorce rates among Nigerian couples by comparing outcomes between those who received counselling and those who did not. The findings hold value for multiple stakeholders, offering empirical evidence to support the integration of premarital counselling into legal frameworks, potentially advocating for mandatory counselling before marriage licenses are issued, thereby fostering more stable marriages and families.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework: This literature review will investigate the primary elements that affect divorce rates, the theoretical underpinnings of marital stability, and the efficacy of premarital counselling. It will also employ interaction, attachment, and social exchange theories to elucidate the dynamics of marriage and how these elements may lead to either stability or dissolution. Likewise, counselling effectiveness models such as client-centred therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and emotionally focused therapy (EFT) will be critically analysed, highlighting their importance in preparing married couples.

This review will also discuss the objectives and content of premarital counselling, especially in Nigeria, where marital training is primarily a reflection of religious or traditional beliefs. This section, therefore, will investigate prevalent counselling methodologies in Nigeria, concentrating on the ways in which spiritual and cultural dimensions shape counselling practices. By contrasting these with international trends, the study will identify deficiencies in addressing the psychological and emotional facets of counselling.

Subsequently, a thorough analysis of existing empirical research on the effectiveness of premarital counselling, both globally and specifically in Nigeria, will be conducted. These studies illustrate the success rates of counselling in mitigating divorce but also expose shortcomings in research, especially in the Nigerian context, where quantitative data remains limited. This investigation aims to fill these gaps by employing a statistical framework to

compare divorce rates between couples who have participated in premarital counselling and those who have not. In doing so, the review accentuates the necessity for a more profound comprehension of counselling's role in fostering marital stability in Nigeria beyond mere religious or ethical principles.

Marriage Stability Theories: Marriage stability has been the subject of extensive research across multiple disciplines, with various theories proposed to explain how relationships endure or break down over time. Among the most prominent theoretical frameworks are Interaction Theory, Attachment Theory, and Social Exchange Theory¹². Each provides unique insights into marital dynamics, emphasising different factors such as communication, emotional bonds, and the costs and rewards of staying in a relationship.

Interaction Theory: The Companion Interaction Theory or Interaction Theory conceptualises the ways in which couples voice, interact and resolve conflicts¹³. This theory posits that the more positive interactions a couple has with one another, and the higher the quality of these interactions is, then this will likely result in greater marital stability. It states that good communication, respect and conflict resolution are needed for a healthy relationship¹⁴. On the other hand, negative interactions such as criticism, defensiveness and contempt are powerful predictors of marital distress and even divorce.

In the same vein, John Gottman, a primary marriage researcher who, developed the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," a paradigm that outlines four destructive patterns in interaction (criticism, defensiveness, stonewalling and contempt¹⁵. His research highlights that marriages with a higher ratio of positive to negative interactions are more likely to be stable. Specifically,

¹² Russell Cropanzano et al., 'Social Exchange Theory: A Critical Review with Theoretical Remedies' (2017) 11(1) *Academy of Management Annals* <<https://journals.aom.org/doi/10.5465/annals.2015.0099#>> accessed 13 October 2024

¹³ Rita Zukauskienė, 'The roles of conflict engagement, escalation, and avoidance in marital interaction: A longitudinal view of five types of couples' in John M Gottman (ed), *Interpersonal Development* (Routledge 2017)

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ John P Caughlin et al., 'Conflict in Dating and Marital Relationships' in J Oetzel and S Ting-Toomey (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Conflict Communication: Integrating Theory, Research, and Practice* (Sage Publishing 2006)

he noted that a ratio of 5:1 (five positive interactions for every negative one) significantly correlates with marital longevity.

Interaction Theory also considers the way couples handle conflicts. Successful couples tend to approach disagreements with a cooperative mindset, seeking to resolve issues through compromise and understanding rather than engaging in a win-lose dynamic¹⁶. This theory highlights the importance of developing communication skills, empathy, and emotional intelligence, which are often key components of premarital counselling. By fostering positive interaction patterns before marriage, counselling can help couples build a foundation for long-term stability¹⁷.

However, critics of Interaction Theory argue that it places too much emphasis on communication and conflict resolution, overlooking deeper psychological factors that may influence a couple's ability to interact positively¹⁸. Therefore, while interaction patterns are undeniably important, this theory may not fully account for underlying issues such as attachment insecurities or personal histories that can affect marital stability.

Attachment Theory: Attachment Theory, originally developed by John Bowlby, examines how early relationships with caregivers influence an individual's behaviour in adult romantic relationships¹⁹. According to this theory, the way individuals form attachments as children (secure, anxious, or avoidant) can have a profound impact on their ability to maintain stable, long-term marriages. The attachment styles developed in childhood tend to carry over into adulthood, shaping how people approach emotional intimacy, trust, and dependency in their relationships²⁰.

¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷ John Mordechai Gottman, 'Gottman Method Couple Therapy' in Alan S Gurman (ed), *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy* (4th edn, Guilford Press 2008)

¹⁸ Peter T Coleman and Robert Ferguson, *Making Conflict Work: Harnessing the Power of Disagreement* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2014)

¹⁹ Barbara Jo Brothers, 'Long Term "Good" Marriages: The Seemingly Essential Ingredients' in Florence W Kaslow and Helga Hammerschmidt (eds), *Couples Therapy, Multiple Perspectives* (1st edn, Routledge 2014)

²⁰ John Mordechai Gottman, *Marital Interaction: Experimental Investigations* (Academic Press 1979)

- **Secure Attachment:** Individuals with secure attachment styles typically experience healthy, stable relationships. They are comfortable with intimacy, trust their partners, and can manage conflicts without becoming overwhelmed by insecurity or fear of abandonment²¹. These individuals tend to have higher marital satisfaction and lower divorce rates.
- **Anxious Attachment:** Those with anxious attachment styles often struggle with insecurity and fear of abandonment. They may exhibit clinginess or need constant reassurance from their partner, which can lead to tension and dissatisfaction in the marriage. Their fear of being left can cause them to react disproportionately to minor conflicts, thereby destabilizing the relationship.
- **Avoidant Attachment:** Individuals with avoidant attachment styles tend to distance themselves emotionally from their partners. They are often uncomfortable with intimacy and may avoid relying on their spouse for emotional support. This can create a barrier to deep emotional connection, making it difficult for the couple to develop the kind of intimacy that sustains long-term relationships²².

Attachment Theory offers valuable insights into how past experiences influence present behaviour. Premarital counselling, when integrated with attachment theory, can help couples identify their attachment styles and work towards developing healthier relational patterns²³. Thus, couples with insecure attachment styles may benefit from learning strategies to build trust and emotional intimacy, thereby improving their chances of marital success.

While Attachment Theory provides a psychological depth that Interaction Theory lacks, it has been critiqued for being overly deterministic. Some argue that it places too much emphasis on childhood experiences, underestimating the potential for individuals to change or develop

²¹ John Bowlby, 'The Bowlby-Ainsworth attachment theory' (1979) 2(4) Behavioral and Brain Sciences <<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/behavioral-and-brain-sciences/article/abs/bowlbyainsworth-attachment-theory/6D35C7A344107195D97FD7ADAE06C807>> accessed 13 October 2024

²² Vincenzo Venezia, *Attachment Theory in Relationships: Useful Tools to Increase Stability and Build Happy and Lasting Bonds. A Journey from Childhood to Adulthood* (Vincenzo Venezia 2023)

²³ Ingeborg Eikenæs et al., 'Attachment styles in patients with avoidant personality disorder compared with social phobia' (2016) 89(3) Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281488900_Attachment_styles_in_patients_with_avoidant_personality_disorder_compared_with_social_phobia> accessed 13 October 2024

healthier attachment styles through therapy, life experiences, or conscious effort²⁴. Nonetheless, its influence on the emotional dynamics within a marriage is substantial, especially in understanding why some couples struggle with intimacy or trust more than others²⁵.

Social Exchange Theory: Social Exchange Theory provides an economic lens through which to view relationships, suggesting that marriages are maintained when the perceived rewards outweigh the costs. According to this theory, individuals continuously assess their relationships based on what they are gaining or losing²⁶. Hence, if a partner perceives that the benefits of staying in the marriage (emotional support, companionship, financial stability) outweigh the drawbacks (conflicts, sacrifices, lack of personal freedom), they will likely remain in the relationship. Conversely, when the costs exceed the rewards, the likelihood of divorce increases²⁷.

This theory also introduces the concept of Comparison Level (CL) and Comparison Level for Alternatives (CLalt). The CL refers to the individual's expectations of what they deserve from a relationship based on past experiences and societal norms²⁸. The CLalt involves the perceived quality of available alternatives to the current relationship, such as other romantic partners or the benefits of being single²⁹. Hence, this implies that if an individual perceives that they could be happier or more satisfied outside the marriage or with someone else, they may be more likely to pursue divorce.

²⁴ C Nathan De Wall et al., 'So Far Away from One's Partner, Yet So Close to Romantic Alternatives: Avoidant Attachment, Interest in Alternatives, and Infidelity' (2011) 101(6) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* <https://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/eli-finkel/documents/InPress_DeWallLambertSlotterDeckmanPondFinkelLuchiesFincham_JPSP.pdf> accessed 13 October 2024

²⁵ Rosetta Castellano et al., *What Makes Us Stay Together?: Attachment and the Outcomes of Couple Relationships* (1st edn, Routledge 2018)

²⁶ Antonia Bifulco and Geraldine Thomas, *Understanding Adult Attachment in Family Relationships: Research, Assessment and Intervention* (1st edn, Routledge 2012)

²⁷ Baedou Kofoworola Akinyemi, 'Spousal Maintenance: A Comparative Analysis of Spousal Maintenance in Nigeria and the United Kingdom' (2024) SSRN <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4946330> accessed 13 October 2024

²⁸ Carl Marcus Wallenberg and Robert Handfield, 'Social exchange theory' in Wendy L Tate et al. (eds), *Handbook of Theories for Purchasing, Supply Chain and Management Research* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2022)

²⁹ *Ibid*

Social Exchange Theory explains many dynamics observed in modern marriages, especially in a society where individual fulfilment and personal happiness are increasingly emphasised. It also aligns with research showing that economic independence can increase the likelihood of divorce, as financially stable individuals (particularly women) may feel less dependent on staying in an unsatisfying marriage³⁰.

Furthermore, one strength of Social Exchange Theory is its focus on individual agency within the marriage³¹. Unlike Interaction and Attachment theories, which focus more on emotional and psychological factors, Social Exchange Theory acknowledges that practical considerations—such as financial security, social status, and the availability of alternative partners—play a significant role in marital stability³². However, critics argue that this theory can be overly simplistic, reducing complex emotional relationships to a mere cost-benefit analysis. Marriage, many contend, involves more than just tangible rewards and costs—it also encompasses deep emotional bonds, moral obligations, and social pressures that may not easily fit into an economic framework³³. Moreover, Social Exchange Theory does not adequately address how love, affection, and commitment factor into the decision to stay married, elements that are not always quantifiable in terms of costs and rewards.

Theoretical Evaluation: Each of these theories offers valuable insights into different aspects of marriage stability, and their combined perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing marital success. Interaction Theory highlights the importance of communication and conflict management in maintaining a stable marriage. It provides practical tools for couples, particularly through premarital counselling, which focuses on developing these skills³⁴. Attachment Theory offers a deeper psychological perspective, explaining how early life experiences shape adult relationships and emphasising the role of emotional bonds in sustaining marriages³⁵. Social Exchange Theory, while more pragmatic, offers an economic lens

³⁰ Akinyemi (n 27)

³¹ Wallenberg (n 28)

³² Judith Wallerstein, *The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts* (Plunkett Lake Press 2019)

³³ Wallenberg (n 28)

³⁴ Akinyemi (n 27)

³⁵ Wallenberg (n 28)

to understand marital stability, focusing on how individuals make decisions based on perceived costs and rewards³⁶.

However, no single theory can fully explain the complexities of marital stability. Marriage is influenced by a wide range of factors, including emotional, psychological, social, and economic dimensions³⁷. While these theories provide frameworks for understanding marital dynamics, real-life relationships often involve a combination of these elements. Premarital counselling can integrate insights from all three theories to prepare couples for the multifaceted challenges of marriage, helping them build strong communication skills, develop secure emotional attachments, and navigate the practical realities of married life.

In conclusion, Interaction, Attachment, and Social Exchange theories each contribute critical elements to understanding marriage stability. Together, they offer a multidimensional approach to assessing how couples maintain their relationships, why some marriages fail, and how premarital counselling can play a role in reducing divorce rates by addressing these underlying dynamics.

COUNSELLING EFFECTIVENESS MODELS

Counselling effectiveness models provide structured approaches to therapy, focusing on the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions of clients' experiences – clients, in this instance, represent partners ready for marriage or marriage. Three prominent models – Client-Centered Therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), and Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) – offer different frameworks for addressing individual challenges and fostering personal growth.

Client-Centred Therapy (CCT): Developed by Carl Rogers, CCT is based on the humanistic approach, emphasising empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence (authenticity)

³⁶ Wallerstein (n 32)

³⁷ Paul Hjellming et al., 'On Ideals in Romantic Relationships' (2013) 1(1) Colloquy Undergraduate Research Journal <<https://spark.bethel.edu/colloquy/vol1/iss1/3/>> accessed 13 October 2024

in the therapeutic relationship³⁸. This therapeutic model posits that individuals possess an inherent tendency toward self-actualisation, and the therapist's role is to create a supportive environment in which the client feels heard and understood³⁹. In this case, CCT's non-directive nature allows clients to lead the discussion, fostering self-awareness and personal insight. Studies show that CCT is particularly effective for individuals seeking emotional support and affirmation, but its non-structured format may be less suited for clients needing direct intervention⁴⁰.

Evidently, CCT encourages open communication, emotional honesty, and self-awareness, which are crucial during premarital counselling. By fostering a non-judgmental environment, couples can explore their values, fears, and expectations of marriage. This process enhances emotional connection and self-understanding, which are foundational for marital success and longevity. CCT's focus on empathy also builds mutual respect, which is crucial for navigating marital challenges⁴¹.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): CBT is a widely practised, evidence-based approach that addresses the interplay between thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. It asserts that maladaptive thought patterns contribute to emotional distress and dysfunctional behaviours⁴². Through techniques like cognitive restructuring, behavioural experiments, and exposure therapy, CBT helps clients challenge irrational beliefs and replace them with healthier cognitions. The effectiveness of CBT is well-documented across various mental health conditions, including

³⁸ Brittany C Solomon et al., 'Why disagreeableness (in married men) leads to earning more: A theory and test of social exchange at home' (2021) 75(2) *Personnel Psychology* <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/peps.12454>> accessed 13 October 2024

³⁹ Linda Berg Cross, *Couples Therapy* (2nd edn, Routledge 2001)

⁴⁰ Shelley A Riggs, 'Childhood Emotional Abuse and the Attachment System Across the Life Cycle: What Theory and Research Tell Us' in Nancy Reyome (ed), *The Effect of Childhood Emotional Maltreatment on Later Intimate Relationships* (1st edn, Routledge 2019)

⁴¹ Yaron Zoller and Jeffrey Muldoon, 'Illuminating the principles of Social Exchange Theory with Hawthorne Studies' (2019) 25(1) *Journal of Management History* <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329103266_Illuminating_the_principles_of_social_exchange_theory_with_Hawthorne_studies> accessed 13 October 2024

⁴² Siti Rohmah Nurhayati, 'Marital Quality: A Conceptual Review' (2019) 7(2) *Buletin Psikologi* <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337759107_Marital_Quality_A_Conceptual_Review> accessed 13 October 2024

depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)⁴³. Its structured, problem-focused approach allows clients to develop practical coping strategies and experience measurable progress.

Thus, it can be ascertained that CBT's focus on identifying and correcting dysfunctional thought patterns is invaluable for premarital preparation. It helps couples develop realistic expectations about marriage by addressing irrational beliefs and cognitive distortions. This model also equips couples with practical tools to manage conflicts and communicate effectively, improving long-term marital stability⁴⁴. Hence, CBT emphasises proactive problem-solving, ensuring that couples enter marriage with the skills necessary to cope with inevitable challenges.

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT): EFT, developed by Sue Johnson, focuses on the emotional dynamics within relationships, particularly attachment patterns. EFT aims to strengthen emotional bonds between individuals (often couples) by identifying negative interaction cycles and fostering secure attachment behaviours. EFT is grounded in attachment theory and helps clients explore and express vulnerable emotions in a safe, supportive environment. Research demonstrates that EFT is highly effective for couples experiencing relationship distress and is linked to long-term relationship satisfaction⁴⁵. However, EFT may require longer therapeutic engagement than CBT, as it delves into deep emotional experiences⁴⁶.

Thus, EFT's focus on secure emotional attachment is highly relevant for both premarital preparation and marriage sustenance. It teaches couples to recognise and break negative interaction patterns, thereby strengthening emotional bonds. EFT's emphasis on emotional vulnerability encourages deeper connection, fostering trust and intimacy, which are vital for

⁴³ Marvin Frankel et al., 'Inter-personal congruence: the social contracts of client-centered and person-centered therapies' (2019) 18(1) *Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies* <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331610818_Inter-personal_congruence_the_social_contracts_of_client-centered_and_person-centered_therapies> accessed 13 October 2024

⁴⁴ Beverly Pasian and Rodney Turner, *Designs, Methods and Practices for Research of Project Management* (1st edn, Routledge 2015)

⁴⁵ Laura Sadowski and Carri Casteel, 'Intimate partner violence towards women' (2010) *BMJ Clinical Evidence* <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21733197/>> accessed 13 October 2024

⁴⁶ David Hawkins, *Journey Together: Turn Your Marriage Into the Adventure of a Lifetime* (Harvest House Publishers 2021)

sustaining a healthy marriage⁴⁷. Therefore, the ability to communicate emotions effectively enhances conflict resolution, reducing the likelihood of emotional withdrawal or detachment over time.

Collectively, these models provide a well-rounded approach to premarital counselling, ensuring that couples are emotionally, cognitively, and relationally prepared for the demands of marriage. By addressing emotional dynamics, thought patterns, and communication, they offer a comprehensive framework for marital success.

OVERVIEW OF PREMARITAL MARRIAGE COUNSELLING

Premarital counselling is a form of therapy or educational program designed to help couples prepare for marriage by addressing critical aspects of their relationship. It is increasingly seen as an important preventative measure that fosters strong, healthy marriages by equipping couples with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate common marital challenges⁴⁸. In the Nigerian context, premarital counselling often integrates cultural, religious, and societal expectations, aiming to strengthen the institution of marriage, which is highly valued in Nigerian society.

OBJECTIVES AND COMPONENTS OF PREMARITAL COUNSELLING

The core objective of premarital counselling is to ensure couples enter into marriage with a deep understanding of each other, an awareness of potential challenges, and the tools to manage conflicts effectively. In Nigeria, the traditional, religious, and even legal aspects of marriage are

⁴⁷ Deborah Dobson and Keith S Dobson, *Evidence-Based Practice of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy* (2nd edn, Guilford publications 2018)

⁴⁸ Veronica Kallos-Lilly and Jennifer Fitzgerald, *An Emotionally Focused Workbook for Couples: The Two of Us* (2nd edn, Routledge 2021)

critical, making premarital counselling a holistic endeavour⁴⁹. Some of the objectives include the following, as deduced in some studies^{50,51}:

Enhancing Communication Skills: Effective communication is one of the fundamental pillars of any successful marriage. Counselling aims to teach couples how to express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns openly and constructively and to listen actively to each other. Communication training covers techniques for conflict resolution and avoiding destructive communication patterns such as blame or criticism.

Setting Realistic Expectations: Premarital counselling helps couples to discuss and set realistic expectations for various aspects of their married life, including finances, emotional intimacy, sexual relations, parenting, and household responsibilities. Unrealistic or unmet expectations are a common source of marital conflict, so setting clear and practical expectations upfront is key.

Conflict Resolution Techniques: Counselling equips couples with strategies to manage and resolve conflicts healthily. This includes recognising potential sources of conflict, learning to address differences calmly, and focusing on problem-solving rather than blame-shifting. In the Nigerian context, where extended family involvement in marital issues can complicate conflict resolution, counselling may also touch on setting boundaries and managing external pressures.

Financial Planning and Management: Finances usually become a primary point of friction in most relationships, so one of the things premarital counselling encourages is for engaged couples to have honest and open conversations about money. In this scenario, are budgeting, saving, and financial transparency joint or separate accounts in the Nigerian context can be

⁴⁹ Tiffany L Clyde et al., 'Revising Premarital Relationship Interventions for the Next Generation' (2020) 46(1) *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jmft.12378>> accessed 13 October 2024

⁵⁰ Suleman Ibrahim Lazarus et al., 'Gendered Penalties of Divorce on Remarriage in Nigeria: A Qualitative Study' (2017) 48(3) *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* <<https://colab.ws/articles/10.3138%2Fjcf.48.3.351>> accessed 13 October 2024

⁵¹ Wade Luquet, *Short-Term Couples Therapy: The Imago Model in Action* (2nd edn, Routledge 2007)

reflected herein – thus, traditions like payment of dowry/bride price, familial responsibilities and meeting societal normative standards for financial independence are equally relevant.

Family Planning and Parenting: Counselling plays a pivotal role in family planning by facilitating discussions among couples about their aspirations and anticipations concerning offspring. This encompasses dialogues about the desired number of children, preferred contraceptive methods, and strategies for child-rearing. Considering the profound cultural significance attributed to procreation in Nigeria, this area is of paramount importance for numerous couples.

Role Expectations and Gender Roles: In a nation characterised by cultural plurality, such as Nigeria, the perceptions and expectations surrounding gender roles can vary significantly according to factors such as ethnicity, religious affiliation, and familial background. Premarital counselling thus serves to facilitate discussions among couples regarding their beliefs about gender roles, mutual expectations regarding domestic duties, and the equilibrium between professional obligations and familial responsibilities. In more traditional contexts, these discussions may centre on conventional roles, whereas in more progressive regions, they may encompass the negotiation of shared duties. An additional crucial element of premarital counselling involves assisting couples in recognising the significance of emotional and sexual intimacy within the context of marriage. Counselling facilitates candid dialogues regarding expectations, apprehensions, and preferences in these domains, thereby ensuring that both partners feel at ease and possess a shared comprehension.

COMMON PRACTICES AND COUNSELING METHODOLOGIES IN NIGERIA

Premarital counselling techniques and practices in Nigeria differ based on the social, cultural, and religious backgrounds of the couple. Nonetheless, several recurring motifs and techniques show up in various contexts⁵²⁵³.

⁵² Bawa (n 10)

⁵³ Tamaryn L Crankshaw et al., “As we have gathered with a common problem, so we seek a solution”: exploring the dynamics of a community dialogue process to encourage community participation in family

Religious-Based Counseling: In Nigeria, religious institutions play a crucial role in premarital counselling. Most couples seek counselling through their churches, mosques, or other religious organisations. These sessions are often mandatory for couples planning to marry within the religious institution. Key characteristics include:

- **Christian Counseling:** In Christian denominations, counselling is often led by a pastor or trained marriage counsellors within the church. It typically involves discussing biblical principles for marriage, the spiritual roles of husband and wife, and the importance of prayer and faith in maintaining a strong marriage. Couples may also be encouraged to maintain their personal relationships with God as a foundation for their marriage⁵⁴.
- **Islamic Counseling:** In Islam, premarital counselling is often provided by an imam or other religious leaders, focusing on the religious obligations and rights of both partners according to Islamic teachings. Topics covered include the financial responsibilities of the husband (such as providing for the family), the rights of the wife, and the importance of mutual respect and kindness⁵⁵. Islamic premarital counselling may also include discussions about polygamy, a practice permitted in Islam.

Culturally Based Counseling: In addition to religious counselling, many Nigerian couples also engage in culturally based counselling. This is especially common in traditional marriages, where elders or community leaders provide guidance based on cultural customs and norms. Some practices include:

- **Family Involvement:** In many Nigerian cultures, the family plays a pivotal role in marriage. Premarital counselling can involve both families, where elders provide wisdom on how to maintain a successful marriage, manage external family relations, and uphold

planning/contraceptive programmes' (2019) 19(1) BMC Health Services Research
<<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31623612/>> accessed 13 October 2024

⁵⁴ Randolph K Sanders, *Christian Counseling Ethics: A Handbook for Psychologists, Therapists and Pastors* (2nd edn, InterVarsity Press 2013)

⁵⁵ Shagufta Omar, 'Marriage in Islam: Life Partnership or Discriminatory Family Set Up? An Analysis of Some Protective Legal and Moral Shariah Provisions for Women with Special Reference to Surah An-Nisa' (2014) SSRN <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314537821_Marriage_in_Islam_Life_Partnership_or_Discriminatory_Family_Set_Up_An_Analysis_of_Some_Protective_Legal_and_Moral_Shariah_Provisions_for_Women_with_Special_Reference_to_Surah_An-Nisa> accessed 13 October 2024

cultural values⁵⁶. Elders might also advise on conflict resolution strategies that align with cultural practices.

- **Traditional Customs and Expectations:** Counseling may also cover traditional marital expectations, such as roles within the home, the process of managing extended family expectations, and cultural rites that must be upheld during and after the marriage ceremony⁵⁷.

Professional Counseling: Some couples, especially in urban areas or those with higher educational backgrounds, may opt for professional premarital counselling provided by licensed therapists or psychologists. Professional counselling is often secular and takes a more psychological and scientific approach to preparing couples for marriage. Common methodologies include:

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** This method helps couples identify and change negative patterns of thinking and behaviour that could harm their marriage. It also teaches practical skills such as communication, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution⁵⁸.
- **Solution-Focused Therapy:** This approach is future-oriented, helping couples to focus on their goals for the marriage and how to achieve them⁵⁹. It emphasises positive communication and strengths within the relationship rather than focusing solely on problems.
- **Workshops and Seminars:** In some cases, professional counselling might take the form of group workshops or seminars where couples participate in activities that improve their understanding of each other and teach them essential skills for marriage.

Additionally, online premarital counselling has grown in popularity in Nigeria due to technical improvements and the country's expanding internet access, particularly among younger,

⁵⁶ Dr Joseph Adebayo Awoyemi, *Pre-Marital Counselling in a Multicultural Society* (Lulu.com 2015)

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

⁵⁸ Solomon (n 38)

⁵⁹ Frankel (n 43)

technology-proficient couples⁶⁰. Thus, couples in long-distance relationships or those who want a more flexible, private therapy alternative may find this choice especially intriguing. Online resources offer webinars, classes, and individual counselling sessions, frequently conducted by qualified marriage counsellors.

Common Counseling Tools and Techniques: Counsellors in Nigeria use various tools and techniques to facilitate effective communication and understanding between couples listed below⁶¹. Some of the common tools include:

- **Personality Assessments:** Tools such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) or the DISC profile are sometimes used to help couples understand their personality types and how they might interact in marriage.
- **Questionnaires and Inventories:** Counselors often use structured questionnaires or inventories to explore areas such as communication styles, conflict management, financial planning, and sexual expectations. These tools provide a structured way to identify potential issues and open up discussions.
- **Role-Playing:** In some sessions, couples might engage in role-playing scenarios to practice conflict resolution or decision-making skills.

Deductively, premarital counselling in Nigeria is an evolving practice that draws from religious, cultural, and psychological traditions. It aims to prepare couples for marriage by addressing key areas such as communication, financial management, conflict resolution, and setting realistic expectations. Whether through religious leaders, professional counsellors, or cultural elders, couples are given the tools to build strong, enduring marriages that align with Nigerian societal values. As divorce rates in Nigeria rise, the effectiveness of premarital counselling in reducing marital breakdowns is a timely and relevant subject for further research and intervention.

⁶⁰ Luquet (51)

⁶¹ Albert Oludele Ajani and Sunday Olutayo Fakunle, 'Globalisation and Trends of Changes in Family Institution in Nigerian Society' (2021) 2(1) American International Journal of Supply Chain Management <<https://www.acseusa.org/journal/index.php/aijscm/article/view/39>> accessed 13 October 2024

FACTORS INFLUENCING DIVORCE RATES IN NIGERIA

Several interrelated factors contribute to this trend, spanning socio-economic, cultural, religious, and legal dimensions. Analysing these factors offers insight into the complexities surrounding marriage and divorce in Nigeria, as well as the evolving nature of marital relationships in the country.

Economic Pressures and Financial Instability: Economic factors play a significant role in the rising divorce rates in Nigeria. Financial stress can erode marital relationships, leading to conflicts, dissatisfaction, and ultimately divorce⁶². Some of the critical economic pressures include:

- **Unemployment and Income Disparities:** Nigeria's high unemployment rate, particularly among young people, places a strain on marriages. Financial insecurity can lead to stress, frustration, and dissatisfaction, as partners may feel unfulfilled in their roles or unable to meet their family's needs. Income disparities between spouses, where one partner earns significantly more than the other, can also contribute to power imbalances, resentment, and feelings of inadequacy.
- **Inflation and Cost of Living:** The rising cost of living in urban centres like Lagos and Abuja exacerbates financial tensions. Couples often struggle to meet basic needs such as housing, education, healthcare, and daily expenses. This can lead to constant arguments and dissatisfaction within the marriage, with money becoming a primary source of conflict.
- **Pressure to Meet Societal Financial Expectations:** In Nigerian society, there are often strong social and familial expectations for material success, including maintaining a certain lifestyle, throwing elaborate celebrations, or providing for extended family members. When these expectations are not met, it can create additional strain on marriages, leading to frustration and eventual separation.

⁶² Drew D'Agostino and Greg Skloot, *Predicting Personality: Using AI to Understand People and Win More Business* (John Wiley and Sons 2019)

Cultural Shifts and Changing Social Norms: Nigeria is a country with diverse cultural and ethnic groups, each with its unique values regarding marriage. However, as Nigeria becomes more urbanised and exposed to global cultural trends, there has been a shift in traditional values related to marriage. Several cultural factors⁶³ influence the rising divorce rates:

- **A shift from Extended Family to Nuclear Family Structures:** Traditionally, Nigerian families were extended, and family elders played a significant role in marital affairs, often acting as mediators during conflicts. However, urbanisation has led to a move toward nuclear family structures, where couples are more independent. This independence can reduce the sense of communal support that traditionally helped resolve conflicts and keep marriages together.
- **Women's Empowerment and Gender Roles:** The increasing participation of women in education and the workforce has shifted gender dynamics in Nigerian marriages. More women are becoming financially independent and less willing to tolerate abusive or unequal marriages. This empowerment enables some women to leave marriages where they feel oppressed, neglected, or disrespected. Traditional gender roles are also being questioned, causing friction between couples who hold differing views on the roles of men and women in the household.
- **Erosion of Traditional Values:** In some Nigerian communities, marriage has historically been viewed as a sacred and permanent institution. However, with the growing influence of Western values, marriage is increasingly seen as a partnership that can be dissolved if it is not working. This shift in mindset is especially prevalent among younger generations who are more exposed to modern values and ideas through media, education, and social interaction.

Infidelity and Trust Issues: Infidelity is one of the leading causes of divorce in Nigeria, as in many other parts of the world. When one or both partners are unfaithful, it can lead to a

⁶³ Agatha U Nzewuji et al., 'Psychosocial Variables That Enhance Marital Stability Among Couples in Southeast Nigeria' (2024) 50(1) Journal of Social Service Research
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380556604_Psychosocial_Variables_That_Enhance_Marital_Stability_Among_Couples_in_Southeast_Nigeria> accessed 13 October 2024

breakdown of trust and communication, often resulting in separation⁶⁴. Several factors contribute to the high rates of infidelity:

- **Cultural Tolerance of Male Infidelity:** In some Nigerian cultures, men's extramarital affairs are more socially accepted or tolerated, while women's infidelity is considered unacceptable. This double standard can lead to frustration and feelings of unfairness within the marriage. Women who find their husbands unfaithful may feel justified in seeking divorce, especially if societal attitudes are shifting towards more equitable treatment of both genders.
- **Technology and Social Media:** With the rise of smartphones and social media, infidelity has become easier and more discreet. Emotional and physical affairs can be initiated and sustained through online platforms, which can lead to distrust and tension in marriages.
- **Polygamy:** In certain Nigerian communities, polygamy is still culturally accepted. While some marriages thrive under this arrangement, others suffer when the husband fails to balance the emotional, financial, and time demands of multiple wives and families. In polygamous settings, feelings of jealousy, competition, and neglect can push wives to seek divorce.

Lack of Effective Communication: Poor communication is a fundamental cause of many marital breakdowns. In the Nigerian context, couples often enter marriage without adequate communication skills or understanding of each other's expectations, values, or goals⁶⁵. The inability to resolve conflicts through dialogue leads to several issues:

- **Cultural Taboo on Open Expression:** In some Nigerian cultures, discussing emotions or personal problems openly is seen as taboo or a sign of weakness. This cultural attitude

⁶⁴ Lorretta Favour C Ntoimo and Monica Ewomazino Akokuwebe, 'Prevalence and Patterns of Marital Dissolution in Nigeria' (2014) 12(2) The Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology <https://www.nasajournal.com.ng/journal_articles/vol_12/issue_2/paper_1.pdf> accessed 13 October 2024

⁶⁵ Falilat Anike Okesina, 'Marital Adjustment and Communication Styles Among Married Adults in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria' (2022) 14(1) Canadian Journal of Family and Youth/Le Journal Canadien de Famille et de la Jeunesse <<https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/cjfy/index.php/cjfy/article/view/29750>> accessed 13 October 2024

can prevent couples from expressing their grievances or frustrations, allowing problems to fester until they become unmanageable.

- **Gendered Communication Dynamics:** Traditional gender roles sometimes dictate that women should be submissive and not challenge their husbands, making it difficult for women to voice their opinions or concerns in marriage. This can lead to resentment and dissatisfaction, which may culminate in divorce.
- **Misaligned Expectations:** Couples often marry with differing expectations, particularly regarding finances, roles, children, and family obligations. When these expectations are not communicated or negotiated early in the marriage, they can become sources of ongoing conflict.

Domestic Violence and Abuse: Domestic violence and abuse, both physical and emotional, are major drivers of divorce in Nigeria. While there is growing awareness of the issue, it remains a pervasive problem in many marriages, especially in communities where traditional gender norms and power imbalances exist⁶⁶. Factors contributing to domestic violence include:

- **Cultural Norms and Social Acceptance:** In some Nigerian cultures, domestic violence is normalised or dismissed as a private matter, making it difficult for victims to seek help. However, as awareness grows about the damaging effects of domestic violence, more women and some men are choosing to leave abusive marriages, contributing to the rising divorce rates.
- **Legal and Institutional Barriers:** While Nigerian law criminalises domestic violence, enforcement is inconsistent, and victims often lack access to adequate legal or psychological support. This can delay the decision to leave an abusive marriage, but once support becomes available or the abuse escalates, divorce becomes an inevitable outcome.
- **Psychological Trauma:** Victims of long-term abuse often suffer from severe psychological trauma, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder

⁶⁶ Godiya Allanana Makama, 'Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: The Way Forward' (2013) 9(17) European Scientific Journal <<https://core.ac.uk/reader/236407158>> accessed 13 October 2024

(PTSD). This emotional toll can make it difficult for the marriage to continue, leading to separation or divorce.

Influence of Religious Beliefs: Religion plays a significant role in Nigerian society, and religious beliefs can both deter and facilitate divorce, depending on the context⁶⁷. For instance:

- **Religious Stigma Against Divorce:** In many Christian denominations and Islamic communities, divorce is frowned upon or even forbidden. Couples may stay in unhappy or abusive marriages because of religious obligations or fear of social ostracism. However, in recent years, some religious leaders have become more accepting of divorce, particularly in cases of abuse or severe marital strife⁶⁸.
- **Religious Counseling:** In cases where religion promotes premarital counselling or other interventions, couples may have better tools to resolve conflicts, reducing the likelihood of divorce. However, when religious teachings emphasise submission or endurance in the face of hardship, some individuals may feel trapped in unhealthy marriages.

Legal Barriers and Reforms: The legal process surrounding divorce in Nigeria can be cumbersome, expensive, and drawn out, deterring some couples from pursuing legal separation. Some challenges include:

- **Complexity of Divorce Proceedings:** Nigeria's legal system, particularly its handling of divorce, varies across its multiple legal frameworks – statutory, customary, and religious laws. Statutory marriages require formal legal proceedings, which can be lengthy and costly, deterring many couples from initiating divorce⁶⁹.
- **Customary and Religious Divorce Laws:** In communities where marriages are governed by customary or Islamic law, divorce procedures may be simpler but may also favour men, making it difficult for women to initiate divorce. In some cases, women may be left

⁶⁷ Okpara (n 8)

⁶⁸ Adegoke (n 7)

⁶⁹ Sadowski (n 45)

without adequate financial support or child custody rights following a customary or religious divorce.

The rising divorce rates in Nigeria are influenced by a complex interplay of economic, social, cultural, and legal factors. As Nigerian society continues to evolve, with increasing urbanisation, globalisation, and shifts in gender roles, marriages face new challenges that may not have existed in previous generations⁷⁰. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach, including better communication, economic stability, empowerment of women, and legal reforms that support individuals in abusive or unsatisfactory marriages. Premarital counselling and public awareness campaigns may also help to equip couples with the skills they need to build stronger, more resilient marriages⁷¹.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

The empirical review of studies on premarital counselling and its effectiveness in reducing divorce rates highlights varied findings across different contexts, with a focus on data-driven analyses. Several researchers have explored the impact of premarital counselling on marital stability, using surveys, longitudinal studies, and statistical analyses to assess how counselling interventions influence marriage outcomes. The following paragraphs discuss the empirical evidence from global and Nigerian studies relevant to the research topic.

Globally, premarital counselling has been shown to have positive effects on marital satisfaction and longevity. In a longitudinal study conducted in the United States, Stanley et al.'s research found that couples who participated in premarital counselling reported higher levels of marital satisfaction and were less likely to divorce within the first five years of marriage⁷². Their study utilised survey data from over 1,000 couples and applied quantitative methods to measure the correlation between counselling interventions and marital stability. Another study by Markman et al. confirmed these findings, suggesting that premarital counselling helps couples develop

⁷⁰ *Ibid*

⁷¹ Frankel (n 43)

⁷² Scott M Stanley et al., 'Premarital education, marital quality, and marital stability: findings from a large, random household survey' (2006) 20(1) *Journal of Family Psychology*
 <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16569096/>> accessed 13 October 2024

communication skills, conflict resolution techniques, and realistic expectations, all of which are crucial for long-term relationship success⁷³.

A meta-analysis by Hawkins also revealed that couples who underwent premarital counselling were 30% more likely to stay married than those who did not receive any counselling⁷⁴. These studies, which are predominantly based on data from Western contexts, provide strong evidence that structured premarital interventions have measurable benefits in reducing divorce rates.

Empirical studies in Nigeria also support the positive impact of premarital counselling, though the extent of its effectiveness is influenced by cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors. A study surveyed 300 married couples in selected urban areas in Nigeria, half of whom had participated in premarital counselling⁷⁵. The results showed that couples who had undergone counselling reported lower levels of conflict and were more satisfied with their marriages. Adeyemo's study used statistical analyses to demonstrate that counselling significantly reduced the likelihood of early divorce, with participants citing improved communication and mutual understanding as key benefits.

Similarly, Bawa conducted research on 200 Christian and Muslim couples in southwestern Nigeria to investigate the role of religious counselling in marital stability. Their findings indicated that religious premarital counselling, especially in Christian churches, contributed to lower divorce rates⁷⁶. The study used quantitative survey methods to compare the divorce rates of couples who received counselling with those who did not. However, it was noted that counselling's effectiveness was less pronounced in Muslim communities where other factors, such as family pressure and polygamous traditions, played significant roles in marital outcomes.

⁷³ Elizabeth S Allen et al., 'PREP for Strong Bonds: A Review of Outcomes from a Randomized Clinical Trial' (2015) 37(3) Contemporary Family Therapy <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10591-014-9325-3>> accessed 13 October 2024

⁷⁴ Hjellming (n 37)

⁷⁵ Rafael Cortez et al., 'Adolescent Fertility and Sexual Health in Nigeria' (2016) Health, Nutrition and Population Discussion Papers <<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/507641468190770251/pdf/103667-WP-ASRH-Nigeria-PUBLIC.pdf>> accessed 13 October 2024

⁷⁶ Bawa (n 10)

The empirical review underscores the positive role of premarital counselling in promoting marital stability and reducing divorce rates. Studies in both global and Nigerian contexts consistently demonstrate that couples who participate in premarital counselling experience improved communication, conflict resolution, and marital satisfaction. However, in the Nigerian context, the effectiveness of counselling is moderated by cultural and religious factors, necessitating tailored counselling approaches that account for these variables. Overall, empirical evidence supports the premise that premarital counselling is a valuable tool for mitigating divorce rates, though its success depends on the specific social dynamics at play.

GAPS IN LITERATURE

Although there has been considerable scholarly inquiry into premarital counselling and its effects on marital stability, notable deficiencies persist, particularly within the Nigerian context. A significant number of studies predominantly utilise qualitative methodologies or limited sample sizes, thereby constraining the applicability of their conclusions. The exploration of quantitative evidence regarding the efficacy of premarital counselling in Nigeria remains insufficiently addressed. This paper seeks to fill that void by employing a quantitative methodology, utilising surveys to evaluate and compare divorce rates among couples who have participated in counselling versus those who have not. Additionally, longitudinal research is deficient concerning the enduring effects of premarital counselling. Predominantly, existing studies emphasise short-term outcomes. This article mitigates that issue by analysing retrospective data from couples married for varying durations, thereby offering valuable insights into the lasting influence of counselling.

The literature on premarital counselling in Nigeria often overlooks secular approaches, focusing mainly on religious programs. This article will compare both religious and secular counselling to offer a broader perspective on their effectiveness. Additionally, many studies fail to account for Nigeria's regional and cultural diversity. By sampling couples from different regions and backgrounds, this study will provide region-specific insights.

There is also limited examination of specific counselling components like communication skills, conflict resolution, and financial planning in preventing divorce. This article will assess these

factors to identify which aspects contribute most to marital stability. By comparing divorce rates between couples who have undergone counselling and those who haven't, and evaluating the effectiveness of specific counselling elements, the study will help refine counselling programs to focus on the most impactful interventions.

Thus, the article will bridge gaps in quantitative research, cultural diversity, and counselling success metrics, contributing to a deeper understanding of premarital counselling's role in reducing divorce rates in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study employs a quantitative approach, utilising random sampling to select couples from Lagos, Ogun, and Oyo States in Nigeria. A total of 100 individuals, comprising 50 couples, were sampled, with an uneven distribution based on population density. Specifically, Lagos contributed 50 participants (25 couples), Ogun provided 30 participants (15 couples), and Oyo contributed 20 participants (10 couples). This distribution ensures a diverse representation across urban and rural areas in the Southwestern region of Nigeria.

State	Number of Couples	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Total Sample
Lagos	25	50	50%
Ogun	15	30	30%
Oyo	10	20	20%
Total	50	100	100%

Table 1. Participants and Samples Demographics

Data was collected through structured, close-ended questionnaires designed to capture information on marital stability, satisfaction, and the couples' experiences with premarital

counselling. The survey also assesses specific counselling components, such as communication skills, conflict resolution, and financial planning.

The collected data will be analysed using descriptive statistics, enabling a clear summary and interpretation of the results. This analysis will include comparing divorce rates between couples who underwent premarital counselling and those who did not. Additionally, descriptive statistics will help identify trends regarding the effectiveness of different counselling components. By employing this rigorous methodology, the study provides valuable insights into the role of premarital counselling in reducing divorce rates in Nigeria and identifying the most impactful elements of counselling programs, ultimately aiding policymakers and counselling providers in developing more effective interventions.

ANALYSIS

A total of 100 respondents have been surveyed and the result shows that 65% underwent premarital counselling while 35% did not.

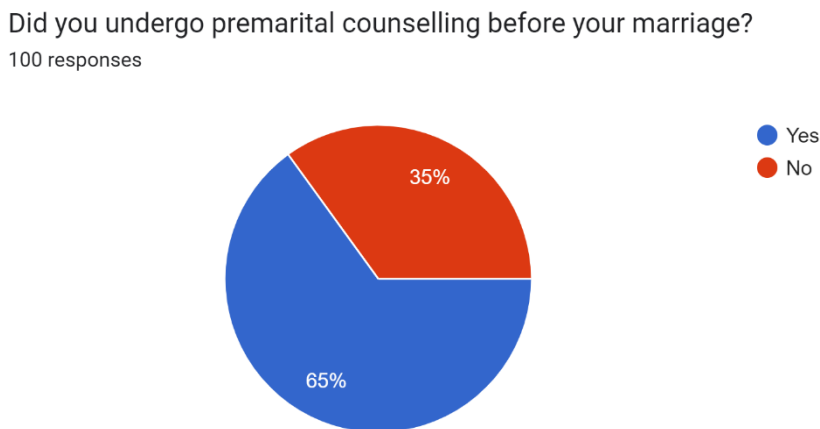


Figure 1. Respondents' Premarital Counselling Overview

In the same vein, the number of sessions which the respondents attend shows their acclimatisation towards accepting and engaging in premarital counselling. 71% of the respondents had 1 – 3 sessions, 20% had 4 – 6 sessions, and 19% had over 6 sessions.

If yes, how many sessions did you attend?

63 responses

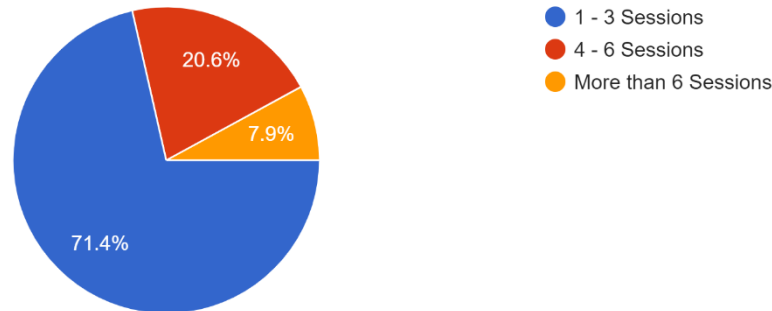


Figure 2. Overview of Sessions Attended by Couples Who Participated in Premarital Counselling

The survey also reflected that the majority of respondents engaged in both available aspects of counselling (religious and professional). The result indicated that 62.7% had both counselling approaches, 17% had professional psychological counselling, and 19% engaged in religious counselling.

Which type of premarital counselling did you receive?

67 responses

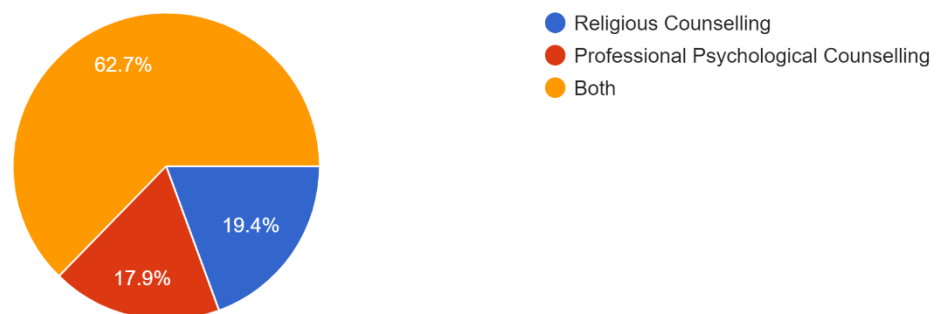


Figure 3. The Type of Premarital Counseling Received by the Couples

Premarital Counselling Significantly Reducing Divorce Rates among Nigerian Couples: The dataset did not directly address divorce rates, but it reflected the effectiveness of premarital counselling in preparing couples for marriage and reducing conflicts. The mixed responses suggest that while some participants found counselling effective in managing conflicts – thereby reducing the rates of divorce, others were neutral or disagreed. This mixed feedback implies that while premarital counselling may play a role in reducing divorce rates for some, it may not have a universal impact. To answer this objective more definitively, a longer-term study directly tracking divorce rates post-counseling would be required.

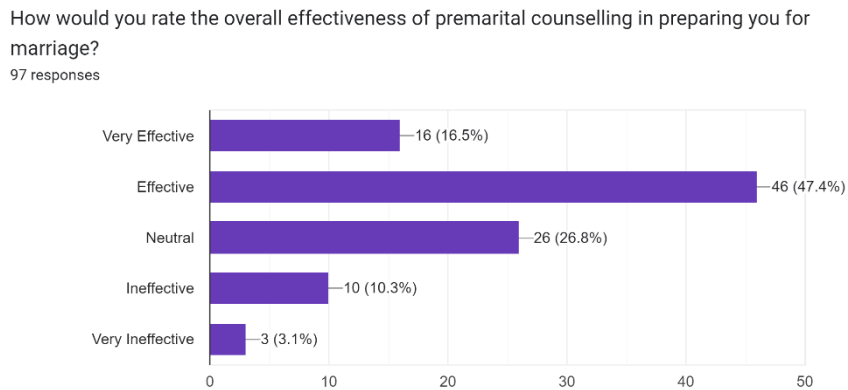


Figure 4. The Effectiveness of Premarital Counselling in Preparing Couples for Marriage

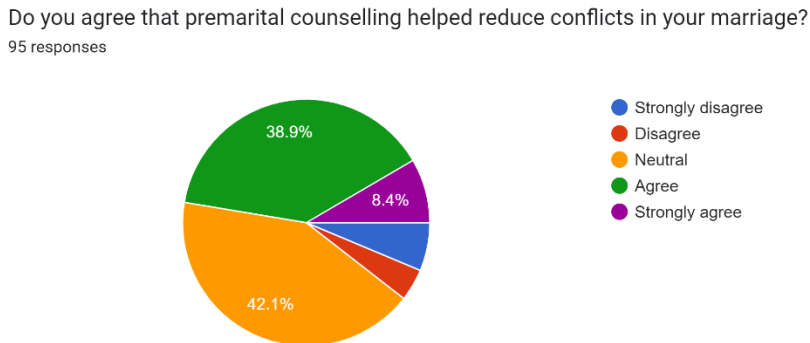


Figure 5. The Effectiveness of Counselling in Reducing Marital Conflicts Leading to Divorce

The Success Rates of Various Premarital Counselling Interventions: In terms of session attendance, most participants attended 1-6 sessions, and many rated their experience as either "Effective" or "Very Effective." This points toward a generally positive perception of premarital counselling, suggesting that interventions offering even a few sessions have potential success in preparing couples for marriage. However, the data doesn't break down success rates based on different types of interventions, so it's unclear whether specific techniques (e.g., conflict resolution training, financial management) were more successful than others.

Has participation in premarital counselling improved your conflict resolution skills within your marriage?
95 responses

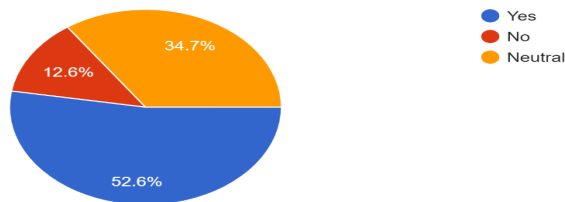


Figure 6. Premarital Counselling Effect on Developing Conflict Resolution Skills

Do you agree that premarital counselling has significantly improved your marital satisfaction?
94 responses

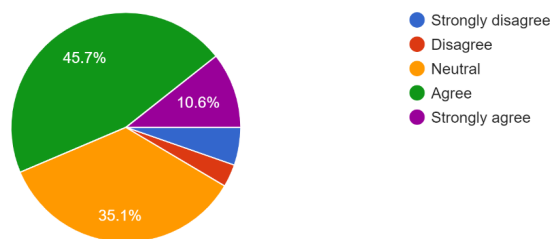


Figure 7. Premarital Counselling Effect on Premarital Satisfaction

Participation in Premarital Counselling Correlates with Marital Satisfaction and Conflict Resolution Skills: There is evidence in the dataset that participation in premarital counselling correlates positively with marital satisfaction in some cases. For example, many respondents who found counselling "Effective" also agreed that it influenced their decision-making

regarding marriage-related matters like finances and communication. However, the relationship between counselling and conflict resolution skills was more ambiguous, as some respondents disagreed that counselling helped reduce conflicts. This suggests that while counselling may enhance certain aspects of marital satisfaction, it may not always translate to improved conflict resolution for all couples.

How well do you agree that there is a correlation between premarital counselling and a reduced likelihood of divorce?

96 responses

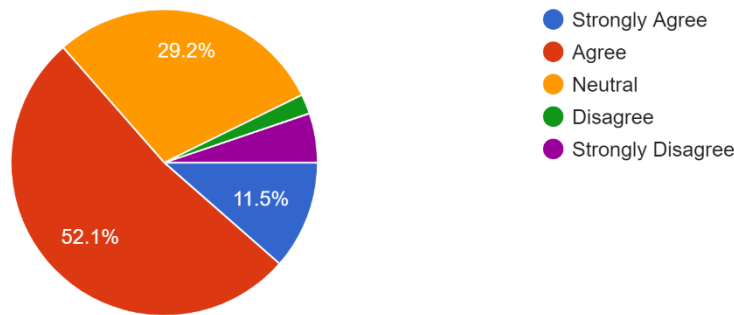


Figure 8. Correlation Between Premarital Counselling and Reduction of Divorce

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING PREMARITAL COUNSELLING SERVICES IN NIGERIA

The results derived from the inquiry, "Are there any barriers that you encountered when accessing premarital counselling services?" indicate a considerable impediment in the accessibility of these services. A notable 51.1% of participants confirmed that they encountered barriers, implying that notwithstanding the presence of premarital counselling options, more than half of the sampled population faced challenges. An intriguing 33% maintained a neutral stance, potentially reflecting minimal involvement or ambiguity regarding the counselling services offered, while 16% disclosed the absence of barriers, indicating that a smaller fraction of participants experienced unimpeded access to these services.

Among those who responded affirmatively to facing barriers, the subsequent inquiry regarding the primary barrier elucidates particular difficulties. Insufficient awareness surfaced as the

predominant challenge, with 43.2% of respondents recognising it as their principal issue. This underscores a vital deficiency in the communication of information concerning the availability and advantages of premarital counselling services in Nigeria, which may restrict couples' access to essential preparatory support.

The financial burden emerged as the second most frequently mentioned barrier, with 35.2% of participants citing this concern. This indicates that cost is a significant issue for couples, particularly in a nation where economic adversities may render counselling services an unaffordable luxury for many individuals.

The availability of counsellors was recognised by 15.9% of respondents as a barrier, suggesting that even when couples possess awareness and financial means, a lack of accessible counsellors or logistical challenges may still hinder their capacity to obtain counselling.

Lastly, 5% of respondents noted social or cultural stigma as a barrier, indicating that, for certain individuals, societal attitudes towards counselling or marriage may dissuade them from pursuing professional assistance prior to marriage.

These findings illuminate critical areas necessitating enhancement, including awareness initiatives, the reduction of counselling costs, the augmentation of counsellor availability, and the mitigation of societal stigmas associated with counselling. Addressing these barriers is imperative for improving the accessibility and efficacy of premarital counselling in Nigeria.

Are there any barriers that you encountered when accessing premarital counselling services?
94 responses

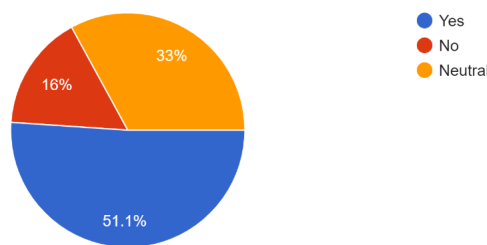


Figure 9. Barriers Encountered in Accessing Premarital Counselling Services

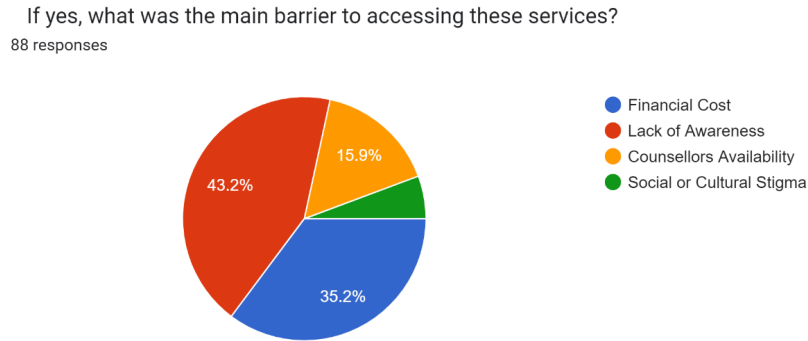


Figure 10. Specifying Barriers Encountered in Premarital Counselling

In summary, the findings suggest that while premarital counselling is generally perceived as beneficial, its effectiveness varies among couples, particularly in terms of conflict resolution. Additionally, further research is needed to directly address the impact on divorce rates and to investigate barriers to accessing counselling services in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Longitudinal Investigations on Divorce Trends: To definitively ascertain the influence of premarital counselling on divorce statistics within Nigeria, longitudinal investigations are imperative. Such studies ought to monitor couples who have participated in premarital counselling over an extended period, thereby evaluating the enduring effects on their marital stability, including divorce rates. Through temporal data analysis, it will be feasible to ascertain whether premarital counselling substantially mitigates the incidence of divorce.

Diversification and Personalisation of Counselling Strategies: The evidence indicates that premarital counselling is widely regarded as beneficial; however, there exists an ambiguity regarding which particular interventions yield the highest success rates. Counselling initiatives should adopt a more varied methodology, integrating components such as conflict management, financial literacy, and effective communication techniques. Furthermore, a bespoke approach whereby counsellors customise the content according to the distinct requirements of each couple could enhance overall efficacy and satisfaction.

Augmenting Conflict Resolution Education: In light of the divergent opinions concerning the efficacy of counselling in alleviating marital disputes, an intensified emphasis on conflict resolution should be integrated into counselling training programs. A more thorough education on navigating disagreements, managing emotional responses, and promoting effective dialogue could yield improved results in this domain.

Enhancing Accessibility to Counselling Services: Although the survey did not explicitly address challenges related to counselling access, the limited responses imply that there is room for improvement in this regard. To bolster accessibility, particularly in rural or underserved regions, Nigerian policymakers should contemplate the establishment of subsidised or complimentary premarital counselling initiatives. These programs could be implemented through religious organizations, community centres, or online platforms, thereby overcoming geographical and financial obstacles.

Advocating Awareness and Mitigating Stigma: Premarital counselling may encounter cultural or societal stigma in certain Nigerian communities. Public awareness initiatives that underscore the advantages of counselling can aid in normalizing its significance in marriage preparation. Educational campaigns disseminated via media and outreach by community leaders could motivate a greater number of couples to engage in premarital counselling programs.

Governmental and Institutional Endorsement: The Nigerian government and academic institutions ought to actively facilitate the promotion of premarital counselling services. This could encompass the integration of counselling into public health initiatives, the provision of financial assistance to counselling facilities, and the establishment of training programs for counsellors. Additionally, academic entities can collaborate with counselling services to provide comprehensive offerings for students contemplating marriage.

Assessment and Evaluation of Counselling Programs: Premarital counselling services must undergo regular evaluations to determine their effectiveness. Counselling providers should gather participant feedback and consistently refine their programs to ensure they cater to the evolving requirements of couples. A standardized framework for evaluating counselling outcomes should be devised to enable service providers to consistently measure their success.

By enacting these recommendations, Nigeria can significantly enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of premarital counselling, ensuring that a greater number of couples derive benefits from these services and are better prepared for enduring marital success.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents an extensive examination of the efficacy of premarital counselling in mitigating divorce rates among couples in Nigeria, specifically within the regions of Lagos, Ogun, and Oyo States. Employing a quantitative methodology, the study juxtaposed divorce rates between pairs who participated in premarital counselling and those who did not whilst also evaluating the particular elements of counselling – namely, communication skills, conflict resolution, and financial planning – that significantly contribute to marital endurance.

The results reveal that couples who engaged in premarital counselling experienced diminished divorce rates, thereby substantiating the assertion that counselling serves as a vital instrument for promoting marital stability. Nevertheless, notable obstacles to accessing counselling services were uncovered, such as a lack of awareness, financial constraints, and the limited presence of counsellors, with cultural stigma emerging as a less prevalent yet significant concern. This research fills several voids in the existing literature by delivering a localized, empirical investigation of premarital counselling in Nigeria and providing insights into both faith-based and secular counselling methodologies. The findings underscore the necessity for enhanced awareness, affordability, and accessibility of counselling services to ensure that a greater number of couples can reap its enduring benefits on marital relationships. The outcomes furnish essential recommendations for policymakers and counselling practitioners to enhance premarital programmes.