
The Influence of Christian Pre-Marital Counselling on Extramarital Affairs

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of the study was to establish the influence of Christian pre-marital counselling in mitigating extramarital affairs in Bondeni Sub-location, Nakuru County- Kenya. Nakuru County is ranked among the top ten counties where extramarital affairs is potentially rife, as implied by the relatively high HIV prevalence. The study was anchored on Cognitive Behaviour Theory. Descriptive survey design was adopted. The study was based on a purposive sample of 310 married members from six Churches that run pre-marital counseling programmes. Data was collected through questionnaires and interview guide. The data was analyzed using Chi Square and Spearman's Rank Correlation tests at 0.05 significance level. The results revealed that incidences of extramarital affairs were significantly higher among respondents who did not attend pre-marital counseling before getting married than among respondents who attended pre-marital counseling. The results affirmed that through pre-marital counselling programmes, the Church was able to mitigate extramarital affairs in society. Therefore, the Church need to give greater prominence to comprehensive pre-marital counselling for couples intending to get married.

KEYWORDS: Christian Pre-marital Counselling, Extramarital Affairs, Infidelity, Christianity, Marriage

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, extramarital affairs have been on the rise and, today it is a common occurrence in modern society (Smith, Hall, & Daigle, 2010). Estimates by researchers suggest that, up to 60 percent of men and 50 percent of women report extramarital affairs in their lifetime (Kwena, Mwanzo, Shisanya, Camlin, Turan, Achiro, & Bukusi, 2014). In the United States, studies suggest that as high as 50 percent of the population has engaged in extramarital affairs (Potter, 2011). Within American marriages, the range of infidelity has been estimated between 20 percent and 40 percent (Marin, Christensen, & Atkins, 2014) while incidences of infidelity are as high as 70 percent among dating couples (Tsapelas, Fisher, & Aron, 2010).

In the United Kingdom (UK), the prevalence of infidelity is reported to be relatively lower, with at least 10 to 14 percent of babies born reportedly being from extramarital affairs (Nowak, Weisfield, Imamoglu, Weisfield, Butovskaya, & Shen, 2014). Lower rates are also reported in India too where a national survey found that, 15 percent of Indians engaged in extramarital affairs (Raghunath & Truscott, 2015). Both findings in the UK and India, however, are plagued by underreporting, especially among women, suggesting that the real statistics could be just as high as that of their American counterparts (Nowak et al., 2014; Raghunath & Truscott, 2015). With the high percentage of those who are engaged in extramarital affairs in the United States, UK, and India, there is a great need for mitigation to lower the percentage. Lowering the percentage may strengthen marriages and families.

In Africa, extramarital affairs account for the high diffusion of venereal diseases such as HIV epidemics (Coma, 2013). Just like other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, married couples in Kenya have been found to engage in extramarital affairs (Kwena et al., 2014). The prevalence of extramarital affairs in Africa suggests that the vice is a pervasive phenomenon that knows no boundaries. A survey reported by Kioko (2015) in Kenya, showed that Nairobi had the highest rate of extramarital affairs, with 60 percent men and 40 percent women engaging in extramarital affairs. Nyanza followed, with 55 percent men and 45 percent women engaging in extramarital affairs. The other diverse regions showed different rates of infidelity among married couples. This high prevalence of infidelity is not different from the statistics reported in the western world and is deemed to be as a result of individual, socio-cultural, and economic trends in the country.

Discovery of extramarital affair has led to a number of emotional reactions such as increased anxiety and depression as well as suicidal ideation among couples and Christians couples are no exceptions. The offended spouse often feels inadequate and unattractive. In addition, the perpetrator often shows symptoms of distress, anxiety, guilt and loneliness. The consequences of these reactions are awful. In a study of social dimensions of marital conflicts among Christians in Kenya, Onyango, Odhiambo and

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Maito (2013) found that, extramarital affairs were identified by 45 percent of respondents as a source of marital conflict. In their study, it was found that husbands caught by their wives in extramarital affairs, verbally and physically assaulted their wives. On the contrary, wives who found their husbands to be having extramarital sexual relations, would be physically assaulted and at times chased from the matrimonial home. Extramarital affairs have been found to induce heart disease in the betrayed spouse, and also to increase the betrayer's cardiovascular risks (Fisher, Bandini, Monami, Smith, Balzi, Forti, Manucci, & Maggi, 2011).

By definition, pre-marital counselling is used as a preventative measure, by helping couples learn how to work through relationship problems that predispose extramarital affairs later in the marriage (Sauerheber & Bitter, 2013). Tambling and Glebova (2013) suggest that, Christian pre-marital counselling programmes provide one preventative approach for addressing many of the risk factors typically associated with extramarital affairs. Thus, many couples are encouraged or even required by their pastors or by the state to engage in pre-marital counselling. Given that majority of Kenyans identify with Christianity, the influence of premarital counseling programs on their life should be evident. However, the statistics about infidelity raises the question of whether Christian pre-marital counselling is effective not only in mitigating extramarital affairs but also regulating the behavior of Kenyan couples towards each other. However, little research attention has been focused on the influence of premarital counseling in mitigating extramarital affairs. This is the knowledge that the current study sought to fill. The sole objective of the study was to establish the influence of Christian pre-marital counseling in mitigating extramarital affairs in Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pre-marital counselling therapy is organized for couples who are thinking of starting a family (Ime & Ukpong, 2013). It is typically educational, brief, future-oriented, and geared toward helping couples develop, enhance, and improve relationship quality and interpersonal skills (Sauerheber & Bitter, 2013). The goal of pre-marital counselling is to determine if there are any significant differences in a couple that should be addressed before the wedding ceremony (Scott, 2013). Olson, Olson and Larson (2012) argue that, good pre-marital counselling helps the couple get its marriage off to a more positive start and has been shown to reduce risk factors that predispose extramarital affairs. According to Olson et al (2012), pre-marital counselling stimulates meaningful dialogue for the couple. It teaches them communication and conflict resolution skills which they can use to resolve current and future issues. Couples, also, learn the value of proactively working on their relationship and how they can maintain a healthy relationship without resulting to extramarital affairs.

The majority of pre-marital counselling is provided within Church settings and is provided by the clergy or lay ministers of the Church, hence the term Christian premarital counseling (Sauerheber & Bitter, 2013). Christian pre-marital counselling is a form of counselling that honours Jesus Christ and believes that the Holy Spirit is always present in the counselling relationship with the counselor and the client (Clinton & Hawkins, 2011). Christian couples believe that God is involved in their marriages in providing motivation to continue to grow together in unity and stability (by overcoming challenges) and marital happiness. Thus, the Christian worldview underpins the counselling practice adopted to help the couple address the problems that predispose extramarital affairs.

Christian counselling generally is a ministry-profession that is growing in complexity and in membership (Clinton & Hawkins, 2011). Its membership includes professional clinicians, pastoral counselors, and many others who deliver services to a wide range of clients from a distinctively Christian worldview. This, therefore, reflects a continuum of providers of pre-marital counselling from the professional religious helpers to professional therapeutic helpers (Sauerheber & Bitter, 2013).

Despite its popularity in the church, the efficacy of Christian premarital counseling in mitigating extramarital affairs has received limited scholarly attention, especially within the Kenya African context. Kepler (2015) examined the relationship between pre-marital counselling and marital quality, whose deterioration has been linked to extramarital affairs. The research involved 27 participants. The findings showed that individuals who took part in pre-marital counselling indicated greater marital satisfaction than those who did not, although, Chi-square results showed that the difference was not statistically significant. The researcher recommended the need for further research to explore this relation more fully in order to develop a solid base of knowledge that can inform the development of effective social work intervention strategies in the area of pre-marital and marital counselling.

Burdette, Ellison, Sherkat and Gore (2007) undertook a study that examined whether there were any religious variations in extramarital affairs. The study found that both Church attendance and Biblical beliefs were associated with lower odds of self-reported extramarital affairs. Also that, embedded congregational networks discouraged extramarital affairs by enhancing marital quality through programs, pre-marital and marital counselling, formal and informal social support and exposure to moral messages through Christian spiritual counselling.

Ansah-Hughes, Akyina and Oduro-Okyireh (2015) undertook a perception study of married people about pre-marital counselling in Techiman Municipality of Ghana. The study was conducted among 259 married people from eight Churches. The major finding from the study was that, pre-marital counselling had positive impact on marriages and Techiman Municipality

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married people had positive perception about pre-marital counselling. It was suggested that pre-marital counselling should be maintained and encouraged in all Churches. By implication, the study, by Ansah-Highes et al. (2015), suggests that pre-marital counselling, by proxy, reduces the chances of extramarital affairs. However, this relationship was not directly proven in the study. This necessitated the need for the current study which tested the influence relationship by comparing incidences of extra-marital affairs between married individuals who attended pre-marital counselling and those who did not.

Nganga and Wasanga (2010) assessed pre-marital counselling programmes in selected PCEA Churches in Kiambu District, Kenya. The study involved a sample of eight Church ministers and eighty Church wedded couples drawn from eight parishes. It was found that 90 percent of the respondents considered pre-marital counselling sessions useful. They were equipped with interpersonal skills related to many factors that predispose extramarital affairs, including finances, sexuality and communication. However, the relationship between Christian premarital counselling and incidences of extramarital affairs was not tested inferentially.

The literature suggests that, the Christian worldview underpins the counselling practice adopted to help the couple address the problems that predispose extramarital affairs. However, the influence relationship has barely been tested empirically in Kenya. Empirical studies undertaken in other countries lead to the conclusion that, pre-marital counselling teaches them communication and conflict resolution skills, which helps them resolve their issues without resorting to extramarital affairs. However, proof of this relationship is limited, thus necessitating the current study which tested the influence relationship by comparing occurrence of extramarital affairs between married individuals who attended pre-marital counselling and those who did not.

III. METHOD

Descriptive survey design was adopted. The study was implemented in Six Churches that run pre-marital counseling services in Bondeni sub-location in Nakuru County, Kenya. A sample of 310 respondents comprising of pastors and church members was used. Qualitative data entailed capturing opinion of respondents with regards to the nature and effectiveness of pre-marital counselling programmes. The data analysis involved first entering the data into computer software for analysis. The use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 20) was made for this purpose. The data was coded and entered into this software where the data was analyzed. Qualitative data was analyzed through thematic technique.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A total of 179 usable questionnaires were obtained. Respondents were asked whether there had been incidences of extramarital affairs in the course of their marriage. Results revealed that 24% of the respondents reported incidences of extramarital affairs in the course of their marriage while 76% did not. Taken on their own, the numbers suggest that the incidences of extramarital affairs among respondents were few. However, it can be argued that the numbers were still high among members of the Body of Christ. This level of prevalence is also consistent with numbers reported within American marriages where Marin et al. (2014) reported an estimated range of between 20 percent and 40 percent but higher than those reported by Nowak et al. (2014) in UK at 14 percent or in India by Raghunath and Truscott (2015) at 15 percent. However, the figures are relatively lower than the numbers reported by Kioko (2015) in Nairobi at 40 to 60 percent. The result implies that extramarital affairs were indeed pervasive among Christians.

Respondents were asked whether they attended pre-marital counseling before they got married. Figure 1 shows that 60% of the respondents did not attend pre-marital counselling but 40% did undertake it. This implies that most of the respondents did not attend premarital counseling

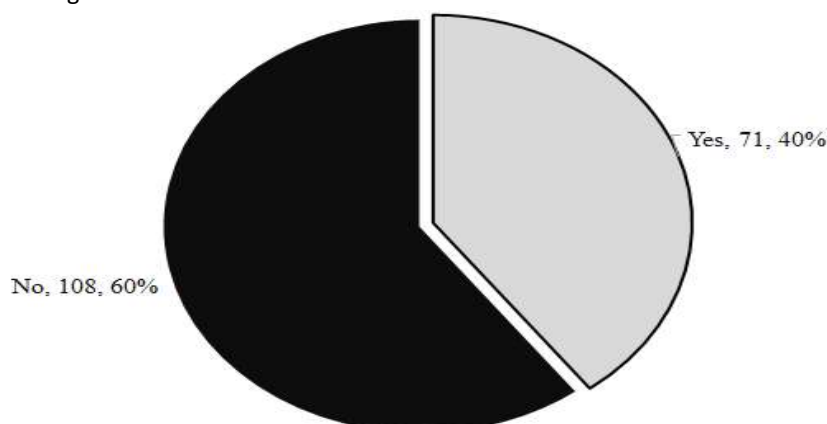


Figure 1 Attendance of premarital counseling before marriage

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The study sought to establish the number of premarital counseling lessons respondent attended before marriage. Figure 2 shows that on average, respondents attended about 4 premarital counseling sessions, with the numbers deviating from this average by about 3 sessions ($M=4.3$, $SD=2.7$). The figure depicts a positively skewed distribution which implies that most of the respondents attended less than 4 premarital counseling sessions before getting married. The results showed that the minimum number of sessions was 1 whereas the maximum was 16.

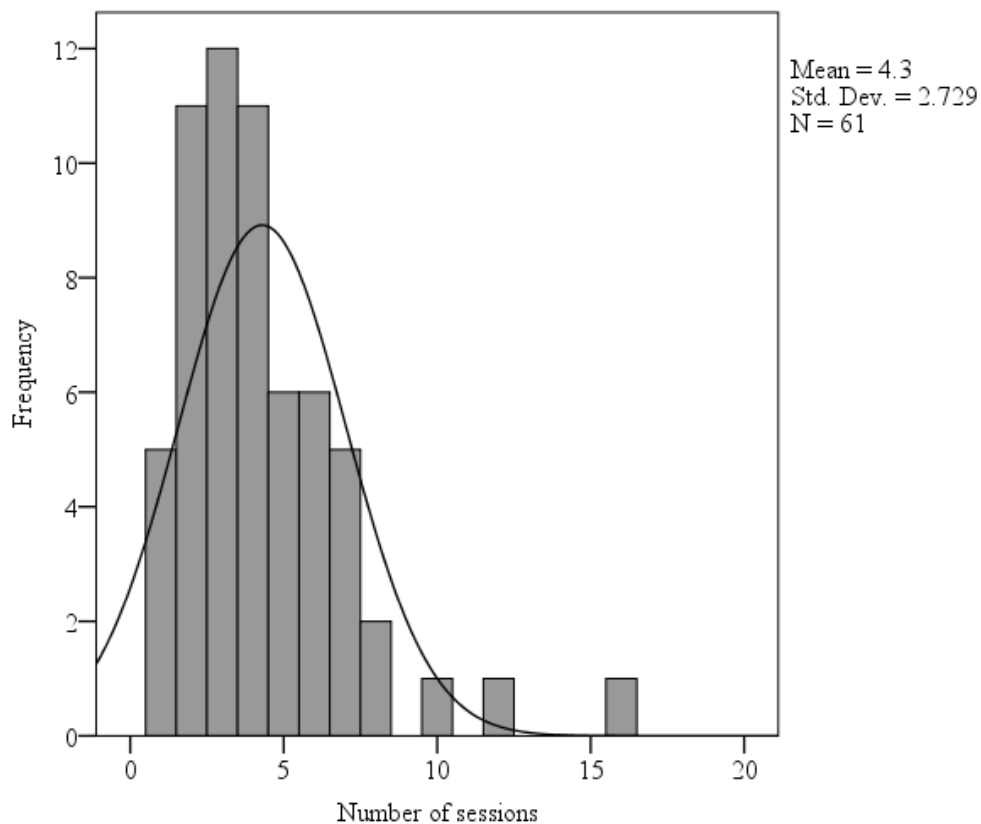


Figure 2 Distribution of respondents by number of premarital counselling sessions attended

Interviews held with the pastors of the respective churches revealed that pre-marital counselling lessons were discharged by the pastors and/or appointed leaders such as elders, the pastor’s wife or best couples. This agrees with the observation by Sauerheber and Bitter (2013) that most of pre-marital counselling is provided within Church settings and is provided by the clergy or lay ministers of the Church. The finding is also resonant to the notion of a continuum of providers of pre-marital counselling from the religious helpers to therapeutic helpers as discussed by Sauerheber and Bitter (2013). This means that within the church setting, pre-marital counseling was not left to professional counsellors alone but even non-professional counselors assumed to possess the skills are allowed to discharge the role.

Findings on the effect of premarital counseling on various dimensions of marital relationship are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Effect of premarital counseling on material relationships

Role of pre-marital counselling		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
The quality of our relationship improved greatly after attending pre-marital counselling	<i>F</i>	1	4	17	47	39	108
	%	0.9%	3.6%	18.0%	42.3%	35.1%	100.0%
Pre-marital counselling equipped me with interpersonal skills that has helped me relate well with my spouse	<i>F</i>	1	2	18	44	43	108
	%	0.9%	1.9%	16.7%	40.7%	39.8%	100.0%
Pre-marital counselling opened my eyes to the problems that I should guard against in order to have a happy marriage	<i>F</i>	5	0	13	55	35	108
	%	4.7%	0.0%	12.1%	50.5%	32.7%	100.0%

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During pre-marital counselling, I learnt how to work through relationship problems that may affect my marriage	F	4	4	13	47	40	108
	%	3.7%	3.7%	12.1%	43.0%	37.4%	100.0%
I often resort to Scripture whenever I am facing a difficult time in my marriage	F	6	0	12	50	52	120
	%	5.0%	0.0%	10.0%	41.7%	43.3%	100.0%

Table 1 shows that 42.3% and 35.1% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, that the quality of their relationship improved greatly after attending premarital counseling. Eighteen percent (18%) of the respondents were neutral while 3.6% and 0.9% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. Therefore, most of the respondents realized an improvement in the quality of their relationships after taking pre-marital counselling lessons.

On whether pre-marital counselling equipped them with interpersonal skills that helped them relate well with spouse, 40.7% of the respondents agreed and a further 39.8% of the respondents strongly agreed. However, 16.7% of the respondents were neutral while 1.9% and 0.9% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. It can thus be inferred that, for most of the respondents, pre-marital counselling equips people with interpersonal skills useful for relating well with a spouse.

Table 1 also shows that, 50.5% of the respondents agreed and 32.7% strongly agreed that, pre-marital counselling opened their eyes to the problems that they should guard against in order to have a happy marriage. However, 12.1% of the respondents were neutral while on the other hand, 4.7% of the respondents strongly disagreed. Therefore, majority of the respondents had their eyes opened to problems they should guard against, in order to live happily in their marriage.

On when the respondent learnt how to work through relationship problems that may affect their marriage, 43.0% and 37.4% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed, respectively. However, 12.1% of the respondents were neutral; 3.7% of the respondents disagreed and another 3.7% strongly disagreed. Therefore, most of the respondents learnt problem solving skills useful for solving their marital issues successfully.

The table further shows that 41.7% and 43.3% of the respondents often resorted to Scripture whenever faced with a difficult time in their marriage. Ten percent of the respondents were neutral and 5 percent strongly disagreed. This means that, majority of the respondents did resort to Scripture whenever faced with difficulties in their marriages.

Attendance of pre-marital counselling was analyzed against incidences of extramarital affairs as and the results presented in Table 2. The results reveal that incidences of extramarital affairs were higher among respondents who did not attend pre-marital counseling before getting married (76.7%) than among respondents who attended premarital counseling (23.3%). This suggests that pre-marital counselling potentially reduced risk exposure to extramarital affairs.

Table 2: Premarital counseling and incidences of extramarital affairs cross-tabulation

		Has there been incidence of extramarital affair during the course of your marriage			Total
		Yes	No		
Did you attend premarital counseling before you got married	Yes	Count	10	61	71
		%	23.3%	44.8%	39.5%
	No	Count	33	75	108
		%	76.7%	55.2%	60.5%
Total	Count	43	136	179	
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

In order to test the relationship between premarital counseling and extramarital affairs, Chi-square test was run and results presented in Table 3. The table shows that the difference in incidences of extramarital affairs between respondents who attended premarital counselling and those who did not was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 6.306, p < .05$. This implies that pre-marital counselling did reduce risk of occurrence of extramarital affairs to a statistically significant degree.

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Table 3: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.306 ^a	1	.012
Continuity Correction ^b	5.438	1	.020
Likelihood Ratio	6.642	1	.010
Fisher's Exact Test			
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.270	1	.012
N of Valid Cases	179		

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 17.01.

The views of the respondents were sought with respect to whether pre-marital counseling programmes were effective in mitigating extramarital affairs. As figure 13 shows, analysis of the data revealed that for 83.8% of the respondents, pre-marital counselling programmes were effective. However, 13.5% of the respondents disagreed that the programmes were effective, 2.7% of the respondents were not sure. The following are sample verbatim comments:

“Yes because you learn problems that may affect marriage.”

“Yes especially if the counsellor is equipped through learning from other people and is a true believer.”

“Yes, they form a foundation upon which counseled couples keep reference.”

“Yes. If it is done in good faith and involves experienced counsellors.”

“Yes. It gives eye opener to many aspects of life.”

“Yes. It is very effective for couples to learn from others experiences.”

“Not many. It depends on individual life style. Understanding and God fearing.”

“Proper knowledge of the word is better. The session are not enough.”

“Yes and no. Depending on the stand of both partners.”

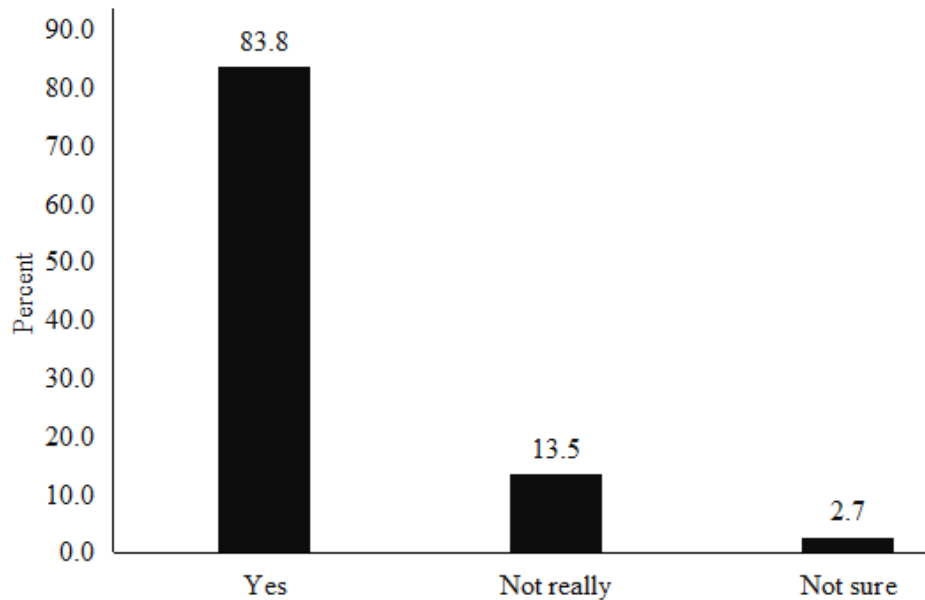


Figure 3 Respondents' perception of effectiveness of pre-marital counselling

Results from interviews held with the Pastors revealed that all the Pastors were unanimous that pre-marital counselling is effective. One of the Pastors commented thus;

“Yes. There is a great difference between those who have gone through pre-marital counselling and those who have not. Those who have gone through, have skills and knowledge to better address marriage issues more than those who did not.”

Respondents were asked to suggest ways of improving pre-marital counselling to be more effective at mitigating extramarital affairs. Findings were summarized under six predominant themes. The most frequently mentioned suggestions, according to

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Figure 4, was to increase number of lessons/sessions (30.6%), followed by increasing awareness of its importance (26.5%) and thirdly, increasing frequency of the programmes (24.5%). To a lesser extent, respondents also suggested, getting qualified and experienced counsellors (12.2%) and enriching programme content (6.1%).

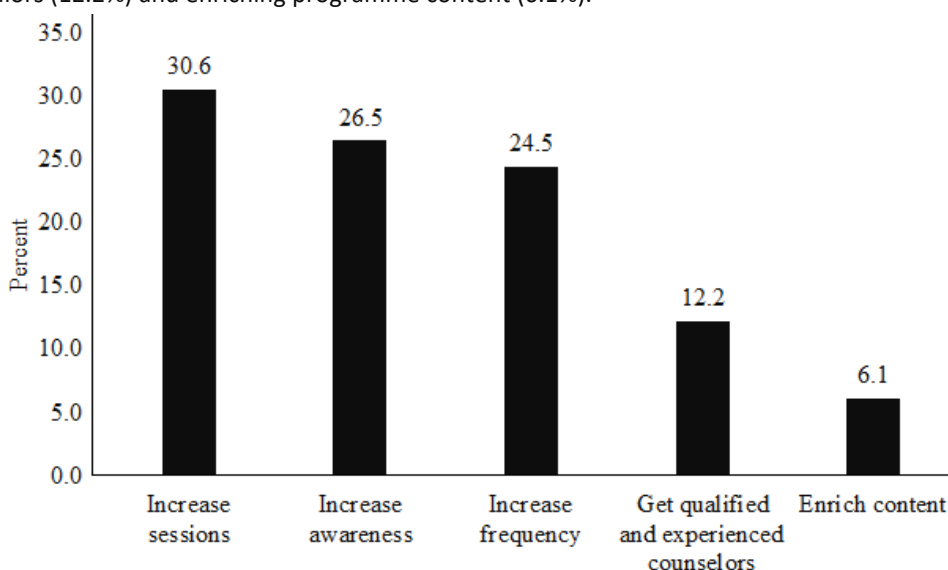


Figure 4 Suggestions for improvement of premarital counseling programmes

The Pastors were unanimous that the duration of the programme should be extended. Sample verbatim responses from the Pastors were as follows:

“These programmes should take longer time than we have been doing. This allows time for the couples to process what being in marriage entails, preparing them not to fall into the trap of extramarital affairs.”

“The Church to organize more of them. There are great challenges that need to be faced – those who are preparing for marriage think that marriage is ever lasting/ a bed of roses. They do not anticipate problems/unfaithfulness. Those who marry spouses from other churches or different doctrines may end in hardships and end up in extramarital affairs if such issues are not addressed before marriage. Also organize refresher courses after 2-3 months after the wedding.”

V. CONCLUSIONS

The study set out to establish the influence of Christian pre-marital counselling in mitigating extramarital affairs in Bondeni Sub-location, Nakuru County- Kenya. It was found that incidences of extramarital affairs were higher among respondents who did not attend pre-marital counselling before getting married than among respondents who attended pre-marital counselling. The difference in incidences of extramarital affairs between respondents who attended pre-marital counselling and those who did not was statistically significant. For most of the respondents, pre-marital counselling programmes were effective in mitigating extramarital affairs. From the study findings, it is therefore clear that pre-marital counselling programmes are necessary for equipping couples with the skills for managing marital relationships. Pre-marital counselling equipped participants with interpersonal skills that has helped them relate well with their spouses, open their eyes to the problems that they should guard against in order to have a happy marriage, and empower them on how to work through relationship problems that may affect the marriage.

The Church should create greater awareness of the importance and significance of pre-marital counselling to the society and especially to couples intending to get married. The findings of this study should be used as an evidence base upon which to support an institutionalized approach to conducting Church marriages. The content and duration of pre-marital counseling should be expanded in order to allow adequate coverage of all critical topics necessary to ensure marital fidelity. By implication, this would mean that couples intending to wed in Church should get enrolled into such programmes early enough.

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