

INFLUENCE OF PREMARITAL COUNSELLING ON MARITAL ADJUSTMENT AMONG MARRIED STUDENTS OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN TARABA STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of premarital counselling on marital adjustment among married students of public universities in Taraba State. Premarital counselling is a process that aims at preparing those who plan to get married with knowledge on how to improve their relationship once they are married. However, with the rate of increase in divorce these days as observed by the researcher, it has prompted this work in order to look at the effectiveness of the premarital counselling on marital adjustment. The research was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. A cross sectional survey design was adopted, with a sample size of 452 drawn from a population of 1572 through purposive sampling. Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (MAQ) was used to collect data, which were analysed using descriptive statistics and chi-square of mean standard deviation to answer the research Questions. The findings revealed that; premarital conflict management counselling significantly influences marital adjustment among married students. Similarly, premarital emotional intimacy counselling was found to significantly enhances marital adjustment, strengthening emotional bonds. The study concluded that premarital counselling is pivotal for fostering marital harmony and adjustment among married students. It recommended that counselling centres in public universities should expanded to include premarital counselling programs tailored to address conflict management, emotional intimacy, effective communication, and sexual satisfaction. The Study also recommend that intended couples should be encourage to participate actively in a premarital counselling programmes These initiatives would help intending couples develop the skills necessary for building resilient and fulfilling marital relationships.

Keywords: *Influence, Premarital Counselling, Marital Adjustment, and Married Students*

Introduction

The institution of marriage is as old as the existence of man. It is the coming together of two persons in love with consent of parents, guardians and witnesses for the purpose of procreation and companionship. Dadi (2020) reported that marriage is the heterosexual

relationship, sharing a common residence, engaging in economic co-operation and procreation. Marriage is expected to be an affair of intimacy and compromise, where spouses complement each other. Similarly, Haviland, Harald, McBride and Walrath (2017) asserted that marriage is an approved social institution in which two or more persons establish a family through a socially or ritually recognised union or legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations. Marriage is a relationship that operates on many levels, with many elements intertwist and interweave in a specific way (Moses & Everest, 2023). Therefore, Marriage is a union of two separate individuals who agree to plan and establish their own family as husband and wife.

Marriage can be a lot of work for both spouses, and sometimes it might end in conflict between couples. Disagreement, often arise which cause strain in a relationship and makes marriage even more challenging. Marital conflicts are natural because individuals are unique with different temperaments, tastes and habits. Whenever two people get together eventually some of the belief system and personal habits of one will annoy the other, regardless of the degree of love (Tasew & Getahun, 2022). In healthy relationships, couples tend to accept and resolve conflict. However, in case of unhealthy relationships, marital conflicts arise due to several reasons. When there is conflict between role performance and role expectation of the spouses, it leads to maladjustment of husband/wife relationships and to marital disruptions (Pathan, 2015). More so, Conflict that is not managed correctly diminishes happiness and it leaves them broken and burnt out (Tasew & Getahun, 2022). Marital adjustment is maintained by several factors such as conflict management, emotional intimacy, effective communication, socio-economic status, sexual life and so on.

Universally, marriage is a foundation in every society. The marital relationship is a source of support, friendship and joy, creating cooperation, sympathy, kindness, patience and responsibility towards the family (Sadeghi, Khedmati & Yousefi, 2018). Marital satisfaction often relates to marital adjustment and it is usually characterized by strong free-flowing communication abilities and visibly deep satisfaction in term of affection, sexuality, shared time and finances (Uwaoma, Unamba, Ebeh & Chine, 2016). Marital adjustment refers as the condition of overall happiness and satisfaction feeling of husband and wife with regards to their marriage and with each other (Singha, 2016). Marital adjustment is defined as coordination and sympathy in achieving common goals in husband and wife's life which leads to mutual satisfaction. Adjustment between husband and wife makes it possible for them to avoid from conflicts or to solve them wisely such that both sides feel satisfied from each other (Sadeghi, et al, 2018). Marital adjustment also entails conflict managements among couples, emotional intimacy, effective communication, sexual satisfaction and adaptation to marital life. When all these are lacking in marital relationship, its leads to marital dissatisfaction which in turn affect people of all ages, races and cultural backgrounds and often leads to divorce.

According to Udofia, Bonsi, Agbakpe, and Udofia, (2021), marital satisfaction and adjustment are the most important sign of marital success. The dream of having a smooth marital journey with all the love and romance does not always work out as it is intended because some married coupls immediately experience problems in the early years of their marriage. Marriage adjustment refers to the ability of couples to achieve satisfaction, happiness and success in a number of specific marriage tasks. It also includes agreement on flexibility as each spouse is

allowed to play his or her role as regards socio-economic background, emotional stability in marriage, sexual adjustment, changes in value system and communication (Ako & Ashami, 2017). Also, marital adjustment is considered as one of the most important effective factors on marital life's endurance and stability.

News reports and social media posts are rife with announcements and gossip of divorce. More worrisome is the increase of divorce among young marriages with irreconcilable differences masking the untold story surrounding the reason or reasons for the dissolution of the union. Part of the reason pegged are the inability of couples to properly study each other and the recklessness of not waiting to discover if the love was genuine before getting married. Marriage is the closest kind of relationship between humans. If marriages are functioning well, harmonious and mutually beneficial, others system are also likely to be in good condition. On the other hand, if there is restlessness or discord in marriage (marital dissatisfaction), it will be completely dysfunctional which could lead to divorce. Lack of commitment to marriage by both partners has remained a major factor that has seen divorce rise in recent times. This usually affects family stability, children and the entire social climate of the communities. Maunde, Salihu and Usman (2019) findings have indicated that divorce has negative impact on spouses as well as the development of children in the society, and it leads to number of social problems such as prostitution by young ladies.

The researcher observed that many studies attribute this to several factors but little attention has been paid to pre-marital counselling. Additionally, the researcher also has seen and heard of various divorce cases. The damaging effects of divorce points to the fact that ways or strategies need to be put in place such as mandating premarital counselling to improve the quality of marriage and reduce the rates of marital divorce.

Conflict Management involves accepting such conflict as is necessary, but at the same time, doing everything possible to keep it to the minimum amount essential to change. This is done by confining conflict to the least destructive forms and to resolve it as rapidly and constructively as possible (Langat & Njenga, 2015). It also involves attempt by parties (in this case husband and wives) to adopt less extreme tactics of conflict settlements in which efforts are made to agree on those critical issues which are the root cause of conflict. Conflict management is defined as the opportunity to improve conflict situations and strengthen relationship. It also aims to resolve the underlying issues in the conflict situation. Many couples do not have the ability to manage conflict in such a way that will strengthen their marriage. It is important to find ways to equip couples with conflict management skills to curb the effects of many escalated conflicts like fighting among couples, abuse of one another, separation and divorce as a result of conflict, and murder which is the end result of escalated conflict and to embrace emotional intimacy.

Emotional intimacy in marriage can contribute to the well-being of each individual partner in part by an arena in which both partners can satisfy important needs such as emotional need. Emotional intimacy refers to the connection, the love, the caring and the levels of trust, safety and communication that they felt with their partners (Štulhofer, Jurin, Graham, Janssen & Træen, 2019). Emotional intimacy is generally defined as a closeness in which both partners feel secure and loved and in which trust and communication abounds. When couples are emotionally intimate

with their spouses, there is a connection that makes them see into the each other's soul, knowing their hopes, dreams, and fears and understanding them at a deep level (Frederick, Lever, Gillespie, & Garcia, 2017). Emotional intimacy is a combination of mutual acceptance, sharing, understanding and care.

When couples have been together for long time, both emotion work and relationship work both of which are crystalized in emotional intimacy may greatly facilitate managing, and often adapting to marital adjustment (Merwin, O'Sullivan, & Rosen, 2017). Emotional intimacy with another person involves honest, open, and straightforward communication; it involves sharing our most important thoughts and feelings with each other and gaining comfort and strength from these dialogues. Emotional intimacy is the kind of intimacy that genuine friends as couple have with each other which in most time is usually achieved through effective communication. It tends to be relatively stable and can last a lifetime.

Marital communication is understood to be direct communication between partners. Marriage communication is a process by which partners exchange information, viewpoints, and emotional states; it includes verbal and written expression, body language, individual mannerisms, and communication styles (Awosan, Iroye & Okolo, 2023). Effective communication is a key for husband and wife to have a happy marriage, even if you offer advice to a marriage that has a bad relationship, the advice is likely to fail since the couple must have good communication among themselves. A healthy partnership requires effective communication because it enables partners to feel love, trust, tolerance and patience. To solve problems within a marriage, communication is vital (Effa & Nwogu, 2019). It serves as a pillar for the system of understanding and peaceful coexistence in a marriage.

To attain marriage adjustment among couples with the aim of strengthening the marital life, studies have shown that pre-marital counselling has a role to play in the union (Odero, 2018). A study conducted on couples concluded that couples who have received premarital counselling had 31% less chance of marriage failure (Parhizgar, Esmaelzadeh-Saeieh, Kamrani, Rahimzadeh, & Tehranizadeh, 2017). Pre-marital counselling is defined as a technique or a learning package that seeks to prepare couples with facts on how they could improve their bond once they are legally married (Udofia, et al 2021).

Premarital counselling is a process that aims at preparing those who plan to get married with knowledge on how to improve their relationship once they are married (Thomas, 2020). Pre-marital counselling should be the basis for progress of couples' relationship and it should include communication skills, satisfactory relationship, active listening, conflict management skills, problem solving skills, control of emotions, increased awareness and understanding of couples from own self, others and marriage, strengthening ties and emotional relationships between them and their understanding and knowledge about the pathology and the crisis of marriage strengthen the marital life, a shift has been made towards pre-marital counselling (Parhizgar, et al, 2017). Providing couples with strong communication skills improves their emotional stability and boosts their sexual closeness, which promotes their marital pleasure throughout many circumstances (Carlson, Daire, & Hipp, 2020).

The purpose of premarital counselling is to work out problems in the relationship prior to the marriage as well as to prepare the couple for what is expected in a marital relationship. Additionally, to equip couples with effective communication skills to enable them to solve problems as and when they arise. With a preventive orientation, these programmes (premarital counselling) are geared at providing couples with an awareness and understanding of potential problems which may occur during marriage, as well as providing couples with information and resources to effectively prevent or ameliorate such problems. Thus, this work aims at examining whether premarital counselling will have an influence on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba State.

Statement of the Problem

Generally, it is believed that an individual whether male and female, before getting married being formal or informal must have been counselled and advised by their families, religious background, societies and even friends on the needs to adjust to marriage in order to enjoy a peaceful and fruitful married life. However, with the rate of increase in divorce these days as observed by the researcher, it has prompted this work in order to look at the effectiveness of the premarital counselling on marital adjustment. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the rate of marital dissatisfaction, conflicts, and divorce among young couples in Taraba State. Universities students, especially in regions like Taraba State, face unique challenges in balancing academic pressures, financial uncertainties, and relationship responsibilities, often without adequate preparation for the realities of marriage.

Many married students experience difficulties in adapting to their new roles, leading to issues such as poor communication, financial stress, socio-economic background, sexual satisfaction and role conflicts, which can affect their overall well-being and academic performance. The extent to which premarital counseling mitigates these challenges and enhances marital adjustment remains unclear. This situation raises important questions: To what extent does premarital counselling contribute to successful marital adjustment among married students? How can it help young couples manage the pressures of academic and marital life simultaneously? Premarital counselling has emerged as a valuable tool for couples to prepare for marriage and address potential challenges. However, it seems the effectiveness of premarital counselling in improving marital adjustment among married students of public universities in Taraba State remains largely unexplored.

This study seeks to address these issues by investigating the influence of premarital counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba State. The findings would provide insight into the effectiveness of premarital counselling in promoting healthier marriages and better adjustment.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to determine the influence of premarital counselling on marital adjustment among married students of public universities in Taraba State. Specifically, this study sought to:

- i. determine the influence of premarital conflict management counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state.
- ii. ascertain the influence of premarital emotional intimacy counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state.

Research Questions

In line with the specific objectives, the following research questions were raised to guide the study.

- i. What is the influence of premarital conflict management counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state?
- ii. What is the influence of premarital emotional intimacy counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. All the null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

H0₁: There is no significant influence of premarital conflict management counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state.

H0₂: There is no significant influence of premarital emotional intimacy counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state.

Research Methods

Cross sectional survey design was used in this study.

The target population for this study comprised of 1572 married students from Taraba state university and Federal university Wukari. Available data collected at the Directorate of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Taraba State University and Federal University Wukari. The population comprises of 1312 married students from Taraba State University and 260 married students from Federal Universities Wukari. The choice of public universities married students is because the environment of school often shapes students' attitudes toward relationships and marriage, university students who are married often face distinct challenges such as balancing academics, work and family responsibilities, university students are more open to psychological and relationship education making them a good sample for evaluating the impact of premarital counseling, also the academic work load, financial pressures and social dynamics of university can test marital stability.

The sample comprises of 452 married students obtained using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for sample determination. Purposive sampling was used to select 452 married students because such students have already undergone premarital counselling be it formal or informal.

The criteria for purposive sampling is that the respondents must be married and also a students from public universities in Taraba state.

The instrument Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (MAQ) consists of 40 items in 5 clusters with 8 items per cluster using a four-point rating scale to elicit students' responses.

The instruments for the study was subjected to face and content validation by three experts in the Faculty of Education, Taraba State University, Jalingo,

A pilot test was carried out on 40 married university students of Modibbo Adama University Yola, Adamawa state which is outside the study area but has the same characteristics with the sample study area. To ascertain the reliability coefficient, the study employed the use of Cronbach alpha. The internal consistency showed the reliability coefficient of 0.84 esteemed to be reliable. According to Ajai and Amuche (2016) an instrument with high correlation is useful for a study.

The following Steps were used for data collection.

Step I: To gain permission to carry out the research, a cover letter of introduction was given from the Head of Department, Counselling, Educational Psychology and Human Development

Step II: With the letter of introduction, the researcher visited the two public universities to familiarize with Heads of departments. During the visit to the universities, the researcher provides an explanation of the purpose of research work to the Head of Departments. Three research assistants were employed and were adequately brief on their assigned responsibilities regarding administering and retrieving the questionnaires.

Descriptive statistics such as mean, and standard deviation was used to answer research the questions while inferential statistics of Chi-square was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Findings

The result is presented according to the research questions framed and hypotheses tested.

Research Question 1

What is the influence of premarital conflict management counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation rating scores on the influence of Premarital Conflict Management Counseling on Marital adjustment among Married students in Public Universities in Taraba State (N=452)

S/N	ITEMS	Mean	SD	Remark
1	As learned during premarital counselling, we settle dispute with my spouse	3.21	1.04	Agree

	without fighting			
2	I negotiate with my spouse whenever a problem arises in our marriage as guided during premarital counselling	3.07	1.04	Agree
3	I am always ready to solve/resolve any issue that arises in our marriage	3.34	0.92	Agree
4	Conflict management training acquire during premarital counselling has helped me to solve marital conflicts	2.96	1.12	Agree
5	Couples who do not engage in conflict management before marriage often face more challenges in adjusting to married life.	3.34	0.91	Agree
6	Premarital counselling has greatly influenced my ability to manage conflict with my spouse	3.45	0.82	Agree
7	Couples who learn conflict resolution skills before marriage are less likely to experience significant marital issues	3.28	0.95	Agree
8	Effective premarital counselling on conflict management leads to more effective communication during marriage	3.42	0.87	Agree
Grand Mean		3.26	0.96	

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Results of table 1 show the mean and standard deviation scores of the ratings on premarital conflict management counselling influence on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state. All the items have mean rating scale above 2.50 including the grand mean. This shows that premarital conflict management counselling influence marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state.

Research Question 2

What is the influence of premarital emotional intimacy counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation rating scores on the influence of Premarital Emotional Intimacy Counseling on Marital adjustment among Married students in Public Universities in Taraba State (N=452)

S/N	ITEMS	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Premarital counselling helped us to always try to remain intimate by not keeping record of wrongs in our relationship.	2.78	1.14	Agree

2	Premarital counselling guide me to build strong emotional bonds with my husband/wife in our marriage	2.81	1.04	Agree
3	Devotion to one another has strengthened/enriched our emotional intimacy.	2.84	.99	Agree
4	I reflect on topics learnt during premarital counselling on love, respect and consultation with my spouse when I and my husband/wife had misunderstanding	2.82	1.00	Agree
5	Premarital counselling taught me that lack of emotional intimacy before marriage can lead to difficulties	2.88	1.00	Agree
6	Lack of emotional intimacy before marriage can lead to difficulties in adjusting to married life	2.94	1.11	Agree
7	Premarital counselling has helped me build a strong foundation for my marriage	3.12	1.03	Agree
8	Advice from parents during marital engagement promotes marital stability	2.85	1.03	Agree
Grand Mean		2.88	1.04	

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Results of table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation scores of the ratings on premarital emotional intimacy counselling influence on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state. All the items have mean rating scale above 2.50 including the grand mean. This shows that premarital emotional intimacy counselling influences marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state.

Hypothesis 1

H0₁: There is no significant influence of premarital conflict management counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state.

Table 3: Chi Square Test statistic of influence of Premarital Conflict Management Counselling on Marital adjustment among Married students in Public Universities in Taraba State.

<u>Premarital Conflict Management</u>	<u>Counselling</u>
Chi-Square	1939.874 ^a
<u>Df</u>	<u>3</u>

<u>Asymp. Sig.</u>	<u>.000</u>
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The result of the analysis on table 6 shows that there is significant influence of premarital conflict management counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state. Chi square at 3 degree of freedom ($\chi^2 = 1939.874$; $p = .000$). Since the computed p-value (0.000) is less than the 0.005 level of significance, the null hypothesis of no significant influence is rejected and it is concluded that there is significant influence of premarital conflict management counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state.

Hypothesis 2

H0₂: There is no significant influence of premarital emotional intimacy counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state.

Table 4: Chi Square Test statistic of influence of Premarital Emotional Intimacy Counselling on Marital adjustment among Married students in Public Universities in Taraba State.

<u>Premarital Emotional Intimacy</u>	<u>Counselling</u>
Chi-Square	456.628 ^a
Df	3
<u>Asymp. Sig.</u>	<u>.000</u>

The result of the analysis on table 7 shows that there is significant influence of premarital emotional intimacy counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba state. Chi square at 3 degree of freedom ($\chi^2 = 456.628^a$; $p = .000$). Since the computed p-value (0.000) is less than the 0.005 level of significance, the null hypothesis of no significant influence is rejected and it is concluded that there is significant influence of premarital emotional intimacy counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba State.

Discussion of Findings

The main purpose of the study was to determine the influence of premarital counselling on marital adjustment among married students of public universities in Taraba State. The study revealed that premarital conflict management counselling significantly influences marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba State. This aligns with Abdullah et al. (2017) and Batista da Costa and Mosmann (2021), who affirm that conflict management strategies taught during premarital counselling enhance couples' abilities to address disputes constructively, fostering mutual understanding and improved relational dynamics. Such

interventions are crucial for students juggling academic and marital responsibilities, as they provide practical skills for navigating disagreements without escalating tensions. Similarly, Marang'a (2021) found that couples exposed to conflict resolution training before marriage exhibited higher levels of marital satisfaction and adaptability. The significant influence observed in this study reinforces the importance of premarital counselling in preparing couples for the complexities of married life.

However, some scholars, such as Langat and Njenga (2015), note that the effectiveness of conflict management counselling may vary across cultural contexts and individual personalities, suggesting potential limitations in its universal applicability. This contrasts with Adeniyi and Ekeanya (2021), who highlight the enduring benefits of such counselling in fostering healthy communication and problem-solving skills. The findings of this study suggest that within the socio-cultural framework of Taraba State, premarital conflict management counselling is a pivotal tool for promoting marital stability and adjustment among married students.

The study also found that premarital emotional intimacy counselling significantly influences marital adjustment among married students in the study area. This corroborates the findings of Ngunjiri and Muiru (2021), who argue that counselling that enhances emotional intimacy fosters trust and emotional connectedness, critical elements for marital stability. Emotional intimacy is particularly important for married students, as it enables them to balance the demands of their academic pursuits with the emotional needs of their partners. Sheikhi, Moghadam, and Navidian (2021) similarly observe that couples receiving emotional intimacy counselling are more likely to communicate effectively about their emotional vulnerabilities, leading to greater marital satisfaction and adjustment.

In contrast, Gbaste, Daniel, and Utsan (2020) found that the impact of emotional intimacy counselling can be undermined in contexts where socio-economic pressures dominate marital concerns. However, this study's findings suggest that for married students in Taraba State, emotional intimacy counselling plays a vital role in addressing relational challenges specific to their dual roles as students and spouses. This supports Awosan, Iroye, and Okolo's (2023) conclusion that premarital counselling interventions focusing on emotional connectedness significantly reduce marital conflicts and enhance overall relationship quality.

Batista da Costa and Mosmann (2021) note that the effectiveness of sexual satisfaction counselling depends on its cultural sensitivity and how openly couples can discuss sexual matters. The findings of this study suggest that in the Taraba State context, premarital counselling addressing sexual satisfaction is a vital tool for enhancing marital stability. This corroborates the assertion by Sheikhi, Moghadam, and Navidian (2021) that sexual satisfaction counselling significantly impacts overall marital quality and adjustment.

Conclusion

This study explored the influence of premarital counselling on marital adjustment among married students in public universities in Taraba State (Taraba state University, Jalingo and Federal university Wukari). Specifically, the study has shown that an effective conflict

management counselling influences marital adjustment among married students, premarital emotional intimacy counselling influences marital adjustment among married students, premarital effective communication counselling influences marital adjustment among married students, Premarital socio-economic status counselling does not influence marital adjustment among married, finally the study concluded that premarital sexual satisfaction counselling influences marital adjustment among married students.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study the following recommendations were made:

- i. Couples intended to marry should be encourage to participate in premarital counselling programme that focus on conflict management strategies, enhancing communication skills, building emotional intimacy, addressing socio-economic and sexual relationship dynamics. This ensure the enter marriage with strong foundation for adjustment and stability.
- ii. Counselling centres in public universities should be establish and expand premarital counselling programmes tailored to address conflict management, emotional intimacy, effective communication, and sexual satisfaction.

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