



The Effect of Premarital Counselling on Christian Marital Sustainability in Ghana: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT:

This study investigates the effect of premarital counselling on Christian marital sustainability in Ghana, with a comparative focus on couples across different denominations. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data from structured questionnaires with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews involving married Christian couples and counsellors. The findings reveal that premarital counselling significantly contributes to marital stability by shaping realistic expectations, enhancing communication and conflict resolution skills, and fostering spiritual grounding. However, the study also identifies disparities in the quality and content of counselling programs across denominations, with some lacking psychological and practical depth. While most couples found counselling beneficial, the study underscores the need for standardized, contextually relevant, and holistic counselling frameworks that go beyond spiritual guidance to address modern marital challenges. The research contributes to ongoing discussions on strengthening marriage preparation programs within religious institutions and highlights the importance of continuous post-marital support to sustain the gains of premarital counselling.

Keywords: Youth Empowerment, Gender Equality, Digital Strategies, Policy-Driven Initiatives, Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

The institution of marriage remains a central pillar in most societies across the globe, and in Ghana, it holds both cultural and religious significance. In Christian communities in particular, marriage is not only viewed as a social contract but a sacred covenant instituted by God. Over the years, premarital counselling has emerged as a crucial intervention aimed at equipping intending couples with the knowledge, values, and skills necessary for sustaining marital relationships. The increasing recognition of premarital counselling within Christian communities in Ghana is closely tied to rising concerns about marital instability, separations, and divorces, even among believers who were traditionally expected to uphold strong marital commitments (Osei-Tutu, 2020). This situation has led religious leaders, marriage counsellors, and scholars to re-examine the role of premarital counselling as a proactive tool in fostering marital sustainability.

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Christian premarital counselling typically includes guidance on communication, conflict resolution, sexual compatibility, family planning, financial management, and spiritual growth. These areas are believed to be fundamental in preparing couples for the realities of marriage. According to Boateng (2019), couples who undergo structured premarital counselling are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of marital satisfaction and lower chances of separation. This is supported by empirical studies from various parts of the world, including Ghana, where counselling is increasingly considered a preventive approach to marital discord. Yet, despite its acknowledged benefits, many marriages continue to experience turmoil shortly after wedding ceremonies, prompting questions about the effectiveness and reach of such counselling services within different Christian denominations and cultural contexts.

In Ghana, marriage remains deeply intertwined with social expectations, extended family involvement, and traditional norms. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2021) argues, Christian marital practices in Ghana often blend with indigenous cultural values, creating a hybrid approach to marital roles and expectations. This fusion can either strengthen or undermine the foundation laid during premarital counselling, depending on the compatibility between the counsel received and the sociocultural realities the couples face post-marriage. For example, while counselling sessions may encourage gender equality and shared responsibilities, the prevailing patriarchal structures in many Ghanaian households may challenge the practical implementation of such ideals. Therefore, assessing the real impact of premarital counselling on marital sustainability requires a contextual and comparative analysis of different Christian communities.

Furthermore, religious institutions play a crucial role in shaping marital ideology in Ghana. The Church often serves as the first point of reference for couples contemplating marriage. The nature and depth of premarital counselling programs, however, vary significantly across denominations and congregations. According to Aboagye-Mensah (2018), mainstream churches such as the Presbyterian, Catholic, and Methodist Churches tend to have well-structured counselling frameworks led by trained clergy and lay counsellors. In contrast, some charismatic and Pentecostal churches offer more personalized and spiritually-focused sessions, which may lack the psychological and social depth found in more established denominations. This variation in approach suggests a need for comparative studies that evaluate how these different models influence marital outcomes among Christian couples.

The growing interest in the psychology of marriage has also introduced new insights into the dynamics of marital sustainability. Studies have shown that emotional intelligence, mutual respect, and adaptive conflict resolution are critical indicators of long-term marital success (Mensah & Dzanku, 2022). Premarital counselling that integrates these psychological components alongside spiritual guidance tends to be more impactful. However, many Christian counselling programs still focus predominantly on doctrinal teachings, often neglecting the socio-emotional aspects of marital life. This imbalance may explain why some couples, though spiritually prepared, struggle with real-life marital challenges such as financial stress, intimacy issues, and communication breakdowns. Research by Owusu-Ansah and Agyei (2020) found that couples who had both religious and psychological counselling had a statistically higher rate of marital satisfaction than those who received only spiritual guidance.

In the Ghanaian context, another critical factor influencing the effect of premarital counselling is the level of commitment by the couple to the counselling process itself. Many couples view premarital counselling as a procedural formality required by the church rather than a transformative experience. This perception often results in superficial participation and inadequate engagement with the counselling content (Tetteh & Darko, 2021). Some couples even enter counselling with preconceived ideas and rigid expectations shaped by social media, peer influence, or romantic ideals, which may not

align with the practical realities discussed in sessions. This phenomenon necessitates a rethinking of how premarital counselling is delivered, making it more interactive, practical, and relevant to the evolving needs of contemporary Christian couples.

Moreover, the issue of marital sustainability is becoming increasingly critical in light of Ghana's rising divorce rates. While exact statistics vary, anecdotal evidence and reports from legal and religious bodies suggest that marital instability is on the rise, particularly among younger couples. As noted by Ampofo (2022), the shift from extended family support systems to nuclear family structures has created additional pressures on married couples, who now have fewer coping resources. Premarital counselling, if effectively structured and contextually relevant, could serve as a buffer against these challenges. However, its success depends largely on the quality of content, the competency of counsellors, and the willingness of couples to internalize and apply the lessons learned.

Gender dynamics also play a significant role in the effectiveness of premarital counselling. In many Ghanaian Christian communities, traditional gender roles are still emphasized, often placing the burden of marital success disproportionately on women. As Adjei and Abena (2020) observed, some counselling sessions still reinforce outdated views of submission and authority, which can lead to power imbalances in marriage. For premarital counselling to truly support marital sustainability, it must promote equity, mutual respect, and shared responsibility between partners. This requires a deliberate shift in counselling narratives and the inclusion of gender-sensitive approaches that challenge harmful stereotypes and empower both spouses.

Finally, with the advent of digital platforms and changing social patterns, there is an increasing need for innovation in how premarital counselling is offered. Virtual counselling, online workshops, and mobile-based applications can broaden access, particularly for couples in long-distance relationships or those with tight schedules. As noted by Kwabena and Boateng (2023), technology-enabled counselling programs have shown promise in urban areas, offering flexible, multimedia-rich content that enhances learning and retention. For Ghana's Christian community to fully harness the benefits of premarital counselling, churches and religious bodies must invest in modernizing their delivery methods while maintaining the integrity of spiritual teachings.

Statement of the Problem

Marriage, within Christian communities in Ghana, is widely regarded as a sacred institution, rooted in divine principles and central to social cohesion. It is often expected to be a lifelong commitment grounded in mutual love, respect, and spiritual values. Despite these deeply held beliefs, marital instability appears to be on the rise even among Christian couples, with growing reports of separations, divorce, emotional detachment, and marital dissatisfaction. This paradox raises important questions about the effectiveness of spiritual and social preparations that precede Christian marriages, particularly premarital counselling, which is intended to equip couples with the tools and mindset necessary for a sustainable union (Osei-Tutu, 2020). Though churches have increasingly institutionalized premarital counselling as a precondition for church-blessed marriages, the growing evidence of early marital breakdown suggests that these programs may not be achieving their intended goals, or may be inconsistently applied across denominations.

The core of the problem lies in the limited empirical evidence linking premarital counselling to long-term marital sustainability in the Ghanaian Christian context. While several churches conduct premarital counselling, there is a lack of standardized curricula and no unified framework for assessing its depth, quality, or impact. Furthermore, different denominations have different emphases—some focus heavily on spiritual compatibility, while others incorporate aspects of conflict resolution, sexuality, or financial

management. Yet, these differences are rarely analyzed comparatively to determine which approaches yield better marital outcomes. This lack of critical evaluation makes it difficult to determine whether premarital counselling as currently practiced is an effective tool or a mere formality before wedding ceremonies (Tetteh & Darko, 2021).

In addition, much of the existing literature on premarital counselling in Ghana tends to focus on its conceptual and theological foundations rather than its measurable effects on marriage longevity and satisfaction. Very few studies offer longitudinal or comparative data on couples who received premarital counselling versus those who did not. The limited number of empirical studies that do exist either fail to differentiate between Christian and secular counselling approaches or neglect to account for the influence of denominational doctrines on the content and delivery of counselling (Mensah & Dzanku, 2022). This presents a clear research gap that undermines the formulation of informed policies and church practices aimed at enhancing marital sustainability. Without this critical evidence, stakeholders are left to rely on anecdotal or generalized assumptions about the value of premarital counselling.

Moreover, the social dynamics within contemporary Christian marriages in Ghana are evolving, influenced by modernization, urbanization, and exposure to global cultural trends. Traditional gender roles, financial pressures, and unrealistic romantic expectations are increasingly cited as sources of marital conflict. Premarital counselling programs that fail to address these emerging issues may be rendered ineffective in preparing couples for the real-life complexities of marriage. Adjei and Abena (2020) note that many counselling sessions still rely on outdated models of marriage that emphasize obedience and submission without addressing communication, mental health, or personal autonomy. Consequently, couples may enter marriage spiritually informed but practically unprepared for the demands of marital life.

Additionally, there is insufficient attention given to the attitudes of couples toward the counselling process itself. Some couples approach premarital counselling with low commitment, viewing it as a compulsory ritual rather than a transformative learning opportunity. Others attend sessions without fully disclosing issues or without openness to critique, thus undermining the depth of engagement. This behavioral challenge, coupled with inconsistencies in counsellor training and experience, further complicates the ability of counselling to achieve meaningful outcomes. Kwabena and Boateng (2023) argue that until the structure, delivery, and evaluation of premarital counselling are systematized and grounded in both spiritual and psychosocial frameworks, its full potential will remain unrealized.

Objectives of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of premarital counselling on the sustainability of Christian marriages in Ghana, with a focus on comparing different denominational approaches to counselling.

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To assess the content and structure of premarital counselling programs across selected Christian denominations in Ghana.
2. To evaluate the relationship between premarital counselling and marital sustainability among Christian couples.
3. To compare the marital outcomes of couples who received premarital counselling with those who did not.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by two key theoretical perspectives: the Family Systems Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior. These frameworks offer valuable insights into how premarital counselling can influence marital sustainability, particularly within the Christian context in Ghana. Each theory contributes a unique lens through which the dynamics of marital preparation and long-term relational outcomes can be understood. Together, they establish a strong foundation for examining the psychological, behavioral, and relational transformations that premarital counselling seeks to achieve. Family Systems Theory, initially developed by Murray Bowen in the mid-20th century, posits that families operate as interdependent systems where the behavior of one member affects the dynamics of the entire unit. The theory emphasizes emotional interconnectivity, patterns of interaction, and multigenerational influences that shape individual functioning within relationships (Nichols, 2020). In the context of premarital counselling, this theory is particularly relevant because it allows for an understanding of how individuals bring their own family backgrounds, beliefs, and behavioral patterns into a marital relationship. Couples are not isolated entities; they are products of their respective familial environments. Premarital counselling, when effectively designed, can help individuals identify and address dysfunctional patterns inherited from their family systems before they manifest destructively in the marriage.

In the Ghanaian Christian context, where family traditions and cultural norms significantly influence marital roles and expectations, Family Systems Theory provides a framework for helping couples critically examine their inherited values. According to Oppong (2021), many marital conflicts in Ghana stem from unaddressed family-of-origin issues, such as parental conflict, poor communication patterns, or unresolved trauma. Premarital counselling offers a structured opportunity for individuals to reflect on these influences, understand how they affect their expectations, and develop healthier relational habits. This aligns with the findings of Asamoah-Gyadu (2021), who notes that Christian premarital counselling programs that include family background assessments tend to report better post-marital adjustment among couples.

Moreover, the Family Systems Theory emphasizes the importance of emotional regulation and differentiation—the ability of individuals to maintain a sense of self while remaining emotionally connected to their partners. Premarital counselling programs grounded in this perspective train couples to navigate conflicts, assert boundaries, and manage emotional reactivity—all of which are essential for sustaining marriages over time. As Gyan and Agyeman (2022) explain, many Christian couples in Ghana struggle with boundary-setting due to cultural expectations of marital fusion, particularly in extended family systems. By promoting emotional maturity and systemic thinking, premarital counselling can mitigate the risk of emotional enmeshment and relational burnout, thereby enhancing marital resilience. The second theory underpinning this study is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Icek Ajzen (1991). TPB is a psychological theory that explains human behavior as a function of intention, which is influenced by three main components: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of premarital counselling, TPB provides a lens through which the motivation and preparedness of individuals entering marriage can be examined. Specifically, the theory helps assess how counselling affects attitudes toward marriage, perceptions of societal and religious expectations, and confidence in one's ability to sustain a successful union.

One of the central premises of TPB is that behavior change begins with intention. Premarital counselling can shape positive attitudes toward commitment, fidelity, communication, and shared responsibilities—key dimensions of a sustainable marriage. According to Mensah and Dzanku (2022), when couples

receive structured counselling that challenges misconceptions and promotes realistic expectations, they are more likely to enter marriage with constructive attitudes and behavioral intentions. This intentionality has been linked to higher levels of marital satisfaction and reduced likelihood of early divorce.

Subjective norms also play a significant role in shaping marital behavior, particularly in religious communities. In Ghanaian Christian settings, marriage is often viewed as a rite of passage and a moral obligation. Counselling programs that are informed by TPB engage with these societal norms by reinforcing positive marital values while also allowing couples to critically evaluate harmful cultural practices, such as gender inequality or unrealistic submission standards. Owusu-Ansah and Agyei (2020) highlight how premarital counselling has the potential to influence communal expectations by promoting egalitarian partnerships rooted in mutual respect and spiritual accountability.

Perceived behavioral control—the third component of TPB—refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to perform specific behaviors. Premarital counselling enhances this sense of agency by equipping couples with practical tools for communication, financial planning, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution. These skills empower couples to feel more competent in managing marital challenges. Research by Kwabena and Boateng (2023) confirms that couples who feel better prepared through counselling are more confident in navigating difficult marital situations and less likely to resort to separation or divorce as a first response to conflict.

The integration of the Family Systems Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior is particularly useful for this study as it bridges the emotional and cognitive-behavioral dimensions of marital sustainability. While the former focuses on relational dynamics and inherited patterns, the latter emphasizes individual intentionality and socio-cognitive processing. Both theories support the argument that premarital counselling, when properly designed and delivered, can create lasting changes in how couples relate, think, and behave within marriage. Despite the value of these theoretical perspectives, there is limited research in Ghana that explicitly applies these frameworks to evaluate premarital counselling outcomes. Most studies remain descriptive or anecdotal, lacking a theoretical grounding that can inform policy and program development. This study aims to fill this gap by using Family Systems Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior as analytical tools to explore how premarital counselling influences marital sustainability among Christian couples in Ghana. The application of these theories will allow for a nuanced understanding of the counselling process and its impact, providing a solid foundation for evidence-based recommendations for churches, marriage counsellors, and policymakers.

Furthermore, studies have highlighted how self-regulation—a key aspect of SCT—can be applied in youth empowerment to promote long-term behavioral change in gender relations. Youth who are taught how to set goals, monitor their progress, and reflect on their actions can become more self-aware and empowered in working toward gender equality. Bandura's framework supports the idea that such behavioral changes are not solely driven by external factors but are largely influenced by the youth's ability to regulate their actions, emotions, and thoughts (Zimmerman, 2020). This dynamic is especially crucial when addressing deep-rooted gender stereotypes, as it enables young people to take deliberate steps toward eliminating discriminatory practices in their communities.

Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have explored the relationship between premarital counselling and marital sustainability, providing valuable insights into its effectiveness, limitations, and contextual variations. These studies span diverse cultural and religious settings, including Ghana, and offer critical contributions to understanding the dynamics of Christian marital preparation.

Agyekum (2019) conducted a mixed-method study in Accra, Ghana, aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of church-based premarital counselling in enhancing marital stability among Christian couples. Using surveys and interviews with 120 couples from three major denominations, the study revealed that couples who underwent structured premarital counselling reported higher levels of marital satisfaction, communication, and conflict resolution skills than those who did not. The study concluded that counselling programs that covered practical issues such as finances and emotional management, in addition to spiritual teachings, had a more positive long-term effect on marital stability. However, Agyekum also noted inconsistencies in how counselling was delivered, citing a lack of standardized modules across churches.

In a related study, Boateng and Asiedu (2021) examined the impact of premarital counselling on newly married couples in the Ashanti Region. Their quantitative study surveyed 200 Christian couples married for less than five years. The researchers aimed to determine whether couples who received premarital counselling had better marital adjustment. Findings showed that those who attended counselling had significantly better scores on measures of intimacy, trust, and decision-making. The study emphasized the role of counsellor expertise, noting that sessions led by trained professionals yielded more favorable outcomes compared to those conducted solely by clergy without formal counselling training.

Osei-Tutu (2020) explored denominational differences in premarital counselling practices among Pentecostal and Orthodox churches in Ghana. The purpose of the study was to compare content delivery, duration, and participant outcomes. Through interviews and focus groups, the research discovered that Pentecostal churches often emphasized spiritual warfare, prayer, and prophetic declarations, while Orthodox churches leaned toward structured discussions on compatibility and life skills. While both approaches had merit, the study found that Orthodox counselling yielded better long-term marital outcomes due to its emphasis on practical preparedness. This finding suggests that doctrinal focus alone may be insufficient in preparing couples for the complexities of marriage.

Mensah and Dzanku (2022) expanded the scope by investigating the psychological impact of premarital counselling on emotional resilience within Christian marriages. The study sampled 80 couples from four regions and assessed their psychological coping mechanisms post-marriage. The findings indicated that couples exposed to emotional intelligence training during counselling were better equipped to manage marital stress and transitions. This study contributed to the literature by emphasizing the need to integrate psychological tools into Christian premarital counselling curricula, particularly in regions where counselling is largely spiritual in nature.

In Nigeria, Adeyemi and Okonkwo (2018) explored the long-term effects of premarital counselling on marital satisfaction in Christian households. The longitudinal study followed 150 couples over ten years, assessing variables such as communication quality, sexual satisfaction, and parenting cooperation. The findings confirmed that premarital counselling significantly predicted marital satisfaction, particularly in the first five years. However, the study noted a decline in its influence over time, indicating that post-marital counselling and continuous support might be necessary to sustain the initial benefits of premarital education.

A more critical perspective is provided by Tetteh and Darko (2021), who examined the limitations of premarital counselling in rural Ghanaian churches. Through case studies of couples in the Northern Region, the study found that while many couples underwent premarital counselling, the content was often superficial and ritualistic. Couples frequently viewed it as a formality required by the church rather than a meaningful educational experience. The researchers concluded that without genuine engagement and contextual relevance, premarital counselling is unlikely to impact marital outcomes significantly.

Finally, Kwabena and Boateng (2023) conducted a comparative analysis between digital and in-person premarital counselling among urban Christian couples in Ghana. Their study aimed to explore how technological platforms influenced counselling effectiveness. They found that while digital platforms increased accessibility and flexibility, in-person sessions facilitated deeper emotional connections and better comprehension. Couples who experienced hybrid models (a mix of online and face-to-face counselling) showed the highest levels of satisfaction and preparedness. This study points to the importance of adapting counselling delivery methods to suit the evolving needs of modern Christian couples.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Approach

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the effect of premarital counselling on Christian marital sustainability in Ghana. The mixed-methods approach was chosen to enable the researcher to benefit from the complementary strengths of both data types—quantitative data to statistically measure the relationship between counselling and marital outcomes, and qualitative data to explore the lived experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of married couples across different Christian denominations (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021). Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to Christian couples to assess the nature and extent of premarital counselling received and its correlation with marital satisfaction and longevity. Qualitative data were gathered using semi-structured interviews with selected participants to gain deeper insight into how counselling influenced their marital experiences. This dual approach allowed for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the research problem by combining general trends with in-depth individual narratives.

Population of the Study

The target population of this study comprised married Christian couples in Ghana who had been married for at least three years, and who either received or did not receive premarital counselling prior to marriage. The study also included marriage counsellors, pastors, and church leaders who conduct premarital counselling sessions. Participants were drawn from various Christian denominations, including Pentecostal, Charismatic, Catholic, and Mainline Protestant churches, to enable a comparative analysis. This diverse population was selected to capture the denominational variations in counselling content and delivery, and their impact on marital sustainability. The inclusion of both couples and counsellors ensured that the study captured multiple perspectives on the role, scope, and perceived value of premarital counselling within different Christian traditions in Ghana.

Sample Size and Technique

A purposive stratified sampling technique was used to ensure balanced representation across denominations and marital counselling exposure. The sample consisted of 320 respondents, including 270 Christian couples (135 who received premarital counselling and 135 who did not) and 50 church-based marriage counsellors and pastors. Stratification was based on denomination, counselling status, and marital duration. This sampling method was essential for drawing comparisons between those who received counselling and those who did not, and for understanding how counselling practices differ across churches. The sample size was determined to provide both statistical validity for the quantitative analysis and sufficient depth for qualitative exploration. It allowed the researcher to identify trends, relationships, and denominational distinctions in counselling approaches and their outcomes on marital sustainability (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Data Collection Instrument

Two main data collection instruments were used: a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The questionnaire, designed for married couples, gathered quantitative data on variables such as length of marriage, frequency and quality of communication, conflict resolution styles, emotional satisfaction, and the presence or absence of premarital counselling. It also included Likert-scale items to assess participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of counselling in addressing marital challenges. The semi-structured interview guide was administered to a selected group of couples and counsellors to collect qualitative data on personal experiences, church doctrines, challenges faced in marriage, and perceived value of premarital counselling. These instruments were pre-tested with a small sample to ensure clarity and relevance, and necessary adjustments were made prior to full-scale data collection. Both instruments were developed to capture the spiritual, emotional, and relational dimensions of Christian marriage, in alignment with the study's theoretical framework and research objectives.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the structured questionnaires were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and percentages were used to profile respondents and summarize key variables such as marital satisfaction, conflict frequency, and counselling exposure. Inferential statistical methods, including t-tests and regression analysis, were employed to examine the relationship between premarital counselling and marital sustainability, and to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between couples who received counselling and those who did not. This helped to validate or refute assumptions about the predictive power of counselling on long-term marital outcomes (Wang, 2024).

The qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were carefully coded, and emerging themes were identified and categorized based on recurring patterns. Key themes explored included participants' perceptions of the role of counselling, the challenges of early marriage, denominational differences in counselling content, and reflections on what contributed to marital endurance. Thematic analysis provided rich, context-specific insights that complemented the quantitative findings, allowing for a deeper understanding of how counselling functions within Christian marital life in Ghana (Kruger & Steyn, 2024). This integrated analysis enabled the researcher to offer evidence-based conclusions and practical recommendations to church leaders, counsellors, and policy stakeholders involved in Christian marriage preparation programs.

4. Analysis and Discussion of Results

Thematic Analysis

This section presents the qualitative findings of the study through a thematic analysis of data collected from semi-structured interviews with Christian couples and marriage counsellors. The analysis focuses on recurring themes that emerged from the participants' narratives regarding their experiences with premarital counselling and its effect on marital sustainability. Through coding and close examination of the transcripts, three major themes emerged: preparation for realistic expectations, communication and conflict resolution, and spiritual grounding and marital endurance. Each theme is discussed in detail, supported by direct quotations from participants to provide contextual depth and authenticity to the findings.

Theme One: Preparation for Realistic Expectations

A dominant theme that emerged was the role of premarital counselling in shaping realistic expectations about marriage. Respondents consistently noted that counselling helped them move away from idealized or romanticized views of marriage to a more grounded understanding of marital responsibilities, challenges, and roles. Many couples emphasized that without the counselling, they would have entered marriage with assumptions that could have led to disappointment and conflict.

One participant shared, "Before the counselling, I thought marriage was all about love and happiness, but during the sessions, we were told clearly that there would be hard times. That changed how I saw marriage. It made me more prepared." Another respondent said, "The counsellor told us that we wouldn't always agree, and that we had to learn to respect each other's opinions and not expect perfection. That helped me adjust my expectations from day one."

The testimonies from counsellors also supported this finding. One church leader explained, "Most young people come into marriage with unrealistic ideas, mostly influenced by social media and romantic movies. Our counselling is designed to reset those ideas with real-life experiences and biblical principles." These insights underscore how counselling serves as a tool to mentally and emotionally prepare couples for the long-term nature of marital life, discouraging premature exits due to unmet expectations.

Theme Two: Communication and Conflict Resolution

Another recurring theme was the impact of premarital counselling on communication skills and the ability to resolve conflicts constructively. Couples who had undergone counselling reported greater confidence in their ability to express their feelings, listen actively, and manage disagreements without escalation. Counselling sessions typically included practical modules on communication dynamics, such as understanding love languages, avoiding blame, and embracing compromise.

One woman remarked, "In the counselling, we learned about how men and women communicate differently. That was eye-opening for me. It helped me understand why my husband reacts the way he does sometimes, and now I don't take things personally." Another husband stated, "The sessions taught us how to sit down and talk about our issues calmly. I remember the counsellor saying, 'Don't fight to win, fight to understand.' That stuck with me."

Counsellors echoed this by emphasizing the role of effective communication in sustaining a marriage. One pastor explained, "We try to equip couples with tools like active listening, using 'I' statements, and scheduling weekly check-ins. These small practices go a long way in preventing major misunderstandings." A counsellor from a Charismatic church added, "We also teach them to pray together and talk openly about issues before they become spiritual strongholds."

These experiences highlight that premarital counselling is not merely instructional but also transformative. By introducing strategies to navigate disagreements respectfully and intentionally, the sessions help create relational habits that promote long-term harmony and understanding within Christian marriages.

Theme Three: Spiritual Grounding and Marital Endurance

The final major theme that emerged was the significance of spiritual grounding as a source of strength and endurance in marriage. Participants frequently mentioned that their faith, which was nurtured and emphasized during counselling, became a central pillar in their ability to navigate difficulties, remain committed, and find meaning in their union. Premarital counselling, especially in Christian settings, often

integrates biblical principles about love, sacrifice, forgiveness, and covenant—ideals that serve as spiritual anchors when couples face challenges.

One participant noted, "Our counsellor always reminded us that marriage is a ministry. That idea has helped us not to give up easily when we argue or face financial problems. We pray together now, and that has become our strongest bond." Another respondent shared, "The counselling showed us that God is the third person in our marriage. Whenever we feel like we can't resolve something, we go back to the Word or speak to our mentor in church."

This theme was also strongly supported by the marriage counsellors, who saw spiritual maturity as critical to marital sustainability. A Methodist church counsellor commented, "We teach that marriage is not just between a man and a woman, but also involves a spiritual covenant with God. When couples understand that, they are more likely to stay committed, even when times are tough." Similarly, a Pentecostal leader added, "We use Scripture to guide them—verses on love, patience, humility—and we teach them to apply these in their daily lives."

The emphasis on spiritual grounding was particularly strong among older couples who had faced severe marital trials such as job loss, illness, or infertility. One such couple said, "There were times we thought of quitting, but our faith kept us together. We would recall the words from our counselling days, and we knew we couldn't just walk away."

This theme illustrates that beyond practical skills, premarital counselling provides couples with a theological and moral framework that sustains their commitment. It offers spiritual resources that become essential tools for coping, healing, and remaining faithful to one another over the long term. In sum, the thematic analysis reveals that premarital counselling plays a significant role in Christian marital sustainability by preparing couples with realistic expectations, enhancing communication and conflict resolution skills, and anchoring relationships in spiritual principles. These findings support the argument that well-structured counselling programs, especially those tailored to the Christian context, are indispensable in fostering enduring and fulfilling marriages in Ghana.

5. Discussion of Results

The results of this study strongly affirm the significant role of premarital counselling in enhancing Christian marital sustainability in Ghana. The thematic analysis identified three dominant areas where counselling had the most influence: setting realistic expectations, improving communication and conflict resolution, and strengthening spiritual grounding. These findings are consistent with previous research by Agyekum, who concluded that premarital counselling helped Ghanaian Christian couples to adjust better in marriage, especially when the counselling content addressed not only spiritual teachings but also real-life marital challenges. This study, much like Agyekum's, highlights that counselling programs which cover practical issues such as emotional management and conflict resolution tend to produce more stable marriages over time.

The role of communication as a core skill imparted during counselling aligns with the findings of Boateng and Asiedu, who reported that Christian couples who received premarital counselling scored significantly higher on conflict resolution and emotional intimacy. In the current study, several participants confirmed that counselling introduced them to practical tools like active listening and weekly communication check-ins, which became routine habits in their marriages. These results affirm the widely accepted view that communication is a cornerstone of marital success, and that counselling can be instrumental in developing this skill. However, this stands in contrast with findings by Tetteh and Darko, who in their study in Northern Ghana, found that many counselling sessions were shallow and often ritualistic, failing to equip couples with meaningful communication strategies. This discrepancy

may be attributed to regional and denominational differences in the structure and delivery of counselling programs, suggesting that not all Christian counselling frameworks are equally effective. In terms of spiritual grounding, the present study echoes the conclusions of Owusu-Ansah and Agyei, who found that spirituality and shared faith values among Christian couples act as buffers against marital breakdown. Participants in this study often cited biblical teachings and prayer as tools learned during counselling that have helped sustain their marriages during difficult times. This finding also parallels the work of Adeyemi and Okonkwo, whose longitudinal research in Nigeria revealed that couples who internalized spiritual principles during counselling were more resilient during crises and less likely to separate. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that while spirituality was generally regarded as a strength, some scholars such as Adjei and Abena have critiqued the over-reliance on spiritual frameworks in Christian counselling. They argue that an excessive emphasis on religious submission, particularly for women, may lead to power imbalances and suppress discussions about more practical or psychological issues such as mental health or emotional abuse. This counterargument suggests that while spiritual grounding is beneficial, it should be balanced with socio-emotional content that empowers both partners equally.

Another key point emerging from this study is the impact of counselling on expectations. Participants reported that counselling helped them discard idealized visions of marriage and embrace a more grounded perspective. This finding supports Mensah and Dzanku's assertion that premarital counselling reduces the gap between expectations and reality, thereby lowering the risk of early disillusionment. However, there is a contrasting body of literature that questions the long-term effectiveness of such interventions. For instance, Adeyemi and Okonkwo's study found that the benefits of counselling tend to diminish after the first five years of marriage unless supplemented by post-marital education and mentoring. This observation suggests that while premarital counselling is a vital starting point, it may not be sufficient in isolation to guarantee marital longevity, and continuous support mechanisms may be necessary.

The present study also reveals that the quality and delivery method of counselling significantly influence its effectiveness, reinforcing findings by Kwabena and Boateng who reported that hybrid counselling models combining face-to-face and digital platforms offered the best outcomes. Couples in this study noted that engaging sessions that were interactive and led by well-trained counsellors had a lasting impact, whereas formulaic or doctrinally rigid sessions were less helpful. This reinforces the need for standardization and innovation in counselling delivery across denominations. However, some conservative scholars may argue that the digitalization of counselling dilutes the sacred nature of the marital preparation process. They maintain that the physical presence in church settings adds a spiritual and moral weight that cannot be replicated in virtual formats. This position underscores the tension between tradition and modernity in Christian marital practices and reflects broader debates on how technology should interface with religious rituals.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study set out to examine the effect of premarital counselling on Christian marital sustainability in Ghana, with a particular focus on how counselling influences expectations, communication, and spiritual resilience among married couples. The findings reveal that premarital counselling plays a critical role in preparing Christian couples for marriage by offering realistic perspectives, strengthening their communication and conflict resolution skills, and grounding their relationships in shared spiritual values. These factors contribute significantly to the stability and satisfaction of marriages, particularly within religious contexts where commitment and moral responsibility are deeply emphasized. The study also

highlighted notable differences in the content, delivery, and effectiveness of counselling across denominations, underscoring the need for standardization and contextual sensitivity.

Despite its importance, the effectiveness of premarital counselling is not guaranteed. The quality of content, the training of facilitators, and the level of engagement by couples all influence its impact. While the counselling experience was largely positive among participants, some narratives and supporting literature suggest that in certain cases, the sessions may be treated as routine or inadequately address the psychosocial dimensions of marriage. Moreover, the diminishing effects of counselling over time, as observed in previous studies, suggest the need for ongoing marital support beyond the premarital phase.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that churches and religious institutions in Ghana develop standardized premarital counselling frameworks that incorporate spiritual, emotional, psychological, and practical dimensions of marriage. Counsellors should be professionally trained, not only in theological doctrine but also in interpersonal and family dynamics, to provide holistic guidance to couples. Churches should consider implementing follow-up counselling programs or post-marital mentoring schemes that offer continued support and address emerging marital challenges. Counselling content must also be updated to reflect modern marital realities, including financial pressures, mental health issues, and gender equality, while remaining rooted in biblical principles. Finally, it is crucial to encourage sincere participation from couples by framing counselling not as a church obligation, but as a transformative journey that prepares them for a lifetime of partnership, love, and shared responsibility.

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