

# IMPACT OF PRE-MARITAL COUNSELLING ON MARITAL STABILITY AS PERCEIVED BY MARRIED ADULTS IN KWARA SOUTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT

ALWAJUD-ADEWUSI, M. B., ODENIKE, A. A.,  
& ARIYO, N. O.

Department of Counsellor Education,  
Faculty of Education University of Ilorin, Nigeria  
Corresponding Author: [alwajud.mb@unilorin.edu.ng](mailto:alwajud.mb@unilorin.edu.ng)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1856-6582>

## Abstract

*Marriage serves as a cornerstone of community cohesion, providing a framework for social support, intergenerational solidarity, and shared values. However, in an era marked by rapid social, economic, and technological change, the institution of marriage faces a unique set of challenges such as broken homes, separation and divorce. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating impact of pre-marital counselling on marital stability as perceived by married adults in Kwara South Senatorial District. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of this study is all married adults in Kwara South and target population is married adults in selected Local Government Areas. The sample is drawn from Kwara South senatorial district. The simple random and convenience sampling techniques were employed to select the sample for this study. The instrument for the study was researchers' designed. The validity and reliability of the instrument was ascertained and the reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics of mean at 2.50 benchmarks to answer the research question, while inferential statistics of t-test and Analysis of Variance at 0.05 alpha level were used to test the hypotheses. The findings of the study indicated that pre-marital counselling teaches partner the guidelines to improve their relationship; builds effective communication and fosters harmonious living. There were no significant differences in the perception of respondents on impacts of pre-marital counselling based on gender and religion. The study therefore recommended that Seminars and training on pre-marital counselling should be part of the activities at National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) orientation programme organized for fresh graduates of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Marriage, Pre-marital Counselling, Couple, Marital Stability

## **Introduction**

Marriage stands as one of humanity's oldest and most revered institutions, it was divinely established and instituted in the Garden of Eden by God Himself and it is affirmed to be a long life union between a man and a woman in loving relationship. The commitment into the institution of marriage should be agreed upon between partners who share common faith, love, honour, respect and responsibility. It is a socially, legally, culturally, or religiously approved intimate relationship between a male and a female; although, some societies have recognized different types of marriage beyond man and woman. Marriage, often hailed as a sacred bond between two individuals, holds profound significance in shaping personal identity and fostering emotional fulfillment (Keller, 2017). It provides a framework for mutual support, companionship, and shared aspirations, enriching the lives of spouses and their families. Research indicates that married individuals tend to report higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and overall well-being compared to their unmarried counterparts (DePaulo, 2019). This underscores the intrinsic value of marital unions in promoting emotional resilience and psychological flourishing.

Marriage serves as a catalyst for personal and societal growth, challenging individuals to transcend self-interest and embrace mutual sacrifice and compromise (Johnson et al., 2023). This journey fosters the development of essential virtues such as patience, empathy, and resilience, enriching the character of spouses and contributing to their collective flourishing. It serves as a cornerstone of community cohesion, providing a framework for social support, intergenerational solidarity, and shared values (Perry-Jenkins & Goldberg, 2021). According to a study by Proulx and Helms (2023), married couples are more likely to engage in supportive behaviors towards each other, contributing to the overall well-being of both partners. By strengthening interpersonal bonds and fostering a sense of belonging, marriage promotes the common good and enhances societal interconnectedness. Furthermore, marriage serves as a cornerstone of family stability and generational continuity. It provides a nurturing environment for the upbringing of children, offering a secure foundation for their physical, emotional, and cognitive development (Fernández-

Cornejo, 2018). Studies consistently demonstrate that children raised in stable, two-parent households tend to fare better academically, socially, and emotionally compared to those from single-parent or unstable family environments (Pew Research Center, 2019). Thus, marriage plays a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of future generations and fostering social cohesion.

In an era marked by rapid social, economic, and technological change, the institution of marriage faces a unique set of challenges. Economic pressures, shifting gender roles, and the prevalence of digital communication have reshaped the dynamics of marital relationships (Lundquist, 2020). Financial strain has placed a significant strain on marriages, leading to conflicts over money management, job loss, or economic instability. In today's competitive job market, couples face challenges balancing career aspirations with family responsibilities, leading to feelings of stress and dissatisfaction (Lundquist, 2020). Persistent changing of societal norms and expectations have altered traditional gender roles within marriages, leading to renegotiation of household responsibilities and decision-making dynamics (Pew Research Center, 2021). This has introduced new sources of tension and conflict as couples navigate evolving roles and expectations. The surge in digital technology and social media has fundamentally transformed how couples communicate. Despite the benefits, such as instant connection, excessive screen time and online interactions had reduced the quality of time spent together. This has led to a decline in intimacy and connection within marriages, fostering feelings of loneliness and disconnection. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has added an additional layer of stress, forcing couples to navigate unprecedented levels of uncertainty and upheaval (Prime, Wade, & Browne, 2020). Economic instability, cultural shifts, and changing social norms have contributed to rising rates of divorce, marital discord, and family instability (Carroll, Doherty, & Stiles, 2019). As a result of these myriad of challenges; from the complexities of work-life balance to the impact of technological advancements on interpersonal dynamics, couples are facing unprecedented hurdles as they embark on the journey of marriage. Amidst these challenges, the need for pre-marital counselling emerges as a vital resource for couples preparing to tie the knot.

Premarital counselling entails structured sessions between engaged couples and a professional third party, such as clergy, mental health practitioners,

or physicians, aimed at helping them assess their relationship and acquire skills for building a fulfilling and lasting marriage (Hawkins et al., 2020). While diverse in its approaches, its core aim is to strengthen premarital bonds, leading to more satisfying unions and reducing the likelihood of divorce. Providers of premarital counselling may operate independently or within religious institutions, yet they share a common goal. The overarching objective is to fortify relationships before marriage, thereby minimizing the risk of future marital dissolution and establishing a solid groundwork for a rewarding and enduring partnership (Stanley et al., 2018). Thorough premarital counselling and preparation empower prospective couples to recognize the significance of marriage and the necessity for careful, thoughtful consideration before making the decision to wed, acknowledging its enduring implications. Premarital counselling or therapy is fundamentally distinct from skills-based premarital education, involving intensive work between couples and therapists, focusing on specific personal issues. Practitioners of premarital counselling employ various theoretical orientations, including behavioral couple therapy, emotionally-focused couple therapy, insight-oriented marital therapy, imago relationship therapy, Bowen family systems theory, and solution-focused brief therapy (Eldridge & Sevier, 2019).

The importance of pre-marital counselling is equipping couples with the skills and tools necessary to navigate the complexities of modern marriage (Udofia, Bonsi, Agbakpe & Udofia, 2021; Jones & Smith, 2022). This form of counselling provides couples with a safe and supportive environment to explore important topics such as communication, conflict resolution, financial management, and future goals. By addressing these areas proactively, couples can establish a solid foundation for their relationship and increase the likelihood of long-term marital success. Pre-marital counselling provides couples with the opportunity to strengthen their bond and deepen their connection. In Nigeria, the emphasis on family values and marital stability is paramount within the societal fabric. Many Nigerians seek pre-marital counselling through religious institutions, which play a significant role in shaping marital attitudes and behaviors. It can also be received through seminars, workshops and conferences. Nowadays, pre-marital counselling is offered virtually. Counselling sessions often integrate religious teachings and practices, resonating with couples' cultural and spiritual beliefs (Okechukwu & Roberts, 2015). Pre-marital counselling

serves as a pivotal tool in guiding couples through cultural expectations and norms, thereby equipping them with the necessary preparation to navigate the complexities of marriage (Okechukwu & Roberts, 2015). Research has shown that couples who participate in pre-marital counselling report higher levels of relationship satisfaction and intimacy compared to those who do not (Brown & Williams, 2023). By investing in their relationship, couples can lay the groundwork for a fulfilling and resilient marriage.

One of the primary benefits of pre-marital counselling is its ability to identify potential areas of conflict before they escalate into larger issues. Through guided discussions and exercises, couples can uncover differences in values, expectations, and communication styles. By addressing these differences early on, couples can develop strategies for effectively managing conflicts and fostering mutual understanding and respect. Moreover, pre-marital counselling can serve as a preventive measure against the challenges that may arise during marriage. By equipping couples with effective communication skills and conflict resolution strategies, pre-marital counselling can help couples navigate the inevitable ups and downs of married life with greater resilience and understanding. In addition to benefiting individual couples, pre-marital counselling also has broader societal implications. By promoting healthy and stable marriages, pre-marital counselling can help reduce the prevalence of divorce and family instability. This, in turn, can have positive effects on children's well-being and overall family functioning (Garcia & Martinez, 2024). It plays a crucial role in equipping couples with the skills and resources they need to build strong and resilient relationships. By embracing this proactive approach to marriage preparation, couples can set themselves up for a lifetime of love, partnership, and mutual support.

The significant repercussions of divorce and broken homes underscore the necessity for preventive measures like premarital counselling. Such interventions aim to enhance marital quality and alleviate the prevalent rates of marital distress and divorce. In Nigeria, broken homes, often resulting from divorce or separation, are a prevalent social issue with significant implications for families and communities. Factors contributing to marital dissolution in Nigeria include economic stress, cultural norms, infidelity, and incompatible personalities. While specific statistics on broken homes may vary due to underreporting and cultural factors, several

studies and reports shed light on the prevalence of marital dissolution in Nigeria. National Demographic and Health Surveys (NDHS) serves as a valuable source of information on family structure and marital stability in Nigeria. According to the NDHS 2018 report, approximately 20% of women aged 15-49 in Nigeria have experienced divorce or separation (National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria] and ICF, 2019). Legal records and court data provide insights into the prevalence of divorce and separation cases processed through the legal system. While comprehensive national statistics may be lacking, regional data indicate a significant number of divorce and separation cases in Nigeria (Odekunle, 2017). Media coverage and anecdotal accounts frequently depict instances of broken homes and marital strife in Nigerian society. Stories of divorce, separation, and the associated challenges faced by families highlight the pervasive nature of this issue.

Relevant to this study is the Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura in the 1970s, which provides a robust framework for understanding how individuals learn behaviours and attitudes through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. It offers valuable insights into human behaviour and learning processes. This theory posits that individuals learn not only through direct experience but also by observing the behaviour of others and the consequences of those behaviours (Bandura, 1977). Social Learning Theory emphasizes the role of observation, modelling, and reinforcement in shaping behaviour. According to Bandura (1977), individuals are more likely to adopt behaviours they have observed in others if those behaviours are reinforced or rewarded. The theory also highlights the importance of cognitive processes such as attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation in mediating learning and behaviour change. Applied to the context of pre-marital counselling, Social Learning Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how pre-marital counseling influences marital stability by facilitating the acquisition, reinforcement, and application of relationship skills. By leveraging principles of observation, modeling, reinforcement, and self-efficacy, pre-marital counselling interventions can effectively equip couples with the tools necessary for building and sustaining healthy and satisfying marriages. As such, Social Learning Theory offers valuable insights for the development and implementation of evidence-based approaches to promoting marital stability and relational well-being.

Social Learning Theory provides a lens through which to understand how couples acquire relationship skills and behaviors that contribute to marital stability. It offers insights into how couples learn relationship skills during counselling sessions. Through observation of counsellors modelling effective communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution techniques, couples acquire new behaviours and strategies that they can then apply in their own relationships (McBride, 2002). By learning effective communication and problem-solving skills, couples are better equipped to navigate challenges and conflicts in their marriage, reducing the likelihood of marital discord and instability. Through the cultivation of empathy, understanding, and support during counselling sessions, couples develop stronger emotional connections and relational bonds, which serve as protective factors against marital dissatisfaction and dissolution. Additionally, positive reinforcement from counsellors encourages couples to practice and refine these skills, increasing the likelihood of their adoption and retention. Couples observe counsellors demonstrating positive relationship behaviours, providing them with examples to emulate in their own interactions. Positive reinforcement from counsellors encourages couples to practice and maintain newly acquired relationship skills. Successful implementation of learned skills during counselling sessions enhances couples' confidence in their ability to maintain a stable and satisfying marriage. Group counselling is a very good form of counselling for this purpose; whereby, couples learn from the experiences of others shared during counseling sessions, inspiring hope and motivation for positive change.

In the contemporary society, the prevalence of marital dissatisfaction stemming from conflicts within marriages is reaching concerning levels. Marriages, traditionally meant to foster love, care, and affection, increasingly encounter a plethora of challenges, ranging from dissatisfaction to divorce. These difficulties, in turn, profoundly impact the well-being of children, causing psychological and emotional distress, as well as anxiety. Couples also endure heightened levels of stress, depression, and anxiety. A significant contributor to this trend appears to be inadequate communication and guidance regarding marital life, leading to a growing number of divorces shortly after marriage. Addressing this pressing issue requires heightened awareness and action. Introducing premarital therapy,

facilitated by trained marital counselors, emerges as a potential solution to mitigate, if not eliminate, these challenges.

A study conducted by Udofia, Bonsi, Agbakpe and Udofia (2021) showed that couples who participated in pre-marital counselling prior to tying the knot reported higher levels of satisfaction with their marriage compared to those who didn't undergo such counselling. Adzovie and Dabone (2021) investigated perception of respondents on the relationship between pre-marital counselling and marital success. The respondents had a negative perception on the effectiveness of pre-marital counselling. Similarly, Watenga (2023) investigated the relationship between pre-marital counselling and marital satisfaction; the findings revealed that pre-marital counselling was preferred by couples. Several researches have been conducted on the menace of marital instability; however, broken home, separation and divorce are attributed with today's marriages. Therefore, this study is carried out in Kwara South Senatorial District to examine the married adults' perception on the impact of pre-marital counselling on marital stability.

### **Research Question**

1. What are the impacts of pre-marital counselling on marital stability as perceived by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference in the impacts of pre-marital counselling on marital stability as perceived by married adults in Kwara State based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the impacts of pre-marital counselling on marital stability as perceived by married adults in Kwara State based on religion.

### **Methodology**

The research design that was adopted for this research is descriptive survey. The population of this study is all married adults in Kwara South Senatorial District. The target population is married adults from the selected Local Government Areas (LGAs). There are 6 Local Government Areas in Kwara South Senatorial District. This includes Ifelodun, Irepodun, Isin, Ekiti, Oke-Ero and Offa LGAs. The researchers employed simple random



technique to select Ifelodun, Isin and Offa Local Government areas for the study. Convenience sampling was used to select 200 married adults from the three LGAs. The respondents selected were able to communicate in English language. The consent of the respondents was sought and permission was given before the administration of the questionnaire. The instrument employed for this study was a questionnaire entitled “Impact of Pre-marital Counselling on Marital Stability”. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; A and B. Section A comprised information on the demographic data of the respondents while section B consisted of Researchers’ structured items on impacts of pre-marital counselling. The validity and reliability of the instrument was carried out. Content validity of the instrument was ensured by giving the instrument to experts in the departments of Counsellor Education and Social Sciences in the Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. The test-retest reliability was confirmed by administering the instrument to 20 married adults in Ekiti LGA which was not part of the selected LGA. The instrument was re-administered after four weeks to the same respondents. The two sets of data were correlated using Pearsons Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained. The data collected was analysed using mean at 2.50 benchmarks, t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance.

## **Results**

**Research Question 1:** *What are the impacts of pre-marital counselling on marital stability?*

**Table 1: Mean and Rank Order of Impacts of Premarital Counselling**

N	As far as I am concerned, I feel that premarital counselling:	Mean	Rank
1	reduces marital conflict	3.52	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	promotes marital stability	3.43	2 <sup>nd</sup>
5	builds effective communication among couples	3.29	3 <sup>rd</sup>
13	helps partner to understand each other's personality	3.27	4 <sup>th</sup>
3	helps the partner in a relationship to understand the health status of their spouse	3.26	5 <sup>th</sup>
20	helps partner in a relationship to show commitment towards their marital life	3.25	6 <sup>th</sup>
9	helps partners to adjust to marital situation	3.21	7 <sup>th</sup>
12	teaches partner how best to express love and affection to one another	3.16	8 <sup>th</sup>
4	helps the partner in a relationship to understand the health status of their partner	3.14	9 <sup>th</sup>
15	helps partner to know the guideline to improve their marriage	3.14	10 <sup>th</sup>
7	enhances intra and interpersonal relationship	3.13	11 <sup>th</sup>
10	foster harmonious relationship	3.09	12 <sup>th</sup>
8	helps individual recipient to its services to select righteous spouse	3.08	13 <sup>th</sup>
6	helps partner to adopt opportunities and also adapt to changes	3.06	14 <sup>th</sup>
11	helps partner to understand other's personality	3.06	14 <sup>th</sup>
14	help dating partner to maintain meaningful courtship	3.02	16 <sup>th</sup>
16	strengthened marriage relationship with so much love	3.01	17 <sup>th</sup>
17	provide would be couples guideline against marital failure	2.92	18 <sup>th</sup>
19	helps partner to be honest, kind and trustworthy at all time	2.86	19 <sup>th</sup>
18	helps to know partner physical ability	2.79	20 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>3.14</b>	

The mean and rank order of the impacts of pre-marital counselling on marital stability showed that married adults agreed that pre-marital counselling had a positive impacts on marital stability. Table I which showed a grand mean of 3.14 established that pre-marital counselling fosters harmonious relationship; teaches partners to adopt effective communication and helps couples to build guidelines to improve marital stability.

**Hypothesis 1:** *There is no significant difference on the impacts of pre-marital counselling on marital stability as perceived by married adults in Kwara State based on gender*

**Table 2:** Mean, SD and t-test Result Showing Difference in Perception on Impacts of Premarital Counselling Based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t	Crit.
	t	p-value				
Male	74	62.72	6.74	198	0.04	1.96
Female	126	62.67	6.82			

Table 2 shows that for degrees of freedom (df) of 198, the calculated t-value of 0.04 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96, with a corresponding p-value of 0.967 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there is no significant difference on the impacts of pre-marital counselling on marital stability based on gender; hence, the hypothesis was not rejected.

**Hypothesis 2:** *There is no significant difference on the impacts of pre-marital counselling on marital stability as perceived by married adults in Kwara State based on religion*

**Table 3:** ANOVA Showing Difference in Perception on Impacts of Premarital Counselling Based on Religion

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	Cal. F	Crit. F	p-value
Between group	28.066	2	14.033	0.30	3.00	0.739
Within group	9118.714	197	46.288			
Total	9146.780	199				

Table 3 shows that for degrees of freedom (df) of 2 and 197, the calculated F-ratio of 0.30 is less than the critical F-ratio of 3.00, with a corresponding p-value of 0.739 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there is no significant difference on the impact of pre-marital counselling on marital stability based on religion; hence, the hypothesis was not rejected.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study revealed that pre-marital counselling has positive impacts on marital stability; because the respondents believe premarital counselling helps reduce marital conflict, promote marital stability, build effective communication, foster harmonious relationship among couple. The findings of this study agreed with Udofia, Bonsi, Agbakpe and Udofia (2021) who found that marital satisfaction was enhanced by pre-marital counselling. The couples that attended pre-marital counselling were satisfied with their marriage. The finding of this study corroborated Watenga (2023) who found that respondents who had pre-marital counselling experienced high level of marital stability. The results of the hypotheses showed that there were no significant differences in the perception of respondents on impacts of pre-marital counselling based on gender and religion. This shows that both male and female respondents agreed that pre-marital counselling had a significant influence on their marriage. The finding also reflected that the religion of the respondents does not influence their responses. The two religions practiced in Kwara State where this study was conducted are Islam and Christianity. It showed that both religions preach the importance of pre-marital counselling and the followers agreed with tenets of the teachings. The finding of this study contradicts the findings of Adzovie and Dabone (2021) who found that there were differences in the perception of male and female respondents regarding pre-marital counselling. The reason for this finding is not unconnected to the fact that African people cherish marital bond so much that some consider divorce or broken home as a taboo. This conviction led married adults to cherish pre-marital counselling and highly imperative to adequately prepare for the lifetime journey.

## **Conclusion**

This study investigated the perception of married adults in Kwara South Senatorial District on the impacts of pre-marital counselling on marital

stability. It was found that pre-marital counselling assisted the married adults to prepare for the challenges they might encounter in marital relationship and pre-marital counselling assisted married adults build a stable home.

## **Recommendations**

The importance of pre-marital counselling cannot be overemphasized, it is therefore paramount for everyone preparing to go into marital relationship to participate in pre-marital counselling. Discussions during the session are significant to intending couples and are worthy of emulation. Counsellors are encouraged to organize pre-marital counselling for youth at various levels such as Tertiary Institutions and Youth camps. Seminars and training on pre-marital counselling could be part of the activities at National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) orientation programme organized for fresh graduates of tertiary institutions. Workshops on marital counselling should be occasionally delivered to serve as a guide for couples. Interactive marital session should also be arranged in various organizations to salvage the menace of marital dissolution.

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