

Perceptions about Pre-Marital Counselling and Marriage Stability in Botswana: A Case of Towing Village

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Abstract: Studies have shown that divorce cases are becoming rampant or occurring at alarming rate and one of the processes that is believed could have a positive impact on marriage or reduce these accelerated divorce rates is pre-marital counselling. Pre-marital Counselling has been defined as a procedure that aims to equip couples with information on how they could advance their relationship once they are legally married. This case study reports the findings of a study conducted by one of the authors for his master's degree thesis. In the case study which intended to explore perceptions on the role of pre-marital counselling and marriage stability, a total of 23 participants from one village near the capital city of Gaborone (8 married, 8 single, 7 divorced) responded to an interview guided by semi structured questions. The twenty three participants were selected through purposive sampling and snowballing.

Keywords: Botswana, divorce, marriage stability, pre-marital counselling.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Divorce is regarded as something that is against societal norm because marriage was meant to be a lifelong institution. Despite that, more than often couples have continued to unceremoniously end their marriage. Unstable marriages among Africans have been associated with the influence of western culture (Takyi&Gyimah, 2007). Regardless of that, it is believed that individuals have to make their own choices, yet acknowledging that modernization plays a role in marriage stability. Borowski and Tambling (2015) pointed out that even though pre-marital counselling is underutilised, it is effective in curbing divorce. Pre-marital counselling is a helpful intermediation that occurs between couples who are planning to marry.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Pre-marital counselling has long existed in the culture of Botswana. It was offered in initiation schools called "Bogwera and Bojale". Young men and women were prepared for motherhood and fatherhood and how to live amicably with their spouses as well as to be responsible adults. The initiation schools played a great role in marriage stability in the sense that young girls were taught women duties such as taking care of children and their husbands whilst young boys were taught how to provide for their families (Ellece, 2011). Today, the initiation schools are still existent but are no longer effective in curbing divorce. This is so as marriage is no longer respected and the current generation does not believe in submissiveness unlike elders born in the early and mid-20th century.

However, another form of pre-marital counselling called "go laya" in Setswana is still practiced. This form of counselling is offered to the bride and groom on the wedding day. This form of counselling pertains to how they should treat one another and the roles expected of each and it is offered by relatives and individuals who are married (O. S. Lopang, personal communication, March 15, 2016).

Western pre-marital counselling in olden days was rarely heard of in Botswana. Later, religious institutions also started to engage in pre-marital counselling for their members. In the religious set up, the priests are responsible for offering pre-marital counselling. This is to ensure that the congregants live good happy lives in their marriages. This is still the case as in some churches such as the Roman Catholic couples intending to get married are required to attend pre-marital counselling for a period of at least six months before marriage (P. Ragontse, personal communication, March 13, 2016).

Today, there is a new form of pre-marital counselling which is offered by well trained and qualified counsellors. This form of counselling has specific ethics and codes of conduct which have clearly written rules and regulations that guide the counselling session. These well qualified counsellors are trained at tertiary

institutions such as the University of Botswana while some under the pastoral system. Their qualifications range from certificate to doctoral degrees.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Throughout the world, divorce rate continues to increase at alarming proportions despite faith based interventions or secular counselling (Mbulawa, 2012). Mbulawa goes on to point out that even in Botswana there is a growing concern on increasing divorce rates. This situation has left many families being dysfunctional. To demonstrate the escalating rates of divorce Mbulawa (2012) pointed that, divorce statistics registered with the Lobatse High Court indicate an increase in divorces from 394 cases in 1994 to 1172 cases in 2010, despite the existence of marriage counsellors in Botswana. One is left to wonder whether people are knowledgeable about the counselling services in Botswana. Another factor that has influenced the selection of the topic was the fact that pre-marital counselling in relation to marital stability is an under researched topic.

IV. PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of Tlokweng residents on the knowledge of pre-marital counselling services in Botswana.

V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- (a) How do Tlokweng residents perceive marriage stability in Botswana?
- (b) How does pre-marital counselling influence marriage stability in Botswana?

VI. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies have been conducted on pre-marital counselling and marriage stability in various countries (Johnson, 2012, Sodi et al, 2010, and Takyi&Gyimah, 2007). Kam and Man (1999) conducted a quantitative study in Hong Kong, China on preparing for marriage in a Chinese community. The study used a descriptive design, face to face home interviews and telephone interviews to gather data. A total of 216 respondents took part in the study, of the respondents, 92.1% believed that preparing for marriage is vital. However, involvement in pre-marital services was low and 80% of the respondents believed that there is need for marketing pre-marital counselling services. This may suggest that people do not know about these services. In addition, of the people who attended pre-marital counselling, 77.3% found pre-marital counselling beneficial to marriage stability. From this study, it is evident that pre-marital counsellors need to reach out to the people and market their services.

In the context of Africa, a number of studies on pre-marital counselling and marriage stability have been conducted. Abanyam, Lumun, Sambe, Ngutor, Avenger, Yandev and Yandev (2014) conducted a study in Mkar, Nigeria on pre-marital and marital counselling in reducing divorce globally. Secondary data was used and analysed through functionalist perspective. In the findings of the study, Abanyam et al. (2014) found that the high rates of marriage instability are due to unrealistic expectations before marriage. Communication was also found to be the most frequent problem addressed by therapists at 87%, followed by power struggle at 62%, unrealistic expectations at 50% and extra marital affairs at 28% Defrain (cited by Abanyam et al, 2014).

Another study has also been conducted by Egbo (2011) in Enugu Metropolis, Nigeria on pre-marital counselling influence on marital stability and social adjustment. Participants comprised of 300 couples being 200 who had premarital counselling and 100 who had not taken pre-marital counselling. The social adjustment questionnaire was used to collect data. The findings of the study by Egbo revealed that couples who received counselling had more stable relationships whilst those who did not attend had relationship problems. Counselling couples were more socially adjusted at a mean of 3.29 than 3.21 of non-counselled couples. This suggests that couples who had a higher score were able to relate to their partners compared to those who did not attend pre-marital counselling services.

In another study by Omaege (2013) on critical issues in marriage failure in Benin City, Nigeria, extra marital affairs (100%), witchcraft (98.3%) and lack of communication (96.7%) were rated by respondents to be critical factors contributing to marriage failure. A total of 60 married participants took part in the study and both primary and secondary data was used. From this study, it is evident that not only is lack of pre-marital counselling a barrier to marriage harmony but other factors do contribute as well. Omaege (2013) further recommended that government should set up centres which would employ counsellors, psychologists, social workers and lawyers at local government level and these centres to be funded well

VII. METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design was adopted for the study as it is based on perspectives of participants. Qualitative study is appropriate when human beings are the population of the study or when they are being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This research design was selected as it gives the researcher an opportunity to be more dialogue with participants during collection of data. A qualitative approach gives the researcher an opportunity to investigate a phenomenon within the participant's context and that individuals lived experiences offer a great understanding of how real life is (Kombo and Tromp as cited by Moeti, 2015). By using qualitative approach, enabled the researcher to interact with the participants. It is through this interaction that the researcher was able to probe for further information.

Interpretivist paradigm was chosen as it aims to acquire new interpretations which are dependent on perspective and time. Interpretivist paradigm is of the view that in research, information can only be acquired if there is a dialogue between the participant and researcher and it is through this dialogue where an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study may be achieved (Ponterotto, 2005). Researchers using the interpretivist paradigm mostly use qualitative methods during their study in order to make meaningful responses of a phenomenon (Tuli, 2010). The researcher had dialogue with divorcees, married and single residents of Tlokweng.

7.2 Population

The population of a study refers to a large group of people who take part in the study (Neuman, 2007). The study comprised of residents of Tlokweng Village. Tlokweng is a semi urban village. Although it is near the capital city of Botswana with diverse population it still remains the Setswana cultural set up comprising of people from different ethnicities, and with various socio economic statuses.

7.3 Sampling

Sample is a representation of a population of interest (Charles and Mertler, 2002). Four wards in Tlokweng were purposively selected from 13 wards. The four wards were selected as the researcher felt that they were representative enough of the 13 wards. Secondly, it would have been very time consuming to include all 13 wards. A total of 23 participants (married n=8, single n=8 and divorced n=7) were selected through purposive sampling and snowballing participated in the study.

7.4 Data collection procedure

An in-depth interview guide (Open ended questions) was designed to gather data from divorced, married and single individuals respectively. One advantage of using in-depth interviews is that they give detailed information than other methods. Gerring (2004) share the same sentiments that in-depth interviews are meant to be a private encounter with interviewees that enhance detailed information. Permission was sought from the relevant offices and consent forms were distributed to the prospective participants with the permission of the participants interviews were audio taped and later transcribed verbatim.

Guided by in-depth interview questions, each interview was conducted at each participant home and lasted for about 30-35 minutes. The interviews were conducted in both Setswana and English language. Open ended interview guide was utilised. The single, married and divorced participants responded to different interview questions on marriage stability and their knowledge about pre-marital counselling services and marriage stability respectively. Each interview was divided into three categories being demographics, perceptions on premarital counselling services and marital stability.

Below is a Table that illustrates the demographics of participants.

7.4.1 Participant Information

Table 1

Gender	No of respondents	Age	No of respondents	Level of Education	Total number	Employment status	N=23
Male	10	20-30	6	PSLE	0	Employed	12
female	13	31-40	5	JC	0	Unemployed	5
		41-50	3	BGCSE	2	Self employed	4
		51-60	6	TERTIARY	21	Retired	2
		61-70	3				
TOTAL	23		23		23		23

7.5 Data Analysis

Data was analysed through thematic analysis and question by question (Vaismoradi, 2013). Participant responses that were similar were grouped together and a theme emerged from the responses. Furthermore, responses of participants were analysed by question so that there is a comparison between the responses of participants.

VIII. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

8.1 Perception toward the state of marriage in Botswana

Most of the participants in the study perceived marriage to be unstable in Botswana that although people marry in high numbers those marriages do not last. Furthermore, some couples continue to stay together but in unhappy marriages. Marriage was regarded as not relevant in modern day Botswana as people enter into it for negative reasons such as monetary benefit. Participants felt that marriages of the yester years were very strong and divorce was not part of an African's vocabulary. Today, marriages are not successful as a result of modernity. Modern marriages are also not successful as people treat marriage as mandatory and therefore one has to go through it without considering other factors. Whilst it is regarded as a rite of passage, one has to be mentally prepared for it.

A female divorcee noted the following about marriages in Botswana;

Marriages are not very successful in our country because when you go to the high court a lot of cases are always about divorce (FD₁).

A single male shared similar sentiments;

There is a lot of instability of marriages in Botswana and people enter into marriage as a way of entertaining their peers (SM₃).

A married female also shared similar sentiments and this is what he had to say:

Marriages in Botswana are full of challenges. One of the challenges in Botswana marriages are abuse of alcohol by men mostly and infidelity which causes great disturbance to family peace (MF₂).

The views and perceptions of participants regarding marriages in Botswana imply that marriage is unstable. This is so as majority of respondents regarded Botswana marriages as a failure. Kologwe (2011) and Moeti (2015) confirm the results of other scholars or researchers that there is high number of divorce cases in Botswana. The other finding was that it was not easy to tell whether premarital counselling is good as none of the participants had gone through premarital counselling before and therefore their responses was based on an assumption of how premarital counselling could have been effective. This confirms research that premarital counselling programs are underutilised (Borowski& Tambling,2015). A female participant had a positive response by saying: I could not have divorced...I could have known the advantages and disadvantages of marriage (DF₁). Based on her response, one may assume that had she been prone to premarital counselling probably she could have been well equipped with a lot of information which could have influenced her decision.

8.2 Importance of pre-marital counselling on marriage stability

8.2.1 Increased knowledge

Majority of the participants including single, married and divorced regarded pre-marital counselling as an important tool to help reduce high rates of divorce in the country. A married female who was in support of pre-marital counselling indicated that;

It is very very important because that is where you learn things you did not know, it opens you up in a lot of things before you get married (MF₅).

A married male also shared the same sentiments and stated that;

Pre-marital counselling is good because the young generation has to be given pre-marital counselling so they know where they are going and what they getting themselves in (MM₂).

From the above responses, it is evident to say that the married participants in this study advocated for pre-marital counselling. With reference to MF₁'s response to the significance of pre-marital counselling, Ansah-Hughes et al. (2015) opine that pre-marital counselling should be mandatory in all churches. Despite the above respondents advocating for pre-marital counselling neither of them has attended pre-marital counselling.

The single participants in the study both male and female shared same sentiments that pre-marital counselling is important. Some divorced that were interviewed supported pre-marital counselling even though none of the participants had attended pre-marital counselling. A study by Williamson, Bradbury, trail and Karney (2014) differs with the latter as they are of the view that pre-marital education programs prevent relationships from deteriorating and help in improving communication amongst couples. Carroll and Doherty (2003) share the same sentiments with Williamson et al (2014) that couples who have attended pre-marital prevention programs have a short term relationship quality and interpersonal skills compared to those who have not been through the program.

The perceptions of some divorcees on the importance of pre-marital counselling differed with those of married and single participants. For example, a male divorcee when asked about the importance of pre-marital counselling stated that “for a person whom it shall be their first time in marriage it is very important” (DM₂).

Majority of participants in the study from all marital statuses regarded pre-marital counselling as very important. Several researchers such as Williamson et al. (2014) also regard pre-marital counselling as significant. Participants who were not able to define pre-marital counselling or had little understanding about it regarded it as very important as individuals may greatly benefit from the process.

Common issues that arose from the participants included issues of sexuality such as infidelity and infertility. HIV/AIDS, step parent relationships, learning of each other’s weaknesses, how to keep marriage lively were common issues that emerged from participants as key in enhancing a good relationship.

A single female responded in this manner; Issue of money, infidelity, keeping marriage lively, how to raise kids, disadvantages of not spending quality time together (SF₃).

The topics discussed above by SF₃ have been found to be critical in marriage and if not addressed may be a barrier to marital harmony. Bellido et al. (2016) is of the view that despite children being regarded to make marriage valuable, they may also bring about conflict. Furthermore, children conceived out of marriage may have different behaviours than those conceived after marriage. For example, children born out of marriage may be hostile towards step parent. Lastly, spouses may value children conceived before marriage differently which may bring about conflict in marriage.

The perception of SF₃ about sexuality corroborates with that of Vizheh, Pakgohar, Babaei and Ramezanzadeh, (2012) that infertility is a major contributor to marital conflict and lack of satisfaction in sex. Secondly, failure to get reproductive assistance from specialists is associated with increased rate of separation and divorce. Lastly, a couple accepting each other’s feeling towards infertility may not be easy hence affecting their marital relationship.

8.2.2 Reduce number of divorce cases

Majority of the participants jointly agreed that pre-marital counselling can help reduce divorce rates. Other participants gave a dual response on the matter. A married female had two emotions as to whether pre-marital counselling can reduce divorce rate or not. A married female stated the following when responding to the question;

It wholly depends on an individual if they will utilise the information from pre-marital counseling(MF₅).

Based on the response of MF₅, the personality of an individual is very important in marriage. In a study by Javanmard and Garegozlo(2013) on personality and marital satisfaction among Iranian families, findings of the study revealed that marital satisfaction may be related to characteristics of an individual’s personality. That is, an individual who possesses positive attitude is more likely to have a higher percentage of marital satisfaction than the other. Furthermore, low agreeableness, emotional instability and low conscientiousness were found to be a dominant predictor of low marital and dissatisfaction in a partner.

A married male was however in disapproval of pre-marital counselling and this is what he had to say:

It will not reduce divorce as today’s marriage is different from olden marriages (MM₁).

Whilst MF₅ felt that divorce rate is dependent on personality of individuals, MM₁ felt that pre-marital counselling may not work as modern marriage is different from traditional marriage. In my opinion, the perception of MM₁ could be based on the fact that modern youth are very different from those born in the early and mid-20th century as the participant was 65 years of age. A study by Green and Miller (2013) agrees with MM₁ in that though pre-marital counselling has been found to reduce divorce, other studies tend to have varying findings in that they are dual sided mixed that is they have found pre-marital counselling to be effective and not effective.

A single male stated the following in his response to the role of pre-marital counselling curbing divorce;

It can provided it is done for a longer period of time and not shortly before marriage. Changing the mind-set of an individual takes much time.(SM₄).

SM₄ believes that it should be for a longer period of time. This study is in line with Carol and Doherty (2003) who noted that although pre-marital counselling programs are effective, they produce short term and immediate results in a relationship. The gains do not last long as expected. The perception of SM₄ is in agreement with Allen et al., (2013) who states that there are several reasons affecting marriage leading to divorce. A female interviewee differed with the other respondent on pre-marital counselling curbing divorce and this is how she responded;

It cannot for when time for divorce comes it is not easy to avoid it (SF₂).

Pre-marital counselling based on the responses of SF₂ is therefore not a guarantee that when attended it will reduce divorce rate as expected. The finding corroborates with Sullivan and Bradbury (1997) results where

there was no difference between people who attended and those who did not attend pre-marital counselling with regard to better marital outcomes.

8.3 Availability of services

Majority of participants indicated that they are aware of pre-marital counselling services but do not know the places where they are offered. Some participants attributed this to lack of marketing counselling services whilst others felt that it is due to the small number of counselling centres in the country hence they are not well known. Furthermore, other participants attributed lack of knowledge about these centres as a result of them being new in the country. Participants also felt that counsellors offering pre-marital counselling in Botswana are not enough. Below are interview excerpts of participants when asked about availability of counselling centres and services in Botswana:

A married female responded in this manner;

I do not think pre-marital counselling services are present because if they were present they would be well known (MF₅).

Similar sentiments were shared by a single male who stated;

As much as we are not aware of them, I think they are not enough (SM₁).

Nafees, Farooq, Tahirkheli and Malik (2012) conducted a study on the missing component of guidance service in government high schools among twenty five principals in female government schools. Findings indicated that 80% of the principals were not aware of counselling services in the society and 100% stated that there is no teacher in their schools who offer guidance services. Furthermore, 100% of principals stated that there is no guidance facility in their school. In this study, it was recommended that guidance should be compulsory in the teachers training program. This is applicable to the findings of this study in that majority of participants were not familiar with places where pre-marital counselling is offered hence calling for community outreach programmes by pre-marital counsellors as a way of sensitizing the community about their services.

IX. CONCLUSION

The study that was conducted was able to meet its objectives. The study had three objectives which were all focused on pre-marital counselling and marriage stability in Botswana. Majority of participants fully supported pre-marital counselling to be very important in influencing marriage stability. Participants believed that if one attends pre-marital counselling, their marriage is more likely to become stable. This is so as the couple would be well informed of the disadvantages and advantages of marriage. By being well informed, participants may make the decision as whether to continue with marriage or not.

As participants mostly advocated for pre-marital counselling services, they mostly agreed that pre-marital counselling should be mandatory to all those intending to get married. Furthermore, they suggested that prior to being married by the district commissioner, an attendance certificate of pre-marital counselling services should be put forward.

Marriages in Botswana were regarded as problematic especially that majority of marriages take a few years the couple being married and finally ending in divorce. Whilst being regarded as problematic, majority of participants felt that the newlyweds of the 21st century lack commitment especially in marriage. Secondly, it was found that individuals enter into marriage for the wrong reasons such as financial gain and material possession. Klaus (2009) shares the same sentiments that fair marriages are very impossible as the other partner does not marry for intimacy but for monetary gain. Whilst participants indicated that marriages are a problem, communication, consultation, compromise and seeking pre-marital counselling were found to enhance marriage stability.

The divorcees, single and married did not have any varying perceptions on the importance of pre-marital counselling influencing marriage stability. In most themes that emerged from the interviews, all the participants shared similar sentiments.

Concerning availability of services, churches were the most identified and well known places to be known to offer pre-marital counselling services as well as the University of Botswana Careers and Counselling Centre. Other than the UBCCC no other centre was known to participants to offer pre-marital counselling. A number of individuals offering pre-marital counselling were mentioned by participants whom respondents stated to always be talking on the radio and having columns in newspapers addressing relationship and marital issues. This finding therefore suggests that marriage counsellors in Botswana are not doing enough in terms of advertising their services to the community hence the reasons by majority of the participants who were married never attended pre-marital counselling.

From the married and divorced participants, only three (n=15) indicated that they attended pre-marital counselling whilst the remaining 12 participants did not attend pre-marital services. Those who did not attend pre-marital counselling indicated that they never knew that such a service existed whilst others it was not in their to do list before they could get married. Participants indicated that they never even had a thought of

attending it. However, they knew that such services are of course available. Despite their lack of exposure to premarital counselling, divorcees and married individuals rated pre-marital counselling as very important. However, one male divorcee had a varying opinion as he stated that the wife had made a decision and counselling could not have helped in his situation.

Based on the findings of the study, participants felt that there were certain key topics that should be addressed by the counsellor during pre-marital counselling sessions. These are finance, step parent child issues, infidelity and child raising which could prepare couples for marriage hence equip them with the skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are a set of recommendations that emerged from the study as indicated by participants;

- a) Pre-marital counselling should be mandatory in Botswana and couples prior to being married should produce a certificate of attendance.
- b) There is need to increase pre-marital counsellors in Botswana as they are not enough.
- c) Pre-marital counselling services should be well marketed so that the community is familiar with the services.
- d) Pre-marital counselling services should be introduced in all churches
- e) More pre-marital counselling centres should be built so that getting help is easy.
- f) It is important that couples should go for marriage counselling at least once in a year so as to have a check-up of their marriage.

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