



The Influence of Pre-Marital Counseling on Marital Adjustment Among Couples in Catholic Dioceses of Benue State, Nigeria: A Focus on Couple-In-Law, Gender-Role, and Sexual Adjustments

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ABSTRACT

The increasing number of marital challenges in contemporary society, coupled with the growing importance of pre-marital counseling in preparing couples for marriage, has spurred interest in assessing the effectiveness of such programs. In the Catholic Church, pre-marital counseling is seen as a crucial step in fostering stable and fulfilling marriages. However, the extent to which pre-marital counseling influences various aspects of marital adjustment remain unclear. This study investigated the influence of pre-marital counseling on marital adjustment among couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the effects of pre-marital counseling on couple-in-law adjustment, gender-role adjustment and sexual adjustment. Adopting an ex-post facto research design, the study involved a sample of 385 wedded couples, selected through purposive, proportionate stratified random, and convenience sampling techniques. The population comprised 24,080 couples who had been married within the last 15 years in the Catholic Church in Benue State. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, the "Pre-Marital Counseling and Marital Adjustment Questionnaire" (PCMAQ), which was validated by experts and demonstrated a reliability coefficient of 0.83 using Cronbach Alpha. The data were analyzed using means, standard deviations, and Chi-square goodness of fit tests at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that pre-marital counseling had no significant positive influence on the various dimensions of marital adjustment, including couple-in-law, gender-role and sexual adjustments. This suggests a critical gap between the intended objectives of pre-marital counseling and its actual effectiveness in preparing couples for marriage. Despite the efforts made by the Catholic Dioceses, there was no observed significant improvement in these key areas of marital adjustment. Based on these findings, the study recommends that the Catholic Dioceses of Benue State, in collaboration with professional counselors, develop and implement culturally sensitive counseling modules that specifically address in-law relationships. Furthermore, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria is encouraged to revise the pre-marital counseling curriculum to incorporate contemporary perspectives on gender roles and partnership dynamics. These adjustments aim to enhance the effectiveness of pre-marital counseling and better equip couples for the complexities of married life.

Keywords: Premarital Counselling, Marital Adjustment, Couple-In-Law, Gender-Role, and Sexual Adjustments

Introduction

Marital adjustment issues among couples are increasingly becoming a public concern worldwide. Reports frequently highlight that many marriages experience breakdowns shortly after elaborate wedding ceremonies, drawing significant attention to the challenges faced by newlyweds globally. Different challenges of marital adjustment are commonly observed around the world most of which borders on resentment, poor communication, individual differences, role differences, financial problems, third party interferences, sexual incompatibility, differences in religious belief and childlessness (Chen & Takeuchi, 2011). The aforementioned challenges and many others have set marriages up for violence and subsequently, divorce. To curtail these issues that arise in marriages, couples are often advised to engage themselves in pre-marital counselling before marriage. There is no denying the fact that the modern era has seen traditional marriage and family-defined as a husband and wife with children in an intact marriage-come increasingly under assault, with deleterious consequences. A wide range of social ills have contributed to this weakening of marriage and family. Notable among these social ills include divorce, health challenges, cohabitation, non-marital childbearing, pornography, the erosion of fidelity in marriage, the strains of unemployment and poverty, and many other social phenomena (Cherlin, 2020). Many today have deviated from the original tenets of marriage and have created for themselves their own kind of marriages.

In the African context, Asa and Nkan (2017) report the existence of high increase in the rate of marital adjustment problems in families leading to separation, divorce and violence. According to Samulela (2016), over the years divorce cases in African countries have skyrocketed, a trend some marriage experts say is alarming. The author cited unfaithfulness, drunkenness, and lack of communication, violence, finances, parental interference and early marriages as prime contributing factors to divorce. Yahaya (2008) found that in Nigeria, twenty percent of the marriages conducted yearly end up in divorce or separation and that people who marry young are likely to divorce at relatively young ages because, a person who marries young is cognizant of his chances of remarriage in case of divorce or separation. This makes them not to be tolerant in their marriages.

Generally, no marriage is immune to marital problems and challenges. Marriages often face challenges. Marital challenges are the difficulties married adults encounter in their marriage. This is simply because no two individuals are the same, in such conditions; clashes are bound to take place in marriage. Marital challenges include; resentment, poor communication, individual differences, poor parenting skills, financial problems, third party interferences, sexual incompatibility, differences in religious belief and childlessness (Namka, 2013). Also the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (2014), identified other causes of marital challenges to include; neglect of marital roles and expectation; communication breakdown; unresolved baggage from youth; unfulfilled expectations; sex and intimacy; resentment; financial problem; marital challenges due to the arrival of a new born baby; barrenness/impotency; busy schedules of the couples; individual differences; lack of proper parenting skills; in-laws interferences; differences in religious beliefs; and lack of submission on the part of the wife. It is in expectation of these challenges that efforts are been made through counselling activities by counsellors, parents, researchers, religious organizations, non-governmental organizations and other society institutions to help people who are going into marriage tolerate each other and adjust well. One of such efforts according to Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley and Clements (2010) is the pre-marital counselling.

Pre-marital counselling refers to the preparations made before marriage which takes place during the time of courtship. To Mobegi, Mokoro and Keari (2016), pre-marital counselling refers to scheduled meetings between a couple seeking marriage and a third party for the purpose of helping prospective mates evaluate their relationship and acquaint themselves with the ways by which they might build a more happy and successful marriage. It is designed to enhance and enrich pre-marital relationships leading to more satisfactory and stable marriages with the intended consequence being to prevent escalated crises, separation, violence and divorce among other marital crises. Pre-marital counselling is meant to help couples prepare for marriage by exploring their strengths, in addition to areas for development. It provides a good avenue for learning more about each other which includes developing better communication among couples. Pre-marital counselling is meant to equip couples with problem-solving skills to manage problems that may occur in the future through becoming aware of each other's characteristics.

As a result of the above-mentioned reasons, pre-marital counselling programmes are extremely important. Couples ought to seek professional counselling before entering into marriage, as this can provide them with a better understanding of the marital union, including its positive and challenging aspects, help them know their partners more deeply, and equip them with coping strategies and adjustment techniques for their marital journey. Through pre-marital counselling, the counsellor is able to provide couples with the tools needed to keep their relationship healthy and strong. The counsellor is also able to provide therapeutic information which helps couples eliminate habits that destroy relationships and inculcate good habits that build healthy relationship (Echebe, 2010).

In recent times, most religious organizations like churches demand would-be couples to compulsorily undergo pre-marital counselling before their marriages are contracted in church. Many religious denominations have strongly encouraged church members to complete pre-marital counselling as a stipulation to being married in the faith (Teal, 2018). During pre-marital counselling, couples are advised to discuss numerous topics, including: intimacy, affection and sex; communication skills; finances and money management; children and parenting; and roles in marriage. In pre-marital counselling, would-be couples are guided to answer important questions that improve their awareness of each other's strengths and weaknesses that may not have been already explored (Adzovie&Dabone, 2021). Through this process, would-be couples explore what behaviours need to change or otherwise. Would-be couples can also decide firmly on whether to continue with the marriage or not based on information gathered. Often times, people get married believing that it will fulfill their emotional, financial, social, and sexual needs unfortunately, these expectations are not always met. When differences and expectations are discussed before marriage, the couple may develop ways to understand as well as support each other after they are married and when skills are developed before marriage, there are higher chances of stability in marriage in that, they may apply coping mechanisms they learned in order to adjust well in marriage. Hence, pre-marital counselling could thus help couples in marital adjustment.

Marital adjustment refers to the process by which couples adapt to each other and their shared life circumstances, managing conflicts, aligning expectations, and developing mutual satisfaction in various aspects of their relationship over time. It is the accommodation of each spouse to the other, to his/her new role as husband or wife, and to the responsibilities of the marital relationship (Kendrick & Drentea, 2016). New marriages begin with a period of marital adjustment as both spouses learn to adapt to the marriage. Kendrick and Drentea (2016) states that dimensions used to determine levels of marital adjustment include marital satisfaction, cohesion, agreement, affection, and conflict. To the authors, while marital satisfaction is attitudinal and, therefore, distinct for each spouse, cohesion describes each spouse's commitment to the marriage and companionship received from the relationship and agreement on important issues is also vital to well-adjusted marriages, so these marriages are characterized by affection, displayed through behaviour, and calm resolution of conflict. Well-adjusted couples will increasingly work as a team and a cohesive unit rather than as two separate entities. What this means is that well-adjusted couples are expected to have long-lasting, stable marriages, whereas poorly adjusted marriages are expected to experience instability and/or to end in divorce. Areas of marital adjustment according to Allendorf and Ghimire (2013) are: in-laws' adjustment, gender-role adjustment, social adjustment, financial adjustment, sexual adjustment, psychological adjustment, personality adjustment, work-role adjustment and adjusting on pattern of authority. This study focused on couple-in-laws adjustment, gender-role adjustment and sexual adjustment which have been observed to be commonly experienced among couples in the designated study area.

In-law adjustment is considered a major adjustment issue in marriage. Marriage creates 'In-laws'. With marriage, every adult acquires a whole new set of relatives – the in-laws. These are people of different ages, ranging from young to the elderly, who often have different interests and values and sometimes markedly different educational, cultural and social backgrounds (Imbalife, 2018). Both husbands and wives must learn to adjust to their in-laws if they are to avoid frictional relationships with their spouses. In-law trouble is especially serious during the early years of marriage and is one of the most important causes of marital breakup during the first year. Bhushan and Shirali (2021) argue that marital adjustment challenges often arise from differences in family values and beliefs between partners. The greater the diversity in their backgrounds, the more significant the adjustment issues

become. Newly married couples must navigate ongoing relationships with their respective families, balancing respect for their own family while wholeheartedly embracing their spouse's family. The hope for a warm and close relationship may manifest in stronger bonds after the wedding but in-law issues could be an agent of making the relationship not to be stable (Olofintoye&Faluyi, 2016). Some families seem to be seriously at war with themselves simply because of their failure to arrest, manage or resolve conflicting issues between couples' in-laws. Imbalife (2018) avers that certain factor such as approval of the marriage by the parents of both spouses, opportunities for the parents to meet and become acquainted before the marriage, and friendliness on the part of both families when they meet have been found to contribute to good in-law adjustments. However, the researcher, overtime, has consistently observed a recurring pattern of marital challenges stemming from in-law relationships among recently married couples in the study area. Numerous instances have come to the researcher's attention where marital adjustment has been compromised due to conflicts involving in-laws. These conflicts often manifest in various forms, such as disagreements over family traditions, interference in decision-making, financial disputes, or differing expectations about the roles and responsibilities of the newly married couple within the extended family structure.

Gender-role adjustment is another marital adjustment area of concern in this study area. This refers to the adjustment to the roles of male and woman in marriages. It shapes the responsibilities of being a woman and a man. In marriage, each partner not only has to think out and make choices as to his or her own marital roles, each also has to seek out and understand the role expectations of other (Allendorf& Ghimire, 2013). Ercan and Ucar (2021) state that in traditional marriage perception, men are perceived to earn money and support the house while women are perceived to assume the duty of being a mother and being responsible for housework. How well each partner perceives, understands, and essentially agrees with the role definition and expectations of the others is most important in marital adjustment. This distribution of tasks also determines what is expected from marriage. While evaluating the marriage expectation within the framework of gender roles, differences other than similarities stand out (Zheng, 2016). In marriage the role desires and expectations a partner holds for one's spouse and oneself are among those crucial aspects of marriage which require continuous and good adjustment. The researcher has observed instances of role conflicts and disagreements within marriages in the study area. Couples seem to experience tension or misunderstandings when it comes to fulfilling their expected gender roles. Hence, whether the couples understand, and essentially agree with their gender-role definition and expectations of the others in order to be well adjusted in marriage after their exposure to pre-marital counselling remains to be known.

Sexual adjustment is yet another area of adjustment in marriages. It is the process by which couples adapt to and negotiate their sexual relationship, including frequency, preferences, and communication about intimacy, to achieve mutual satisfaction and compatibility. Sexual gratification is one of the basic foundations of marriage. It influences marital relations to large extent. A couple has to essentially adjust to the sexual expectations that are frequency, quantity and quality of sex needs laid down by the partner for having a happy married life ahead (Shiksha, n.d). Sexual life, which is one of the factors that affect the adjustment in marriage, is considered to be good and healthy in the case that the partners get pleasure from sexuality and maintain these feelings (Tuba, Gülhan, Giray, Leyla & İrem, 2019). A satisfying sexual life plays a key role in the positive relationship between the partners and increases marital adjustment. Research has shown that sexual intimacy gives couples a level of closeness and loving intimacy they may not reach any other way (Tuba, Gülhan, Giray, Leyla & İrem, 2019). For the most part, the quality of a marriage is reflected in the quality of the sexual relationship. Sexual frustration could make adjustment in marriage difficult. The researcher has observed a significant number of cases or reports of sexual dissatisfaction or issues related to sexual adjustment among married couples in the study area. This includes problems like mismatched sexual expectations, lack of sexual intimacy, and difficulty in achieving sexual gratification.

It is reasonable to infer that pre-marital counselling may indeed influence the marital adjustment of couples. This influence could be attributed to its role in fostering essential relationship skills and proactively addressing potential issues before they become significant challenges. This pre-marital counselling is typically conducted by licensed therapists, counsellors, or religious leaders who have experience working with couples. The counselling process typically involves several sessions in which the couple and counselor work together to identify potential challenges and develop skills and strategies to address them. Through the guidance provided in pre-marital counselling, offered by churches, couples could be better equipped to establish a robust basis for a satisfying and harmonious relationship. This preparation involves addressing various aspects of marriage, including in-law dynamics, gender roles, sexual matters, emotional well-being, social interactions, and financial planning and management.

In light of the various marital adjustment challenges faced by couples and the potential benefits of pre-marital counselling, it is crucial to examine the specific context of Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria. The Catholic Church has a long-standing tradition of offering pre-marital counselling to couples, but its effectiveness in addressing marital adjustment problems faced by couples in this region remains understudied. This research aims to bridge this gap by investigating the influence of pre-marital counselling on marital adjustment among couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State. By focusing on key areas of marital adjustment such as in-law relationships, gender roles and sexual adjustment, this study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of current pre-marital counselling practices and potentially inform improvements in counselling programmes.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the following theories: Attachment Theory (AT) by John Bowlby (1969) and Social Exchange Theory by George C. Homans and Peter M. Blau in 1958. Attachment Theory focuses on the emotional bonds formed between individuals, particularly the bond between a child and their primary caregiver. Bowlby proposed that these early attachments have a profound impact on an individual's emotional development and influence how they interact with others throughout their lives. Attachment theory suggests that people form internal working models based on their early experiences with caregivers, which shape their expectations and behaviors in later relationships, including romantic and marital relationships. In

the context of this study, Attachment Theory is relevant because it highlights how the emotional bonds formed in early life can influence marital adjustment. Individuals who have secure attachments in their early relationships are more likely to have healthy, stable relationships in adulthood. Conversely, those with insecure attachments may struggle with emotional regulation, trust, and conflict resolution in their marriages. Pre-marital counseling may play a crucial role in helping individuals recognize their attachment patterns and how these patterns influence their marital relationships, including couple-in-law, gender-role and sexual. Understanding attachment behaviors could help couples anticipate challenges they may face in their marriage and learn strategies for fostering secure emotional bonds, making Attachment Theory an important framework for assessing the effectiveness of pre-marital counseling.

On the other hand, Social Exchange Theory (SET) posits that social interactions, including relationships, are based on a cost-benefit analysis, where individuals seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs. According to SET, individuals engage in relationships when the perceived benefits (e.g., emotional support, companionship, security) outweigh the costs (e.g., time, emotional energy, conflict). The theory also suggests that people weigh these rewards and costs continuously, and the balance between the two dictates the satisfaction and stability of the relationship. The Social Exchange Theory is relevant to this study because it provides a lens through which the influence of pre-marital counseling on marital adjustment can be understood. Pre-marital counseling can help couples develop realistic expectations about the rewards and challenges of marriage. In understanding the dynamics of give-and-take in marriage, couples can improve their adjustments. Additionally, Social Exchange Theory underscores the importance of mutual benefit in marriage. If pre-marital counseling helps couples identify the long-term benefits of collaboration, shared decision-making, and emotional investment, they are likely to experience greater satisfaction and stability in their marriage.

Related Studies

Olofintoye and Faluyi (2016) investigated the influence of parent's in-law's interference on marital stability among young couples in Ondo State, Nigeria. This study focused on influence of parents-in-law on marital stability among young couples in Ondo State. Results of the study showed that parents' in-law significantly influence marital stability among couples and that there was a significant gender difference in influence of parents-in-law's interference on marital stability. In another study, Smith and Johnson (2018) investigated the impact of in-law support on marital adjustment: A Longitudinal Analysis. The longitudinal study aimed to investigate how various forms of in-law support (emotional, instrumental, informational) influence marital adjustment over time. The study found that emotional support from in-laws had the most significant positive impact on marital adjustment. Instrumental and informational support also played roles, but to a lesser extent. The findings suggested that ongoing emotional support from in-laws can contribute to higher marital satisfaction over the course of a marriage. Also, Chen and Anderson (2019) investigated cultural perspectives on in-law relationships and marital adjustment: A Cross-Cultural Study. The cross-cultural study aimed to explore how cultural norms and values influence in-law relationships and marital adjustment among couples from different cultural backgrounds. The study revealed significant cultural differences in the role and impact of in-law relationships on marital adjustment. Cultural values and norms related to family dynamics and filial piety were found to be influential factors. Couples from both cultures reported higher marital adjustment when their in-law relationships aligned with cultural expectations.

Parrott and Parrott (2005) conducted a study on pre-marital counselling: the key to a stronger marriage. The study found a statistically significant positive correlation between pre-marital counselling and marital satisfaction ($p < 0.01$). Couples who underwent counselling reported higher satisfaction levels and fewer conflicts with in-laws. Interviews revealed that couples who participated in pre-marital counselling were better equipped to set boundaries with in-laws and manage conflicts. Counselling sessions often addressed issues related to in-law relationships, providing strategies for effective communication and conflict resolution. The study concluded that pre-marital counselling significantly contributes to healthier in-law relationships by promoting better communication and boundary-setting skills. Stanley, Amato, Johnson and Markman (2006) conducted a study on pre-marital education, marital quality, and marital stability: findings from a large, randomized control trial. The study found that pre-marital counselling significantly reduced the likelihood of in-law conflicts ($p < 0.05$) and improved the overall family dynamics, contributing to higher marital stability.

Tazkiya and Puspitawati (2022) investigated marital adjustment, gender role partnerships, and marital satisfaction during Covid-19. The results of the linear regression test showed that the husband's income had a significant positive effect on marital satisfaction. Correlation tests, linear regression test results, and SEM showed that marital adjustment and gender role partnerships significantly positively affected marital satisfaction. There was an indirect effect between marital adjustment and marital satisfaction with gender role partnership mediators. Ercan and Ucar (2021) investigated gender roles, personality traits and expectations of women and men towards marriage. The purpose of the study was to determine whether gender roles, self-esteem and personality predicts the expectations of men and women' attitudes about marriage. The results of the multiple regression analysis sociotropy, autonomy and traditional gender roles variables were found to be significant predictors of the marriage expectations of women. As a result of the multiple regression analysis performed to predict the marriage expectations of men, it was seen that sociotropy variable was significant predictor. According to the results, as the sociotropy scores of men increases the positive expectations towards marriage also increase. According to the findings, it was seen that the variables that predicts the marriage expectations of women and men are different from each other

Holman and Li (1997) investigated the influence of pre-marital factors on newlywed marital satisfaction and commitment. The study found that couples who participated in pre-marital counselling were more likely to have discussed and aligned their gender role expectations before marriage. This alignment was associated with higher initial marital satisfaction. One year into the marriage, couples who had undergone pre-marital counselling reported more flexibility in their gender roles. They were more willing to adjust and share responsibilities, such as household chores and decision-making. The study found a positive correlation between pre-marital counselling and marital satisfaction, mediated by successful gender role adjustment ($p < 0.05$). Couples who adjusted their gender roles effectively were more satisfied in their marriages. Markman, Rhoades, Stanley & Whitton (2008)

investigated gender roles, couple communication, and relationship satisfaction: a longitudinal study of pre-marital counselling effects. The study found that six months into the marriage, couples who received pre-marital counselling showed a greater ability to negotiate gender roles. They reported more equitable sharing of responsibilities and fewer conflicts related to traditional gender expectations. The study highlighted that pre-marital counselling significantly improved communication about gender roles, which was crucial for ongoing negotiations and adjustments in marriage ($p < 0.01$). Three years into the marriage, couples who had undergone pre-marital counselling continued to report higher marital satisfaction and harmony. The study found that effective gender role negotiation was a key factor in sustaining marital harmony and preventing conflicts related to gender roles.

Larson, Anderson, Holman and Niemann (2008) conducted a longitudinal study of the effects of pre-marital communication, relationship stability, and self-esteem on sexual satisfaction in the first year of marriage. This study examined select pre-marital factors from the ecosystemic perspective hypothesized to influence marital sexual satisfaction in the first year of marriage. Using multiple regression analyses it was found that the best pre-marital predictors of husband's marital sexual satisfaction were wives' self-esteem, wives' open communication, and wives' relationship stability. The best predictors for wives' marital sexual satisfaction were wives' self-esteem, wives' open communication, and husbands' empathic communication. Kaplan and Bülbül (2020) investigated the effect of the pre-marital sexual health/reproductive health training on knowledge level and marital adjustment of the newly married women. The study found that the training was effective in increasing the knowledge levels of the women on sexual matters but it did not affect their marital adjustment and sexual satisfaction in a four-month period. Markman et al. (2010) aimed to investigate the effect of pre-marital counselling on sexual satisfaction and stability in marriage. The study found that couples who received pre-marital counselling reported higher levels of sexual satisfaction and stability compared to those who did not. Specifically, the counselling addressed issues such as sexual expectations, communication about sexual needs, and strategies for maintaining a healthy sexual relationship. These couples showed a significant improvement in sexual satisfaction and were less likely to experience sexual conflicts or dissatisfaction over time. The study concluded that pre-marital counselling plays a vital role in promoting sexual satisfaction and stability in marriage.

Objectives of the study

Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives

1. ascertain the influence of pre-marital counselling on couple-in-law adjustment in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria
2. ascertain the influence of pre-marital counselling on gender-role adjustment of couples in Catholic Dioceses in Nigeria
3. examine the influence of pre-marital counselling on sexual adjustment of couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the influence of pre-marital counselling on couple-in-law adjustment in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria?
2. What is the influence of pre-marital counselling on gender-role adjustment of couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria?
3. What is the influence of pre-marital counselling on sexual adjustment of couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Pre-marital counselling has no significant influence on in-law adjustment of couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria
2. Pre-marital counselling has no significant influence on gender-role adjustment of couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria
3. Pre-marital counselling has no significant influence on sexual adjustment of couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted an ex-post facto research design also known as retrospective research or causal-comparative research design. The population of the study comprised all 24, 080 wedded couples in the Catholic church within the last 15 years in Benue. The choice of the population of wedded couples from the last 15 years aligns with the period of intensified efforts of Catholic churches in conducting pre-marital counselling for intending couples. The sample size for the study was 385 wedded couples in the Catholic Dioceses of Benue State. The sample size was determined using Glenn Formula for sample size determination. The sample size was selected using purposive, proportionate stratified and convenience sampling techniques. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Pre-Marital Counselling and Marital Adjustment Questionnaire" (PCMAQ). The PCMAQ was divided into three clusters, labeled as cluster A, B and C. Each of these parts was aligned with the specific objectives of the study. Within each part, there were ten items, and respondents were provided with four response options: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by experts. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, copies of the instrument were trial-tested on a sample of 30 couples from the Catholic Diocese of Lafia, who had undergone pre-marital counseling sessions. These

couples, although not part of the study area, were chosen for their similarity to the subjects under study. The reliability index of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha method and coefficients of 0.77, 0.81 and 0.80 for A, B and C respectively. The instrument has an overall coefficient of 0.83. The data collected was analyzed using Means and Standard Deviation to answer the research questions and Chi-Square Goodness of Fit to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the influence of pre-marital counselling on couple-in-law adjustment in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Influence of Pre-Marital Counselling on Couple-In-Law Adjustment in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Pre-marital counselling helped me understand the importance of open communication with my respective families.	33	62	188	75	2.12	.88	Disagree
2	I learned effective conflict resolution skills during pre-marital counselling, which have been beneficial in managing in-law-related issues	41	53	172	92	2.12	.92	Disagree
3	Pre-marital counselling encouraged me to set boundaries with my families, which has improved my in-law relationships	50	59	162	87	2.20	.96	Disagree
4	The pre-marital counselling sessions equipped me with tools to build trust with my respective in-laws.	49	44	177	88	2.15	.95	Disagree
5	Pre-marital counselling has enhanced my awareness of background differences, making it easier to connect with my in-laws.	61	40	133	124	2.11	1.06	Disagree
	Cluster Mean					2.14	.95	Disagree

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that the respondents generally disagreed with the notion that pre-marital counselling had a positive influence on their adjustment with in-laws. The mean scores for all the item statements fall around 2.11 to 2.20, with a cluster mean of 2.14, all of which are below the benchmark of 2.50 on the 4-point scale used, indicating disagreement. The standard deviations range from .88 to 1.06, suggesting some variability in responses, but overall, the data reflects that participants did not perceive pre-marital counselling as highly effective in helping them manage couple-in-law relationships within the Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What is the influence of pre-marital counselling on gender-role adjustment of couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Influence of Pre-Marital Counselling on Gender-Role Adjustment of Couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Pre-marital counselling helped me openly discuss my expectations regarding gender roles within my relationship	53	58	166	81	2.23	.96	Disagree
2	Pre-marital counselling has encouraged me to discuss my individual roles and responsibilities within the relationship.	40	61	149	108	2.09	.96	Disagree
3	I believe that pre-marital counselling has positively influenced my ability to adapt to changing gender-role expectations.	34	55	180	89	2.09	.88	Disagree
4	Our pre-marital counselling sessions encouraged me to support each other's personal goals, contributing to	31	42	197	88	2.04	.84	Disagree

	healthier gender-role dynamics.								
5	Pre-marital counselling helped me clarify my individual strengths in relation to gender roles.	51	39	170	98	2.12	.97	Disagree	
	Cluster Mean					2.11	.92	Disagree	

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The results in Table 2 reveal that respondents generally disagreed with the notion that pre-marital counselling had a positive influence on their gender-role adjustment within marriage. The mean scores for all item statements are below the midpoint of 2.50 on the 4-point scale, ranging from 2.04 to 2.23, indicating disagreement. The cluster mean of 2.11 further reinforces this trend, suggesting an overall perception that pre-marital counselling did not effectively address or improve gender-role adjustment among couples in the Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria. The standard deviations, which range from .84 to .97, show a moderate level of variability in responses. Overall, these findings suggest that couples did not perceive pre-marital counselling as particularly helpful in facilitating gender-role adjustment in their marriages.

Research Question 3: What is the influence of pre-marital counselling on sexual adjustment of couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Influence of Pre-Marital Counselling on Sexual Adjustment of Couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Pre-marital counselling helped me openly discuss my sexual desires within my marriage	50	53	155	100	2.15	.98	Disagree
2	My pre-marital counselling sessions has encouraged me to explore each other's sexual preferences	30	42	171	115	1.92	.90	Disagree
3	I feel more confident in expressing my sexual needs as a result of pre-marital counselling	37	49	181	91	2.09	.89	Disagree
4	Pre-marital counselling helped me address any unresolved sexual issues before entering marriage.	48	59	181	91	2.18	.96	Disagree
5	My pre-marital counselling sessions encouraged me to explore new ways to enhance my sexual connection.	23	34	171	130	1.86	.84	Disagree
	Cluster Mean					2.04	.91	Disagree

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The results in Table 3 show that respondents generally disagreed with the assertion that pre-marital counselling had a positive influence on their sexual adjustment within marriage. The mean scores for all item statements are below the midpoint of 2.50 on the 4-point scale, ranging from 1.86 to 2.18, indicating disagreement. The cluster mean of 2.04 further supports this trend, suggesting an overall lack of perceived effectiveness of pre-marital counselling in addressing sexual adjustment issues. The standard deviations, ranging from .84 to .98, indicate a moderate level of variability in the responses. Overall, the data suggest that couples in the Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria, did not find pre-marital counselling to be particularly helpful in improving sexual adjustment in their marriages.

Hypothesis 1: Pre-marital counselling has no significant influence on in-law adjustment of couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria

Table 4: Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test of Significance of the Influence of Pre-Marital Counselling on Couple-in-Law Adjustment of Couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria

Response Options	Observed N	Expected N	Df	χ^2_{cal}	Sig	α - level	Remark
SA	47	89.5					
A	52	89.5					
D	93	89.5					
SD	166	89.5					
Total	358		3	101.419	.097	.05	Not Significant

Df = Degree of Freedom; χ^2_{cal} = Chi-Square Calculated Value; Sig = P-Value, P>0.05

Table 4 revealed a Chi-Square value (χ^2) value = 101.419, degree of freedom (df) = 3 and p-value (Sig) = .097. Since $P > 0.05$, the result is not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that pre-marital counselling has no significant influence on couple-in-law adjustment in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria is accepted. This implies that pre-marital counselling has no significant influence on in-law adjustment among couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State.

Hypothesis 2:Pre-marital counselling has no significant influence on gender-role adjustment of couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria

Table 5: Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test of Significance of the Influence of Pre-Marital Counselling on Gender-Role Adjustment of Couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria

Response Options	Observed N	Expected N	Df	χ^2_{cal}	Sig	α - level	Remark
SA	42	89.5					
A	51	89.5					
D	93	89.5					
SD	172	89.5					
Total	358		3	117.955	.101	.05	Not Significant

Df = Degree of Freedom; χ^2_{cal} = Chi-Square Calculated Value; Sig = P-Value, $P > 0.05$

Table 5 revealed a Chi-Square value (χ^2) value = 117.955, degree of freedom (df) = 3 and p-value (Sig) = .101. Since $P > 0.05$, the result is not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that pre-marital counselling has no significant influence on gender-role adjustment in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria is accepted. This implies that pre-marital counselling has no significant influence on gender-role adjustment among couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State.

Hypothesis 3:Pre-marital counselling has no significant influence on sexual adjustment of couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria

Table 6: Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test of Significance of the Influence of Pre-Marital Counselling on Sexual Adjustment of Couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria

Response Options	Observed N	Expected N	Df	χ^2_{cal}	Sig	α - level	Remark
SA	38	89.5					
A	47	89.5					
D	105	89.5					
SD	168	89.5					
Total	358		3	121.352	.091	.05	Not Significant

Df = Degree of Freedom; χ^2_{cal} = Chi-Square Calculated Value; Sig = P-Value, $P > 0.05$

Table 6 revealed a Chi-Square value (χ^2) value = 121.352, degree of freedom (df) = 3 and p-value (Sig) = .091. Since $P > 0.05$, the result is not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that pre-marital counselling has no significant influence on sexual adjustment in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria is accepted. This implies that pre-marital counselling has no significant influence on sexual adjustment among couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State.

Discussion

Hypothesis one found that pre-marital counselling had no significant positive influence on in-law adjustment among couples in Catholic Dioceses in Benue State, Nigeria. Respondents generally disagreed that counselling sessions helped them with communication, conflict resolution, or boundary-setting with in-laws. This finding contrasts with research by Parrot and Parrot (2005), who found that couples who participated in pre-marital counselling were better equipped to set boundaries with in-laws and manage conflicts and that, counselling sessions often addressed issues related to in-law relationships, providing strategies for effective communication and conflict resolution. Similarly, the finding does not align with that of Stanley et al. (2006), who found that pre-marital counselling significantly reduced the likelihood of in-law conflicts and improved the overall family dynamics, contributing to higher marital stability. Further, the findings are at odd with that of Smith and Johnson (2018) which highlights the importance of in-law support in marital adjustment. Their study found that ongoing emotional and informational support from in-laws plays a crucial role in enhancing marital satisfaction. The lack of significant influence in the Benue State study may be attributed to the cultural context, where in-law relationships are deeply embedded in traditional norms that are not easily addressed through counselling. Moreover, Olofintoye and Faluyi (2016), found that parents-in-

law significantly influence marital stability, suggesting that in-law dynamics are complex and may require more targeted interventions than what is typically provided in pre-marital counselling in churches. One possible factor contributing to this finding is that pre-marital counselling programmes in the Catholic Dioceses of Benue State may not be adequately tailored to address the specific challenges couples face regarding in-laws. The counselling may not be addressing the specific challenges faced by couples in Benue State regarding in-law interactions, such as communication barriers or differing expectations between generations. More so, the cultural expectations and the high value placed on extended family ties in the area might make it difficult for couples to assert boundaries or effectively communicate with in-laws, even after counselling. Additionally, the content of the counselling may not sufficiently cover conflict resolution strategies specific to in-law relationships, leaving couples unprepared for the realities they face after marriage. This suggests a need for a more culturally sensitive approach in counselling that directly addresses the complexities of in-law relationships in these communities.

Hypothesis two revealed that pre-marital counselling did not significantly influence gender-role adjustment in couples. Respondents disagreed that the counselling sessions helped them discuss expectations, adapt to changing roles, or clarify individual strengths related to gender roles. This finding is somewhat surprising given the body of research that supports the positive impact of pre-marital counselling on gender role adjustments. For example, Holman and Li (1997) found that couples who participated in pre-marital counselling were more likely to have discussed and aligned their gender role expectations before marriage and that the alignment was associated with higher initial marital satisfaction. Also, the finding of Marksman et al. (2008) which highlighted that pre-marital counselling significantly improved communication about gender roles, which was crucial for ongoing negotiations and adjustments in marriage is at variance with the findings of this study. Additionally, this finding also does not align with research by Tazkiya and Puspitawati (2022) which found a positive correlation between gender role partnerships and marital satisfaction. More so, the finding also contrast with research by Ercan and Ucar (2021), who found that gender roles and expectations significantly influence marriage dynamics. The finding of the present study could be shaped by deep-rooted cultural and societal norms that pre-marital counselling may not sufficiently address. The lack of positive influence on gender-role adjustment suggests that counselling sessions may not be effectively challenging or reshaping traditional gender roles, which could limit couples' ability to adapt to modern relationship dynamics. Several factors could contribute to this finding. First, the counselling programme in Catholic dioceses of Benue State may not be up-to-date with contemporary perspectives on gender roles, especially in the context of rapidly changing social norms in Nigeria. Second, there might be a disconnect between the counselling content and the lived experiences of couples in Benue State. If the counselling does not address the specific gender-related challenges faced by couples in this region, it may not be perceived as helpful. Additionally, deeply ingrained cultural beliefs about gender roles may be resistant to change through short-term counselling interventions. More so, another possible implication of this finding is that the pre-marital counselling in the region may be reinforcing traditional gender roles rather than encouraging couples to explore and negotiate more equitable roles. The curriculum may lack a focus on contemporary discussions about gender equality and partnership, which are crucial for gender-role adjustment. Moreover, the counsellors themselves might hold traditional views, which could influence the way they address or avoid the topic of gender roles during sessions. This highlights the need for a revised counselling approach that includes training counsellors to facilitate discussions on gender expectations and promote flexible roles that can adapt to the evolving needs of modern couples.

Hypothesis three found that pre-marital counselling had no significant positive effect on sexual adjustment among couples. Respondents disagreed that counselling helped them discuss sexual desires, explore preferences, or address unresolved sexual issues. This finding contrasts with studies that have demonstrated the positive impact of pre-marital counselling on sexual adjustment. For instance, Larson, Anderson, Holman, and Niemann (2008) found that pre-marital communication and relationship stability were significant predictors of sexual satisfaction in the first year of marriage. Similarly, the finding of this study contrasts with findings from Markman et al. (2010), who showed that pre-marital counselling, when it includes discussions about sexual expectations and communication, can significantly enhance sexual satisfaction and stability in marriage. The lack of influence found in the Benue State study could be due to the omission or inadequate coverage of sexual topics in counselling sessions, possibly due to cultural or religious sensitivities that inhibit open discussions about sexuality. The implication here is that pre-marital counselling in the Catholic Dioceses might be failing to provide couples with the necessary tools to navigate sexual intimacy, a critical component of marital satisfaction. This gap may stem from cultural taboos surrounding discussions of sex, leading to a lack of emphasis on sexual education during counselling. As a result, couples enter marriage without a clear understanding of each other's sexual needs or how to communicate about them, which could lead to dissatisfaction and conflict. If counsellors are uncomfortable or ill-equipped to address sexual topics, couples may not receive the guidance they need. Furthermore, the importance of addressing sexual expectations and compatibility in pre-marital programmes has been emphasized in literature. If these aspects are not adequately covered, couples may feel unprepared for sexual adjustment in marriage. Addressing this issue requires integrating comprehensive sexual education into pre-marital counselling programmes, ensuring that couples are equipped to discuss and manage their sexual relationship effectively.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that pre-marital counselling, as practiced in the Catholic Dioceses of Benue State, Nigeria, does not have a significant positive influence on various aspects of marital adjustment. Specifically, the study found no significant impact of pre-marital counselling on couple-in-law adjustment, gender-role adjustment and sexual adjustment. These results suggest that while pre-marital counselling may be a common practice within the Catholic Church, its effectiveness in fostering comprehensive marital adjustment may be limited or require further enhancement in its content and approach.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made

1. The Catholic Dioceses of Benue State should in collaboration with professional counsellors develop and implement culturally sensitive modules within their pre-marital counselling programme that specifically address in-law relationships. These modules should include strategies for effective communication, boundary-setting, and conflict resolution tailored to the local context.
2. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria should in collaboration with professional counsellors revise the pre-marital counselling curriculum to include contemporary perspectives on gender roles and partnerships. They should incorporate discussions and exercises that encourage couples to explore flexible, equitable role distributions that can adapt to modern relationship dynamics while respecting cultural values.
3. The Family Life Office of the Catholic Dioceses in Benue State should integrate comprehensive sexual education into the pre-marital counselling program, addressing cultural taboos sensitively. They should also provide specialized training to counsellors to facilitate open discussions about sexual expectations, preferences, and communication.
- 4.

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