

**The role of marriage preparation programs in preventing divorce:
Narratives of recently married individuals in Buffalo City
Municipality.**

A full research thesis
submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Work
in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the
University of Fort Hare
(East London Campus).

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Date of submission: December 2013

Supervisor: John Victor Rautenbach

DECLARATION

I, Rumbidzai Mujoko, Student No: 200706021 declare that this study is my own work and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any University. All sources quoted or used have been listed in the references.

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the perceptions of recently married individuals on the role of marriage preparation programs in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. The study's concern is that despite the fact that marriage preparation programs have been conducted in most parts of the world, some South African marriages are still affected by divorce. In 2009, 34.2% of the divorces came from the African population group and 5, 2% from the Indian/Asian population group. (StatsSA, 2009). Consequently, many marriages are affected by marital distress and divorce which has detrimental effects on the individual, family, communities and the nation as a whole. Marriage preparation programs are set up with the main aim of preventing divorce. It is in this frame of reference that this study saw it imperative to focus on the role of these programs. The study aims to examine what recently married individuals perceive as the role of marriage preparation programs and in turn recommend practical preventative and treatment strategies that can be employed by service providers of marriage preparation programs.

The research drew its theoretical framework from the adult attachment theory, which developed from John Bowlby's attachment theory in children. Guilford (2005) states that the application of attachment theory to adult relationships is a revolutionary event for the modality of couple therapy which gives the therapist a coherent, relevant, widely applicable and well researched framework for understanding the complex phenomenon of the adult love relationships. The study also drew from Jonathan Smith's Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, a qualitative research approach which is committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences. Semi-structured interviews were utilized during data collection. A purposive sampling method was used to select fifteen recently married (3-5 years) individuals who attended a marriage preparation course before their marriage.

The results of this study revealed that marriage preparation plays a major role in divorce prevention through improving good communication skills, helping in managing finances, addressing some cultural beliefs that might affect the marriage negatively, alerting individuals about potential marital challenges, encouraging seeking for help from professional counsellors, providing ways to deal with marital problems, improves marital commitment and increasing the level of marriage readiness.

However, the study also found out that some marriage preparation programs in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality exclude some topics that are perceived as important by participants. In addition, some participants who attended a marriage preparation programs still have difficulties in implementing some of the topics. Recommendations and implications for social work practice are documented in the research.

Key words: Marriage, Marriage preparation, divorce

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my husband and my first born. To my unborn son, we practically conducted the research together and we did it. I love you all and thank you for the support.

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My heartfelt gratitude goes to God almighty for giving me the strength to carry on until I finish this research.

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Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

1. CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

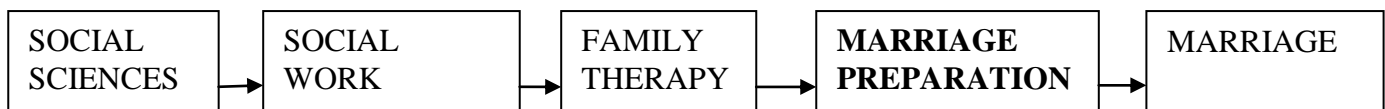
This chapter outlines the background information of the study. In addition, the chapter provides a brief account of the research methodology used and a description of the research design. It ends with a brief overview of the structure of the research.

2. TITLE AND FIELD OF RESEARCH

The title of the study is:

The role of marriage preparation programs in preventing divorce: Narratives of recently married individuals in Buffalo City Municipality.

It is a descriptive study that seeks to understand the role of marriage preparation programs drawing from perceptions and experiences of recently married individuals who went through marriage preparation sessions before their marriage. The following illustration shows the field of the research:



3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND RESERCH PROBLEM

“In a society where half of all marriages will end in divorce, it is important for counsellors to take a look at what is reported as being helpful to clients who undergo premarital counselling” (Bruhn & Hill, 2004, p. 1).

This research explores the role of marriage preparation programs drawing from the narratives of recently married individuals. Ponzetti & Mutch (2006) defines marriage as a complex multidimensional experience. It is a social institution as well as a close personal relationship. They further stated that the major concern around marriage is to establish a unit that is able to nurture offspring. Marriage preparation interventions have been around for decades, with the earliest interventions dating back to the 1930s (Duncan, Childs, & Larson, 2010). Marriage preparation programs in educational and therapeutic settings are expanding in response to several factors, including rising concern about divorce and domestic violence rates.

Silliman & Schumm (2000) are of the view that marriage preparation in Europe began with clergy and community counselling and a few college classes prior to World War II, growing into more systematic pastoral counselling and therapy in the two decades after the war. Holmes & Johnson (2009) stated that finding a romantic partner and developing and maintaining a long-term relationship with that person is a key social process that many strive to achieve. The success or failure of this endeavour can have significant consequences for an individual’s well-being and happiness, so gaining insight into the processes of the development of successful long-term relationship is important for both researchers and counsellors.

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“Marriage preparation is therapeutic couple intervention that occurs with couples who are planning to marry and it aims to provide couples with information on ways to improve the relationship once they are married” (Murray & Kardatzke, 2009). A diverse set of marriage preparation programs currently exists to improve relationships and marriages and most of all, to prevent divorce. Marriage preparation programs vary by organization, curricular focus, client learning style, and target population. The providers offer counselling to individuals, couples or groups. The programs are developed from research, government, faith-based initiatives, or they can operate privately for profit. Among other places, these programs may operate in churches, mental health centres, universities or public assistance offices. The programs usually contain topics such as problem solving, communication, adjustment, commitment, parenting, finances and many more, depending with the service provider (Parker, 1999).

Murray & Kardatzke (2009) state that because of high prevalence rates, immediate and long-term effects on children, its economic and social implications; divorce is a crucial topic for professional counsellors to consider. They mentioned that divorce has become the norm in modern day world and the current generation of young adults entering into marriage has grown up in a culture in which divorce is common. Gardner (2001) pointed out that children growing up in single-parent families experience worse outcomes than children growing up in two-parent families. The author further stated that divorce is usually correlated with negative effects on children’s well-being and even when parents remarry, this does not appear to improve the outcomes. Therefore divorce has detrimental effects to individuals, families, communities and nations.

As supported by statistics, South Africa is facing a high rate of divorce (StatsSA, 2009) which has detrimental effects on a family as an institution that plays a major role in

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strengthening societies. Parrot and Parrot (2003) stated that there are so many contributors to the fracturing of marriage which are cohabitation, serial monogamy, easy divorce laws, moral decline, and stigma of counselling and above all, lack of marriage preparation. Marital distress negatively affects the family and has been linked to manifestations of stress and behaviour problems (Gardner, 2001). Marriage preparation comes as a measure to prevent marital distress and divorce and to enhance the ability of couples to endure stress in marriages. It is assumed that if more couples would seek premarital counselling, then many potential relationship problems could be avoided in the future (Knutson & Olson, 2003). Counsellors need to focus more on helping marriages get off to a good start rather than providing the service of helping individuals and couples to pick up the pieces of a failed or failing relationship (Bruhn & Hill, 2004).

Silliman (2004) found out that safe and stable marriages benefit adults, children, and communities. Many nations around the world realize the vital importance of premarital counselling as a public health measure. For most young people in many societies, the years from the late teens through the twenties are a time of significant change and importance. Many of them have experiences that lay the foundation for their future lives in areas such as work, education, and romantic relationships. Carroll (2007) stated that these young people regard marriage as a life goal. In their study they found out that more than 90% of young adults in the United States rate having a good marriage as quite or extremely important to them and 94% of emerging adults state that they are personally hoping to get married someday. These findings suggest that marriage is an important goal for the vast majority of emerging adults because they are planning for and expecting to get married. Therefore there is need for marriage preparation programs to prepare them before they enter into marriage,

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4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the research is to find out the role of marriage preparation programs as perceived by recently married individuals who participated in these programs. Despite the fact that research has been conducted worldwide on marriage preparation, South Africa is still facing high rates of divorce (StatsSA, 2009). Many marriages are affected and threatened by marital distress. The destruction of these marriages has detrimental effects on a family as an institution that plays a major role in strengthening societies (Gardner, 2001). In a society where half of all marriages will end in divorce, it is important for counsellors and researchers to take a look at what is reported as being helpful to clients who undergo premarital counselling. The researcher believes that more relationship problems could be avoided in the future if couples would seek premarital counselling (Bruhn & Hill, 2004).

4.1 *Research Aim and Objectives*

This section provides research questions which were used in the research. Questions were open and exploratory to encourage participants to talk about their experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). These aims, objectives and questions were formulated based on the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA).

4.1.1 *Research aim*

- To gain understanding of recently married individuals' perceptions of the role of marriage preparation programme

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4.1.2 Research objectives

- To explore how individuals define marriage preparation
- To explore the experiences of individuals in implementing what was taught in the marriage preparation program
- To investigate the empowerment needs of individuals who attend marriage preparation programs.

4.2 Research Questions

- What do recently married individuals (3-years) perceive as the significant role of marriage preparation programmes?
- What are the experiences of individuals in implementing what was taught in the marriage preparation program?
- Which preventative and treatment strategies can service providers employ in their marriage preparation programs?

5. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Marriage preparation program:

For the purpose of this research a marriage preparation program is defined as a written plan used by marriage preparation service providers (religious leaders, professional counsellors and physicians) as a guideline of their marriage preparation course.

Marriage

For the purpose of this research, marriage is defined as a contract between one woman and one man that unites their lives legally, economically, emotionally and physically (Woolverton 2012).

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Divorce

Divorce is the legal dissolution of marriage by a court or other content body (www.oxforddictionaries.com).

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following section describes Adult Attachment Theory and its contribution and use in marriage preparation programs.

6.1 *Attachment Theory*

The research draws on John Bowlby's theory of attachment. The attachment theory focuses on affection bonds that are based on repeated interactions between an infant and his or her primary caregiver (Ruppel & Curran, 2012). Although Bowlby was primarily focused on the nature of infant-caregiver relationship, he also believed that attachment characterized human experience from “the cradle to the grave”. Fraley (2010) states that Hazan and Shaver (1987) were the first researchers to explore Bowlby’s ideas in the context of romantic relationships and it gave birth to Adult Attachment Theory. The assumption is that the emotional bond that develops between adult romantic partners is partly a function of the same motivational system (the attachment behavioural system), that gives rise to the emotional bond between infants and their caregivers. Johnson and Whiffen (2005) states that the application of attachment theory to adult relationships did not occur until the late 1980s, it was a revolutionary event for the modality of couple therapy. It became a theory of close relationships which offered the couple therapist a coherent, relevant, widely applicable and well researched framework for understanding the complex phenomenon of the adult love relationships.

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6.1.1 Adult attachment theory in marriage preparation

Parker and Scanell (1998), examined attachment styles and how they change in the years of transiting to marriage and revealed that attachment and marital adjustments are linked together. Adult attachment theory in romantic relationships is based on the concept that the therapist's role is to help the couple form a thought-based attachment to his/her partner to create an "us versus them" mentality. The premarital counsellor helps individuals in creating couple cohesion by solidifying the couple as an entity separate and against the rest of the world. They use attachment theory to suggest that stable personality characteristics can be built up before marriage and ideas brought from family of origin contribute to one's ability to deal with stressful events and how well couples adapt to difficulties in marriage (Johnson & Whiffen, 2005).

Collins, Ford and Guichard (2006) states that adult attachment theory begins with the assumption that adults enter relationships with a history of interpersonal experiences and a unique set of memories, beliefs, and expectations that shape how they think and feel about their relationships and how they behave in those relationships. In premarital counselling, the theory helps therapists in improving couple's communication skills so as to gain insight into their past and present relationships. The theory also states that the spouse becomes the primary attachment figure for the majority of adults, and their main source of security and comfort. This theory assumes that most significant relationship problems identified in marriage preparation will be about the security of the bond between the partners, about their struggle to define the relationship as a safe haven and secure base. Therefore, premarital counselling focuses on addressing the need for comfort, the promotion of safe emotional engagement and responsiveness as the basis of

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a secure bond (Johnson & Whiffen, 2005). The partner's positive attachment behaviours such as responsiveness and availability will make the other partner feel secure, loved and confident. Negative attachment behaviours will lead to anxiety and distress, which will also lead to intense protest and searching. For this reason, the main role of a pre marriage counsellor will be to help couples deal with negative attachment behaviours in their romantic relationships (Fraley, 2010).

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN BRIEF

The research draws on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2004). IPA researchers are specifically interested in what happens when the everyday flow of lived experience takes on a particular significance for people. This method was chosen since the purpose of the research was to find out what individuals perceive as the role of marriage preparation.

7.1 *Sample*

The sample consisted of 15 individuals who have been married for 3-5 years. A sample of 15 individuals was chosen because the aim is to reveal something of the experience of each of those individuals (Smith et al., 2009). Choosing a sample from the wider population is advantageous because it saves time as well as finances. Individuals instead of couples were chosen as a unit of analysis because the researcher seeks to investigate the experience of each

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individual in the institution of marriage. Therefore the sample consisted of four husbands and eleven wives who were interviewed as individuals.

7.1.1 Sampling strategy

A non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling was used because in IPA participants are selected on the basis that they can grant the researcher access to particular perspective on the phenomena under study (Smith et al., 2009). The individuals who participated were South African citizens, living in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality and have a marriage certificate, issued by the Department of Home Affairs showing that they have been married for 3-5 years. All the participants attended a marriage preparation course before their marriage.

7.1.2 Identification of participants

The participants were identified with the help of Pastor K. Maphinda who is a founder of East London Fellowship Church. He runs a family program on Link FM Christian Community Radio Station (97.1 FM) every Wednesday from 20H00-22H00. He also hosts marriage seminars/workshops which focus on marriage enrichment. His services are not only for his congregation but for anyone who is willing to attend. His seminars and databases were used to identify suitable participants for the study.

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7.2 Data collection

The IPA data collection steps described below were used. An interview schedule was constructed so as to help the researcher think about what the interview might cover and questions were constructed with the aim of encouraging the person to speak about the topic with little prompting from the interviewer. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted for approximately 1 hour each with an aim of facilitating an interaction which permitted participants to share their experiences in their own words (Smith et al., 2009). The interviews were audio recorded and a transcript showing the words that were spoken, was produced.

7.3 Data coding and analysis

This study took the step by step approach of IPA analysis because it is an interpretative work which the investigator conducted aiming to understand the content and complexity of meanings rather than measure frequency (Smith, 2008). The researcher read the first written transcript several times. This was done to make sure that the participant became the focus of analysis and to begin the process of entering the participant's world. The researcher examined the content and noted anything of interest within the first transcript and comments were made on similarities, differences and echoes in what the person was saying. Brief statements of what was important in the various comments attached to a section of transcript were made. The process was done to all other cases. The researcher searched for connections across emergent themes in all cases and a final table of important themes was constructed through a master table of themes for the whole group.

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7.4 Delimitations and scope of the study

The research does not include same sex, cultural marriages and polygamous marriages for the sole reason of limiting the scope of the study. It only included individuals who are legally married through the department of Home Affairs South Africa. The research was conducted in South Africa in the Eastern Cape Province. The scope was narrowed down to include on individuals living in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality.

8. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

8.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

The chapter outlines the background information, purpose and objectives of the study. It also provides a brief account of the theoretical framework and research methodology used in the research. It ends with this summary of the organisation of the study.

8.2 Chapter 2: Review of related literature and research

The chapter presents an overview of related literature that was researched on marriage preparation programs. The information is presented in themes to show the most topical issues on marriage preparation programs.

8.3 Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the research is described. The research explores the Adult Attachment Theory. The Adult Attachment Theory is used by professional counsellors to

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understand the complex issues of human intimate relationship. It is of the view that people are biologically prepared to develop close attachments throughout their lifespan with a few people, including romantic partners. Marriage preparation counsellors help clients to deal with negative attachment behaviours that might affect the marriage as well as reinforcing positive attachment behaviours that might strengthen the marriage.

8.4 Chapter 4: Research methodology – procedure

The chapter describes the process used in conducting the current study. It includes descriptions of the sampling procedure. It provides an overview of the method used in interviewing. It goes on to explain the process of data analysis, research questions, significance of the study, ethical considerations, and limitations in the study.

8.5 Chapter 5: Findings, data display and analysis

This chapter lays out the findings of the research study. The analysed data is presented systematically in themes. It displays the data collected on demographic description of the participants and analysis of the research questions.

8.6 Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations

The final chapter presents a summary of the themes that emerged. The conclusions on each theme are followed by recommendations which also include implications for social work practice.

Chapter One: Introduction

8.7 References and appendices

The section provides a reference list for all material cited in this research. The material includes books and journal articles. The appendices include a copy of the confidentiality and ethics form, a letter sent to East London Fellowship Church to request assistance in recruitment of suitable participants, a response from East London Fellowship Church and the typed transcripts of participants' interviews.

9. CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced the topic and the overview of the research. The research problem shows that marriage preparation programs are utilised as a measure to prevent divorce. It provided a summary on the methodology and design of the research. The following chapter presents the most significant aspects of previous literature on marriage preparation programs discussed in themes.

Chapter Two: **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH**

1. INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This section will discuss the most significant aspects of marriage preparation in themes. The focus will be on explaining what marriage preparation programs are and what constitutes them. The themes that emerged are, defining marriage preparation, its content, its preventive nature, its service providers and the evaluation of previous research.

2. WHAT IS MARRIAGE PREPARATION?

Marriage preparation is the provision of information designed to help couples achieve long-lasting, happy, and successful marriages. It aims to impart knowledge and attitudes and teach the skills and behaviours needed to have successful intimate relationships (Ooms, 2005). It is intended to help couples face the challenges of marriage by enhancing self-awareness and skill building with the aim of preventing future marital distress and divorce. Marriage preparation programs are designed to engage couples in the process of reflection and skills development with the aim of enhancing and supporting the growth of stable and strong relationships (Parker, 1999). Bowling, Hill and Marty (2005) are of the view that marriage preparation programs' goals are to help couples become aware of themselves and their partners, explore their partners' feelings and thoughts, encourage empathy and intimacy, and develop effective communication and problem-solving skills. The diversity of the field makes developing a single definition of marriage and relationship education quite difficult, but its common aim is to assist men and women in building healthy, stable relationships with their partner or family (Parker, 2005).

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Bowling et al (2005) stated that marriage preparation programs teach unmarried couples to solve their problems, effectively communicate, enhance commitment and handle conflicts as a team. The authors further explained that these programs can be summarized in four goals. The first goal is to help couples to resolve conflicts and communicate more effectively by teaching them the speaker-listener technique. The technique assists them to learn to speak their own feelings and listen carefully to their partners. The second goal is the focus on the couples' expectations in their relationships. These programs help couples to explore their expectation because when expectations are unreasonable or unmet; this leads to conflict in relationships. The third goal is to explore their attitudes and choices about commitment so as to improve their current relationship instead of focusing on alternatives. The final goal is to strengthen the couples' bond by encouraging fun, friendship, and sensuality. The couples are engaged in activities that will provide them with opportunities to nurture these areas.

A diverse set of marriage preparation programs currently exists to improve relationships and marriages. These programs vary by target population, curricular focus and client learning style. They are usually developed from faith-based initiatives or research and they can operate for profit, privately. Programs can operate in hospitals, mental health centres, universities, public assistance offices and churches. Providers employ formats that may be group-oriented and instructive and these are different group sizes (Parker, 1999). According to Bowling et al., (2005), most marriage preparation programs emerged from humanistic psychology, which focuses on the expression of feelings, establishment of effective relationships, and the achievement of personal competencies. These programs view marriage as a major area in life which could help individuals grow and act out their potential for self-actualization with regards

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to self and others. They focus on creating an atmosphere where couples could be free to express their feelings and feel accepted by their partners and others.

According to Carroll & Doherty (2003) , the difference between a marriage preparation program and mere informal marital advice from relatives or friends before marriage is that marriage preparation is formal premarital education which is mostly provided by professionals/providers such as religious leaders, counsellors and physicians. They further stated that there are several terms that are used in the literature interchangeably to refer to marriage preparation. These include premarital education, premarital counselling, premarital therapy, and marriage preparation. For this research, the term marriage preparation was used since the word preparation means ground work and becomes an umbrella term that incorporates all the other terms. However marriage preparation service providers have the right to give alternative names or titles to their marriage preparation programmes.

In the United States of America, a variety of marriage preparation programs with different names exists and few of these were later borrowed and used in some African countries. These are presented below:

2.1 Relationship enhancement (RE)

The Relationship Enhancement program draws its influence from behavioural, psychodynamic, humanistic and interpersonal theories. It is a process-oriented program that focuses on teaching couples skills that promote healthy relationships by altering interactions in

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the direction of understanding, mutual respect, caring and cooperation. Its particular method of intervention for achieving these goals involves the counsellor taking the role of acting as a life skills coach, instructing the couple in negotiation skills and effective communication. Relationship Enhancement distinctively addresses issues around love, trust, compassion, belonging, loyalty, pleasure and sexuality within the program. Program developers pointed out that these areas are representative of the major concerns of family life in almost all cultures. According to RE, the key to a committed romantic relationship is each partner's ability to fulfil these desires for the other family members. Providing a caring, stable atmosphere of love and intimacy will enable each family member's personal growth and self-esteem to be nourished (Lieser, Tambling, Bischof, & Murry, 2007)

Much of the program's focus is on assisting couples to learn problem solving skills and empathetic communication. Professional counsellors teach couples valuable nine skills to help them in developing healthy relationships. These skills are empathetic, expressive, discussion and negotiation, facilitative, problem/conflict resolution, changing self, helping others change, transfer and generalization, and maintenance (Arrayed & Hajeri, 2009).

2.2 Relationship Evaluation (RELATE)

Relationship Evaluation was developed on the assumption that each relationship is constructed of continual and mutual interactions between partners in various contexts. Its primary aim is to help couples in a variety of relationship stages, from casually dating to engaged. It assists them in highlighting areas of agreement and disagreement, clarification of perceptions and initiating discussions on individual and couple strengths (protective factors) and

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challenges (risk factors) related to later marital satisfaction. Individuals engage in an exercise of rating themselves and their partners on several factors such as individual personality traits for example, anxiety and depression, couple traits such as communication and conflict resolution skills, their current relationship, personal values, family backgrounds and relationship satisfaction. An 11 page report is compiled and organized using their responses on the above mentioned factors. The couples will keep the report and review it with each other together on several occasions. The format of the RELATE Report allows partners to compare their subscale responses in bar graph formats and provides side-by-side comparisons of their answers to the specific questions in each subscale (Larson, Vatter, Galbraith, Holman, & Stahmann, 2007).

2.3 Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (ACME)

The main focus of this program is to help couples learn how to grow and enrich their marriages. It focuses on coordinating activities in which the couples can help each other to develop further, set off community services that will promote successful marriages and improve the public image of marriage. This program is considered unique in that it provides couples with a time to focus on values and strengths and a long-term support group within the community. The couples have the opportunity to be in a community of couples as a way of observing and learning from each other. They usually focus on values and strengths to continue to rekindle the fire in their marriages (Bowling et al., 2005).

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2.4 Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP)

PREP developed in the early 1990s. It is a research-based program and unique because it teaches couples, married and unmarried, to effectively communicate, handle conflicts, solve problems as a team and enhance commitment. It builds relationship skills such as communication and conflict resolution and increases awareness so that couples can be more proactive in strengthening their relationships over time. It is a 12-hour program in which couples are in a group setting, but it can also be conducted in a couple therapy session. The first goal is to help couples communicate effectively and resolve conflicts. They are also taught techniques that help them to speak their own feelings, listen carefully to their partners and effectively paraphrase the messages. The couples' expectations in their intimate relationships are also discussed. A set of questions is given to the couples to answer on their own, and later the responses are shared with their partners. This activity is aimed at helping couples to explore their expectations. After the couples have explored their expectations, they also explore their attitudes and choices about commitment. The couples are encouraged to think about improving their relationship. They finally engage in creative activities that will provide them with opportunities to nurture these areas (Bowling et al., 2005).

2.5 Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study (FOCCUS)

It is a program that deal with individuals or couples in different types of relationships. It works with interfaith couples, cohabiting/engaged couples, and those in which one or both partners are remarrying. This program is said to be mostly used by Protestant and Catholic churches as well as non-denominational counselling services. It was designed to reflect the ideals

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and values of marriage as being sacred, including issues of fidelity, permanency, openness to children, shared faith in God, forgiveness and unconditional love. The program has four major content areas which contain separate scales. These are; matches of personality, life styles and friends, communication and problem-solving skills bonders and integrators such as religion, values, and readiness for marriage. It also consists of summary categories such as key problem indicators and family of origin issues. This program can be administered to individual, couples or even to groups of couples. One unique aspect of FOCCUS is that it includes the availability of a number of versions for couples that are unable to speak English or have reading problems. The key problem areas are easily listed on one scale. The counsellors help in interpreting the results. Remarriage, cohabitation and interfaith items are also included. The program also utilizes supplemental materials on how to resolve problems, improve communication and manage money (Larson, Newell, Topham, & Nichols, 2002).

2.6 Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts (SYMBIS)

This program was developed by the co-directors for the centre of relationship development and Seattle Pacific University. It focuses on early marriage, neo-marital and premarital education. Their educational approach focuses on personal insight and skill development (Parrott & Parrot, 2003).

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2.7 Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS)

The PAIRS program is primarily based in humanistic and experiential family therapy. The theoretical foundation includes concepts from different areas such as object relations, experiential, communication, behavioural and family systems approaches. The program uses lecture and highly experiential techniques to provide education of basic behaviours, emotions and attitudes essential to the development of affection, empathy, love, pleasure, caring and trust. There are three specific goals of intervention for sexuality topic in this program. First, couples learn the differences between affection, comfort, bonding, sensuality, and sexuality. Understanding these differences help couples expand their closeness. Secondly, couples to learn to satisfy their biological need for the combination of emotional openness and emotional openness. The program refers to this sense of physical and closeness as bonding. Thirdly, couples communicate openly and honestly about their sexual needs and then to request and meet these needs with the help of the partner. The PAIRS program has various assumptions related to couples and sexuality, the most notably that sensuality and sexuality are natural biological needs critical to committed love relationships. It also has the assumption that individuals in committed romantic relationships should leave behind negative sexual experiences, communicate openly about sensual and sexual needs and disregard misinformation about physical intimacy. They must also be able to deal with jealousy that may arise out of possessiveness or mistrust of one's partner (Lieser et al., 2007).

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2.8 PREPARE/ENRICH

PREPARE/ENRICH is based on the assumption that the qualities of the premarital relationship predict quality of the marital relationship. The belief is that if the key relationship factors can be identified and improved, the quality of the marriage will also be improved. This program focuses on the use of a comprehensive premarital or enhancement inventory and includes follow-up sessions and exercises adapted to the specific needs of each couple based on their survey results. The approach has four goals which are: identifying factors related to marital success, assessing couples' progress on those identified factors, providing feedback and exercises for couples to help them deal with problem areas. It also provides couples with conflict resolution and communication skills. The identification of key factors related to success as a couple focuses on five critical areas which are finances, communication, conflict resolution, family-of-origin influences and setting goals. Other issues include the level of comfort being uncovered by the partner, communicating about sexual interests and expectations and an evaluation of partner's level of interest in sex. They also focus on addressing the following; ease of conversation with partner about sexual issues; evaluation of partner's level of knowledge about sexual topics, issues, and behaviours; and certainty about family planning and birth control (Lieser et al., 2007).

The purpose of marriage preparation programs is to direct couples through challenging discussions about vital issues so they can become of a 'sound mind to marry' before they enter into marriage (Schumm, 2008). Marriage preparation aims at improving communication in order to decrease marital conflict. The general benefits of premarital counselling include helping

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couples appreciate the significance of the relationship they are about to enter, informing couples about useful resources to support their relationships when a need arises at a later time, and helping couples to develop strategies to minimize relationship distress (Knutson & Olson, 2003). One of the possible benefits of marriage preparation programs is that couples can learn that there are others who can help them or refer them to help if they experience difficulties later in the relationship (Bruhn & Hill, 2004). Furthermore, more benefits include improved communication and conflict management skills, more commitment to one's mate, greater positivity in marriage, and reduced chances of divorce (Duncan et al., 2010)

One of the vital roles of marriage preparation programs is to help individuals deal with family of origin issues before they enter into marriage such as parental divorce and child abuse. Literature shows that there is a link between parental divorce and marital distress with perceptions in relationships (Gardner, 2001). The present generation of young couples who are entering into marriage has grown up in societies where divorce is usual. Various researchers are of the view that many young adults who have experienced the divorce of their parents may be concerned about how their parents' divorce will affect their marital choices. Furthermore, previous research has shown that observing parental violence causes couples to have problems in managing couple conflict. These researchers pointed out that these young adults understand marriage based on their experiences with their parents (Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2000). Therefore, there is a need for these couples to engage in pre marriage education to prevent marital distress and promote stronger assets once they are married.

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Victims of child sexual abuse or any type of child abuse are also at risk of having difficulties in handling marital challenges. Brumbaugh and Fraley (2006) are of the view that existing mental representations of significant others may resurface to influence new social interactions. For this reason, there is a need to deal with them before they become destructive to one's marital life. According to Larson and LaMont (2005), feelings, attitudes and readiness for marriage are important to study because they form the basis for the decisions of whether an individual is ready to marry. If certain individual conflicts are not resolved, marriage life may be destroyed. Many stressful situations or experiences can hinder healthy development for the individual and the family and marriage preparation programs help to deal with those stressful experiences.

Although these programs differ in format and scope, they all strive to strengthen relationships, build interpersonal skills, and prevent marital distress (Bowling et al., 2005). To sum up the above information, a marriage preparation program is any type of formal approach used to prepare couples for marriage. This is done with an aim of assisting couples to stay happily married, prevent divorce and marital distress.

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3. MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM CONTENT

According to Groom (2001), most premarital counselling programs are standardized and based on a structured curriculum and tailored to the unique needs of each couple. Their content will almost always include communication and conflict resolution skills, supplemented by other topics consistent with the professional, pastoral and personal characteristics of the provider and the intended client group. Relationship issues are usually the sole focus of the program, or sometimes they may be embedded within another program, focused on, for example, parenting or assertiveness (Parker, 1999). Marriage preparation program content includes the core themes in brief lectures, having topics such as danger signs of future problems, gender differences, the speaker/listener technique, problem solving and ground rules for handling conflict. In addition it focuses on strategies for dealing with issues versus events, core belief systems and expectations, forgiveness, commitment, preserving fun, friendship and sensuality (Murray, 2004). Other authors suggest that there are eight content areas that counsellors ask couples to engage in, these are; finances and financial decision making, marital tasks and roles, sexual relations, in-laws, religion, friends, recreation, and children. Couples are asked to discuss different sub issues within each of these areas. Some counsellors prefer using workbooks in their sessions. The workbook usually helps to deal with areas of marital life such as building strengths and working on growth, communication, conflict resolution, family-of-origin topics, financial planning and budgeting, and goal setting (Larson et al., 2002).

There are different approaches used by counsellors in marriage preparation. Parker (1999) is of the view that religious leaders usually prefer to take the form of formal or informal

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discussions while other professional counsellors prefer face to face couple sessions. Community-based marriage preparation programs often take the form of multi session offerings, short workshops or retreats. Other professionals include group sessions. Duncan et al., (2010) states that a group setting is used to help provide a safe environment where couples can learn to relate, trust and receive support from their partners and others. In addition, couples have the opportunity to observe each other. Some colleges and universities also usually offer full-length courses in marriage preparation. Parker (1999) stated that the length and format of programs may vary from short, once off sessions or weekend programs that are spread over a number of weeks. He further explained three ways in which marriage preparation counsellors use to prepare couples for marriage. These are:

- Individual partners are asked to complete an inventory and then come together with a trained counsellor to discuss the results. These inventories are a facilitative tool designed to help couples find out more about themselves and their partner, and to work through the issues important to their relationship.
- Couples can participate in group programs usually consisting of a maximum of 20 couples. They engage in discussions and activities designed to raise awareness and impart skills considered important to marital quality.
- Some programs may choose combine both inventory and group formats.

Some of the programs put emphasis on the skills-based programs that focus on teaching relationship skills, such as how to speak and listen clearly, manage anger, solve problems negotiate disagreements, avoid negative attributions and increase the ratio of positive-to-negative interactions. These skills help to build up empathy and self-awareness for the partner. These programs also include a discussion of the benefits of marriage, the typical areas of couple conflict and stress and destructive attitudes and behaviours that often develop over time that can

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destroy a good relationship. They usually strongly emphasize how to protect and preserve intimacy, friendship, and fun. In addition, some programs are increasingly focusing on the importance of commitment, the value of forgiveness, the need to nurture generosity, kindness and loyalty to develop and sustain a strong marriage (Ooms, 2005).

Some marriage preparation programs use a variety of experiential exercises designed to teach specific communication and other relationship skills. These are sometimes supplemented with movie clip illustrations and practice assignments in between sessions. The programs vary in duration and intensity. They can run for a single afternoon, day session or 2 hour sessions provided over a 6-12 week period. Marriage preparation counsellors teach singly or sometimes aided by coaches who help with the classroom practice sessions (Ooms, 2007). The author further stated that more educated couples are familiar with more cognitive and didactic approaches typical of higher education whereas those without extensive formal education prefer more active experiential methods. Other programs include a variety of methods tailored to diverse learning styles, didactic presentation of information, showing of examples (in a video), interactive discussion and role playing (Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004). Hence the marriage preparation service providers utilize learning styles that suits the client's background.

It is crucial to understand that marriage preparation curricula differ since providers work with different clients with different backgrounds. The information above shows that the content of marriage preparation programs is flexible and generally consists of topics that address the

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important issues that arise in marriages which are likely to cause conflict. The significant benefits of marriage preparation programs are not linked to formats or approaches used. A variety of education formats may be equally effective (Carroll & Doherty, 2003).

Below are the most common topics learnt in marriage preparation programs are discussed in detail.

3.1 Marriage readiness

One of the major aims of marriage preparation programs is to assist couples or individuals to be ready for marriage. People typically enter their romantic relationships with standards and pre-existing beliefs, about what makes a 'good' relationship. These relationship standards are defined as the beliefs or criteria people hold about the qualities relationships should have. Standards include a partner's presumption of what relationships should be like, what makes them rewarding and satisfying and what behaviours should be avoided. The beliefs might be centred on preconceptions of sharing similar goals or values, spending time together, open communication or a variety of other ideas individuals believe to be important to their relationship. Even though these standards indeed exist, people often find their standards unfulfilled in their relationships (Alexander, 2008). Previous research suggests that partners are likely to feel stressed, disillusioned, or disappointed when their standards are not fulfilled. Some studies have found that standard fulfilment is correlated with a variety of indicators of current and future relationship distress and communication problems. They suggest that partners'

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relational quality, mostly satisfaction, is negatively affected by unfulfilled standards. Furthermore, when these standards are irrational or unrealistic, the likelihood of disappointment, frustration, and distress in relationship development are likely to increase.

Marriage preparation counsellors focus on assessing whether their clients are ready for marriage. Slater and Aholou (2009) states that one of the goals of premarital counselling is to help partners examine, confirm or alter their decision to marry a particular person at a particular time.

3.2 Marital challenges and problem solving

Dating relationships bring a unique set of challenges. If couples fail to negotiate, resolve and manage their problems, this may result some individual choosing to terminate the relationship as a way to cope. Alternatively, some may end up choosing to stay in less than satisfying relationships while using a variety of coping strategies such as ignoring the issue (Alexander, 2008). One of the goals of marriage preparation programs is to help couples identify and discuss crucial, possibly problematic, areas of the life they will share (Slater & Aholou, 2009).

Some researchers believe that though romance and fun are there in marriages, they are sometimes coupled with stress, confusion and hardships. They stated that individuals enter

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marriages with certain standards and they often feel disappointed when these are not fulfilled and this affects their relationships negatively. In addition, when these standards are unrealistic, the likelihood of disappointment, frustration, and distress in relationship development are likely to increase. That is why there is a need for counsellors to warn couples about possible challenges that comes with marriage (Alexander, 2008).

Marriage preparation facilitates discussions that allow couples to know more about challenges that are encountered in marriage.

3.3 Family of origin issues

It has been shown that marital dysfunction is one of the main psychological, social, and health risk contributors to the decline of families and societies, costing nations billions of dollars yearly (Knutson & Olson, 2003). Marriage preparation counsellors focus on both high-risk and low-risk couples. Researchers defined a high-risk couple as one in which there was either parental divorce in the women's family of origin or physical aggression in the man's family of origin. Adults who have experienced parental divorce hold have less positive or more ambivalent attitudes regarding marriage as compared to individuals who have not experienced parental divorce. For example, individuals who have experienced parental divorce may prefer to cohabitate rather than to marry because of the fear to commit. They may be disinterested in marriage at all, believe that marriage does not last a lifetime, or view divorce as a reasonable option. The assumption is that, those who finally decide to marry might have concerns about

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their own marriages ending and lower expectations for marital satisfaction(Murray & Kardatzke, 2009).

A significant number of clients seek premarital counselling because of high divorce rates during the past several decades. This means that many individuals are entering into marriage in the context of having experienced parental divorce. They further stated that existing research indicates that adult children of divorce are at high risk for divorce and marital distress. Divorce is becoming more prevalent in society. It is now evident that parental divorce has negative effects on offspring that are evident during childhood as well as young adulthood. One of the strong effects of parental divorce documented in the literature is an increased risk for divorce among offspring of divorced parents (Murray & Kardatzke, 2009). Segrin and Taylor (2006) are of the view that people whose parents have divorced are 1, 5 to 2 times more likely to divorce themselves compared with individuals whose parents have never divorced. This effect is known as the intergenerational transmission of divorce. This effect is said to include the tendency for people from divorced families to marry at a younger age, have lower economic and educational attainment and have a weaker commitment to marriage.

3.4 Communication

Marriage preparation programs teach communication skills to help couples solve problems and communicate effectively in all situations. The communication skills taught are empathetic, expressive, discussion and negotiation, facilitative and conflict resolution. The

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expressive skills help the couples understand their individual feelings and needs in order to express them effectively. The empathic skill helps them to understand their psychological as well as emotional needs of each other. It involves more than listening and repeating what was heard but also understanding how the experiences of the speaker makes them feel in other situations. This skill can assist in building trust, respect and openness in the relationship. Discussing and negotiating helps couples to create a positive atmosphere while difficult feelings and issues are discussed (Bowling et al., 2005). The positive atmosphere assists couples in revealing the deep feelings centred on the difficult issues. The marriage preparation counsellor teaches them problem/conflict resolution to help find solutions to the issues discussed. This skill helps them to identify innovative solutions to relational problems. The couples have to agree on the solutions, it changes their own negative behaviours. Using these components will help the couples' self-esteem and improve their personal and interpersonal effectiveness (Hawkins et al., 2004).

In marriage preparation programs, communication is regarded as the cornerstone for any relationship. It is of paramount importance to educate couples to communicate with one another effectively. Couples learn and correctly practice good attending and reflective listening behaviours. Couples often go to counsellors with troubles they feel are too difficult to solve but when they listen to what their partner is saying they usually make better sense of the problem and arrive at mutually agreeable solutions. The difficult problem all of a sudden becomes less frightening, and the couple finds hope again for their relationship. It would be fantastic if couples learn how to communicate well before marriage and avoid being overwhelmed altogether by problems (Bruhn & Hill, 2004).

3.5 Commitment

Blair and Cordova (2009) are of the view that commitment is one of the most common topics mostly covered in marriage preparation programs. They defined commitment as an attitude that encourages behaviours that serve to maintain and improve relationship quality. These behaviours are usually called relational maintenance behaviours. The authors believe that marital commitment is composed of two components: constraint commitment and personal dedication. Personal dedication commitment is the desire of an individual to improve or maintain the quality of his or her relationship for the joint benefit of the couple. Constraint commitment includes the forces that constrain individuals to maintain relationships. Higher dedication commitment is shown through attitudes that foster couple identity, relationship primacy and satisfaction with sacrifice. Constraint commitment, however, is exemplified through extraneous pressures placed on individuals by family, friends, or mutual investments that impose barriers to relationship dissolution. Cambell and Ponzetti (2007) concurs that commitment is an important factor in determining the persistence of intimate involvements. It reflects a dynamic process that shapes the degree to which individuals wish a particular relationship to carry on into the future because it fulfils personal expectations and needs and in the present.

In marriage preparation programs, the therapist or counsellor stresses the importance of commitment. It has to be clear to couples about what they are committing into. They are assisted with skills that will encourage commitment behaviours in order to create a sense that put their marriage first in everything.

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3.6 Sexual health

Sexuality is an integral part of human life. To enjoy the important benefits of sexuality, while avoiding negative consequences, some of which may have long term or even life time implications, individuals/couples must be well informed of the topic. It is necessary for individuals to be sexually healthy, behave responsibly and have a supportive environment to protect their own sexual health as well as that of others. To reduce the spread of HIV and to improve the sexual health of people, it has been strongly recommended for intimate/sexual partners to have open and honest communication about sexuality, which includes sexual history, sexual behaviours and sexual risk factors that impact sexual and reproductive health. Such topics include attending to couples' ability to communicate their sexual needs, expectations, affection, sensuality and intimacy (Aholou, Gale, & Slater, 2009).

Discussions around sexual activity are usually centred on helping couples to negotiate and manage their expectations about sex within the marriage. Sexual history dialogue is aimed at addressing sexual health concerns that couples may face. Most of the religious leaders agree that discussions about sexual activity within the context of marriage are important for couples to talk about (Lieser et al., 2007). They realize that couples' expectations about sex within marriage are not always congruent with each other. Hence, some religious leaders helped to facilitate conversations about desire and frequency of sex. Other counsellors also assist in understanding each other's sexual desires. Their concern is that sometimes one person might desire to have

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more exploration and yet the other may be a little more reserved. Therefore there is need to help couples work through their own sexual levels and desires. (Aholou et al., 2009)

The marriage preparation literature has placed little emphasis on encouraging couples to demonstrate sexual responsibility by having honest discussions about sexual health and HIV testing prior to marriage

3.7 Total disclosure

Slater and Aholou (2009) state that promoting disclosure is usually a core value of marriage preparation providers. The responsibility of the counsellor is to help couples to know their soon-to-be spouse very seriously. Mostly religious leaders utilize questions or topics which allow them to explore into areas that they consider important for couples to know before marriage. One of the pastors interviewed by the above authors said,

“We try to, number one; make sure they know each other to the best of our ability. We dig through their childhood, their relationships with their parents. We want them to come out knowing who you’re getting” (Slater & Aholou, 2009).

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The belief of the counsellors is that their questions may cause things that were not discussed or explored before counselling to surface. The reason why counsellors value total disclosure is rooted in the belief that marriage is something that individuals enter into and stay together until death do them part. Hence it is important for them to enter this institution knowing who they are marrying and what they're getting into so that they can make an informed decision without doubts.

According to attachment theory, the ability to disclose and confide in a direct way about needs and fears and to tune in to the other partner's experience is crucial if partners are to define the relationship as a safe haven and a secure base (Domingue & Mollen, 2009).

Healthy people are able to disclose information about themselves to an optimal degree to at least one significant other. The topic of self-disclosure is considered to be crucial in the development of intimate relationships and it has a positive influence to marital satisfaction. Most marriage preparation providers consider self-disclosure as a way to develop and maintain intimacy in relationships. Couples disclose their emotions, history, personal desires and anxieties. This is believed to be important for the development of intimacy because such disclosure provides an opportunity for partners to affirm and demonstrate that they care for, support, and accept one another (Aholou et al., 2009).

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The topics explained above are part of the content of most marriage preparation programs. Marriage preparation content is broad and includes various more topics but the researcher could not discuss all of them in detail since the literature on those topics is limited. Marriage preparation programs also include other topics that are not discussed above such as marital roles, preserving fun, finances and parenting (Ooms, 2005).

4. THE PREVENTIVE NATURE OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Preventive intervention is an interdisciplinary field that emerged in the early 1990s to address the need for an integrated model for promoting wellness. It can also be described as efforts to prevent or moderate major human dysfunctions before they occur (Herman, Reinke, Stormont, Puri & Agarwal, 2009). Prevention interventions aims to counteract risk factors and reinforce protective factors in order to disrupt processes or situations that give rise to human or social dysfunction (Hawkins, Shapiro & Fagan, 2010). In the social sciences, risk factors have been defined as individual or environmental hazards that increase individual vulnerability to future negative developmental outcomes whereas protective factors focus on both individual and environmental safeguards that enhance people's ability to resist stressful life events and promote adaptation and competence.

Murray (2005) is of the view that there are three major categories of prevention that focuses on families, these are universal, selective, and indicated prevention. Universal prevention aims to prevent the development of problems in the general population. An example of universal

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prevention is a media campaign that promotes families spending time together. Selective prevention focuses on intervention with targeted higher-risk groups to prevent problems. For example, counsellors may conduct parenting classes for parents whose children have demonstrated behaviour problems in school. Indicated prevention focuses on minimizing the harmful impact of serious problems in the early stages of their development. It involves helping clients to prevent existing problems from further deterioration. An example is when a counsellor helps a couple whose marriage is ending in divorce to minimize the harmful consequences for their children. Marriage preparation programs strive to enhance their clients' strengths to prevent relapses. In addition, training clients in communication, conflict management skills and stress management techniques is also a form of prevention.

Prevention efforts that target families focus on improving the quality and stability of family relationships. For example, in terms of marital and other intimate relationships, quality generally refers to partners' levels of satisfaction within the relationship and stability refers to whether the relationship endures or terminates. Marriage preparation programs have widely used the principles of prevention science. According to Carroll and Doherty (2003), some individuals have specific premarital risk factors that may lead to future marital problems for example low emotional readiness, poor communication skills, family-of-origin dysfunction and hostile conflict resolution style. On the other hand protective factors in premarital counselling include the individuals' strengths. Therefore, the role of premarital counsellor is to work against risk and emphasize protective factors to work towards solid marriage readiness.

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Formal premarital prevention programs in Europe have been practiced since the 1930s (Duncan et al., 2010). Bruhn and Hill (2004) believe that counsellors need to focus more on helping marriages get off to a good start rather than providing the service of helping individuals and couples pick up the pieces of a failed or failing marriage. They further stated that there are many factors shown to increase risk to marital distress or divorce, some of these are; spouse's employment, parental divorce, premarital cohabitation, difficulties in leisure activities and sexual relations, partner's personality and habits, maintaining separate finances, religious dissimilarity and premarital pregnancy. They stated that it makes more sense to focus prevention efforts on risk factors that are relatively dynamic and changeable.

According to Murray (2005), Prevention work in marriage and family therapy includes programs that make every effort to develop strengths and minimize or manage weaknesses of clients. Prevention intervention includes such efforts as premarital counselling, marriage enrichment programs and educational programs aimed at different aspects of family. The programs may address issues related to parenting, the marital relationship, the extended family or community involvement. Programs are usually offered through individual, couple, family, group, and community wide initiatives. The initiatives may also focus on issues of social and political change. Prevention programs use a number of formats and focus on issues such as communication, substance abuse, sexuality, conflict management and family violence. Pre-marriage preparation programs are based on a prevention perspective that has the goal of starting with non-distressed couples and helping them maintain their relatively high levels of functioning (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). These authors further explain that the programs are to provide

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couples with an awareness of potential problems that can occur after marriage and the information and resources to effectively prevent such problems.

Prevention programs should be empirically based. There are three essential criteria that prevention programs that deals with couples should meet to be considered empirically based. Firstly, programs should be empirically informed, meaning that the content is based on basic relationship research for example targeting known risk and protective factors for relationship distress. Programs can emphasize the harmful effects of certain patterns of negative communication based on research done on couple interaction. Secondly, programs should include on-going research to test their efficacy and effectiveness. Marriage preparation programs have studies on effects, including couple communication. Thirdly, program content should be regularly updated based on new research findings (Markman, Whitton, Kline, & Stanley, 2004).

According to Scott and Castellani (2002) reviews of early research that measured marital competence showed that factors of family background and personality have been fairly successful in predicting later marital failure or success. They explained that some scholars have focused more on couple interactions, which is their ability to handle conflict and the attached negative effect. The behaviours exchanged during marital conflict and marital problem-solving discussions contribute to marital distress which eventually leads to divorce. Marriage preparation programs are preventive in nature and generally address relationship issues and challenges upstream before problems become entrenched and destructive. Thus, the programs are usually distinguished from face-to-face individualized counselling and therapy, which is generally offered to already distressed couples (Ooms, 2007). Marriage preparation focuses on helping couples to work on their family background issues so that they do not negatively affect their marriages.

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Marriage preparation preventive interventions are done with the expectation that they will reduce or reverse the decline in marital quality that often lead to marital distress and divorce (Schumm, Silliman, & Bell, 2000). The leading risk factors for divorce and marital distress, for instance, communication problems and negative marital conflict become hard to deal with once they are established, therefore there is a need to recognize them and modify them in pre marriage counselling (Groom, 2001). Carroll and Doherty (2003) are of the view that formal marriage preparation prevention efforts focus primarily on college-age young adults involved in preparing for marriage. Silliman (2004) also state that with the recent exception of efforts to promote healthy family formation for adolescent parents, prevention and early intervention with them should be put in place. These will help to reduce vulnerabilities associated with later marital distress and build competencies for healthy marriage should positively impact couples' transition to marriage. In addition, divorce prevention and relationship enhancement programs with young adults showed evidence of short-term gains which are:

- knowledge of money, sexuality, and parenting,
- realistic expectations,
- interactive skills such as conflict resolution and problem solving,
- companionship practices such as shared recreation and affection
- better long-term stability and satisfaction

4.1 Marital distress targeted as a risk factor

Silliman (2004) also state that with the recent exception of efforts to promote healthy family formation for adolescent parents, prevention and early intervention with them should be put in place. These will help to reduce vulnerabilities associated with later marital distress and

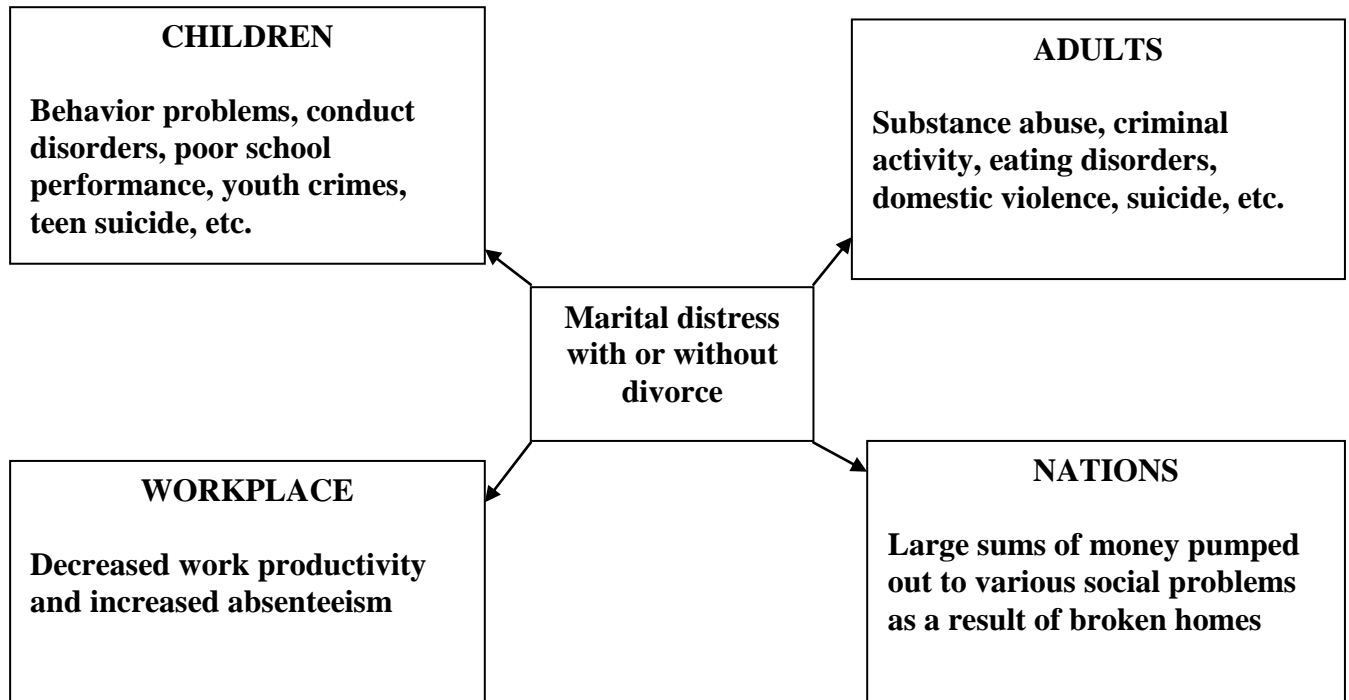
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build competencies for healthy marriage should positively impact couples' transition to marriage. If generic risk factors like marital distress can be identified and altered in a population, this can have a positive influence on a wide range of mental health problems and can reduce the need for many health, social, and correctional services. The authors above have evaluated prevention science in marriage preparation and they suggest that priority should be given to developing a preventive science of marital distress. From their point of view, they concluded that prevention science has already acknowledged a number of common risk factors that underlie a wide variety of psychopathology. Marital distress has been directly identified as one of these common or generic risk factors. Marital distress particularly has been linked to a wide range of both adult disorders such as depression and child disorders such as conduct problems. In addition, a good marriage is seen as one of the common and generic protective factors against a wide range of dysfunctions.

Marital distress (with or without divorce) is said to have negative effects on children, adults, and the community. Marital distress alone has been linked to manifestations of stress in children including: internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems, conduct disorders, poor academic performance, low self-esteem, youth crimes including theft, robbery, violence, gambling, and sexual crimes, teen suicide and social and emotional disturbance in school. In adults, marital distress has been linked to adult manifestations of stress including: substance abuse, criminal activity, eating disorders, marital battering/domestic violence and suicide. Furthermore, marital distress is related to problems in the workplace such as decreased work productivity and increased absenteeism. Approximately 30% of absenteeism is estimated to be due to marital distress, costing \$8 billion per year in the United States (Gardner, 2001).

Fig 2

Negative effects of marital distress and divorce on children, adults, workplace and nations



Most intervention programs have tried to change this trend by focusing their efforts on the community or on at-risk individuals. Because of the high rate of marital distress and the huge amount of evidence connecting it to a wide range of social ills, more effort should be placed on teaching marriage and relationship skills to all youth. Most young people are at risk for later adjustment problems, thus emphasizing the need for primary prevention which is aimed at everyone, not just those who are most at-risk. The approach of targeting common risk factors pays off more highly for society than focused interventions on specific or rarely occurring disorders. Therefore, it is clear that the development of successful preventive interventions that address the common risk factors of marital distress and divorce have the potential to save untold personal, social, and economic costs (Gardner, 2001).

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Prevention efforts do not try to eliminate completely all forms of distress from families and relationships, as some degree of distress is inevitable in all relationships. Most families move through periods of positive and negative interactions. The goals of prevention programs include identifying and reducing signs to distress, minimizing the harmful consequences of distress, and preventing distress from increasing to unmanageable levels (Murray, 2005).

From the above information, one can deduce that marriage preparation is a prevention intervention where the focus is on preventing marital distress and divorce and promoting marital satisfaction and stability. Such preparation is expected to reduce or reverse the decline of marital quality that usually occurs in the first years of marriage.

5. MARRIAGE PREPARATION SERVICE PROVIDERS

According to Carroll and Doherty (2003), there are three main groups that provide most premarital education: (1) clergy, (2) professional counsellors or therapists, and (3) physicians. They further explain that professional counsellors or therapists do some premarital education, mostly for those who have been divorced and are preparing to re-marry than those marrying for the first time. Physicians do some premarital education as well, but they usually limit it to one meeting where they give sexual and contraceptive information. Religious leaders provide the greatest amount of premarital education, as part of voluntary or mandatory marriage preparation programs before church wedding.

However Bowling et al., (2005) are of the view that the marriage preparation programs can be led by people with varying professional backgrounds, degrees, and leadership styles. This

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is so because most providers prefer to invite individuals who have mastered in a certain area of marriage life to give knowledge to other young couples. Some of the programs require their leaders to be married couples. These leaders would be active participants modelling healthy and effective communication. Other programs suggest that the leaders can be a male-female team who are not married to each other. Furthermore, other programs recommend that leaders be professionals who are trained and hold certifications in the specific program. However, regardless of the leaders' backgrounds, the focus is on helping to enhance couple relationships.

Historically marriage preparation began with clergy. Knutson and Olson (2003) estimated that about seventy five percent of first marriages take place in churches. It is also estimated that more than 90% of couples who receive premarital counselling do so from churches or other religious organization (Wilmoth & Smyser, 2010). This means that marriage preparation programs are an integral part of pastoral care. For many individuals, the church is not only a place of worship but also a place where their social, health, and human service needs are met (Aholou et al., 2009). The high incidence of marital problems and divorce rates has prompted many religious institutions to make premarital counselling a prerequisite before marriage. The above authors further explained that Clergy have several advantages in providing premarital education, including their access to and influence with couples, a belief in the value of marriage, a strong educational tradition and an institutional base of operations. The quality of premarital counselling, specifically within a religious setting, predicts valuable benefits and those religious leaders were as effective as other professionals in providing the service.

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Marriage and relationship education programs are also provided by secular, church-based and church-affiliated providers who employ a range of modalities and techniques in delivering services to a diverse client base (Parker, 2005). However, some of the religious leaders are not trained to give premarital education and they therefore do not use any standard program. The training of religious leaders is recommended in order for them to offer effective marriage preparation to their congregation (Wilmoth & Smyser, 2010). The churches are said to have strengths, credibility, and they are grounded in communities. This offers them the opportunity to make a real difference in combating HIV/AIDS. Therefore, with the rising rates of the diseases worldwide, it is imperative for all countries to elicit the support of premarital counselling settings and counsellors, including religious leaders, to strongly promote sexual health and HIV testing with couples preparing for marriage. However, though most providers may be church-based or church-affiliated. Some programs contain references to Christian marriage, but this is by no means a defining feature of all such programs (Parker, 1999).

The above information shows that religious leaders provide the greatest amount of marriage preparation programs.

6. EVALUATION OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Researchers and practitioners have been trying to assess factors associated with the success or failure of different marriage preparation programs. In a meta analytic review of outcome research by Carroll and Doherty (2003), the results revealed that the average person who participated in a premarital prevention program was better off afterwards than 79% of

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people who did not. Their findings suggested that premarital education was effective in producing immediate and short term gains in overall relationship quality. However they stated that there is a lack of extended follow up research and therefore there are hardly any conclusions about long term effectiveness because the follow up periods are usually 6 months to 2 years. Bowling et al, (2005) suggests that this is problematic given the longevity of marriage preparation programs goal: to prevent marital distress and divorce. They further stated that an emotive, cognitive, and behavioural change from these programs takes time, in most cases, at least a year, for the couple to integrate the effects. This research was focused on discovering the effects of marriage preparation through using a follow up period of 3-5 years. It is of paramount importance to find out whether the benefits of marriage preparation are only short term or they can be extended to a longer period as well.

Parker (1999) is of the view that previous studies only demonstrate differences in positive and negative interactions of couples seen via videotaped interaction between couples. There are many unobservable changes, which are not recordable on videotape. This might be problematic as well since there is more to marriage than just a video taped conversation. Other researchers such as Larson et al., (2002) focus on evaluating the effectiveness of marriage preparation programs through analysing the tools used by the providers. They focus on evaluating the programs' level of comprehensiveness. They also evaluated whether these tools are easy to interpret, easy to administer and widely applicable. Ooms (2007) also focuses on evaluating marriage preparation programs focusing on whether they are applicable to diverse populations. The author believed that people who seek marriage preparation counselling are culturally diverse and therefore the programs must accommodate all cultures. He found out that when programs

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began to serve culturally diverse clients, most marriage preparation providers in the field developed an appreciation of the need to be culturally sensitive. Other providers select and train workshop leaders who will be able to speak the clients' language and familiarize themselves with their cultural background.

This research focused on the narratives of married individuals capturing both perceptions on the role of these programs tallied with the individual's experience in the marriage life (Bowling et al., 2005). This allows the marriage preparation program service providers to have a deeper understanding of the experiences of their clients after attending the marriage preparation program.

Although the evaluation of previous research suggests that marriage preparation programs are effective, the previous findings have been criticized because much of the research is conducted in the United States of America and outcomes may not translate to other populations (Parker, 1999). The question always remains whether marriage preparation programs would bring forth the same results especially when applied in other countries. This research attempted to bridge the gap by conducting research in South Africa in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality using South African participants.

Most researchers have focused on couples as a unit of analysis (Bruhn & Hill, 2004). The assumption to this is that marriage is a union between 2 people hence the effectiveness of marriage preparation programs must be based on the couple. However within the unity of marriage there is a unique individual. Parrott and Parrot (2003) are of the view that one of the biggest contributors to the decline of marriage is the psychological health of both people in the

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marriage. They believe that a marriage can only be as healthy as the least person in it; meaning if one person in the couple is aware of their issues and working on them while the other person is unmotivated to overcome any restriction to personal health, the marriage will suffer. This research focused on the individual as a unit of analysis because it seeks to understand the experiences and opinion of that person as an individual in the marriage.

7. CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed most of the important aspects of marriage preparation programs found in the literature. It also provided the evaluations that were conducted by marriage preparation researchers in previous research which outlined the gaps and silences in the field. However the challenge of having limited literature in marriage preparation field remains. Various authors stated different topics that are taught in these programs, others mentioned different types of programs but with very little published material to gain more understanding on the issues around the programs. It is hoped that this research will also fulfil the gap of adding information on the role of marriage preparation programs and the experiences of the participants after attending these programs.

1. CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

The use of adult attachment theory in marriage preparation programs is discussed in this chapter. It is regarded as a theory of romantic relationship and is widely used in marriage and pre marriage counsellors by different professionals. Adult attachment theory is of the view that people are biologically prepared to develop close attachments throughout their lifespan with a few people, including romantic partners. Marriage preparation counsellors help clients to deal with negative attachment behaviours that might affect the marriage as well as reinforcing positive attachment behaviours that might strengthen the marriage. In addition, a qualitative approach of Interpretative phenomenological analysis is discussed in detail since the research focused on gaining understanding on the role of marriage preparation programs through participants' narratives.

2. ATTACHMENT THEORY

The study draws from John Bowlby's theory of attachment. The theory focuses on affection bonds that are based on repeated interactions between an infant and his or her primary caregiver (Ruppel & Curran, 2012). Bowlby theorizes that there are four interrelated behavioural systems that govern human behaviour. These are: attachment, care giving, exploration and sex. Of these, Bowlby recognized the attachment system, which motivates children and adults to seek safety and security through close contact with attachment figures, as being of primary importance in regulating the other systems (Simpson & Rholes, 2010). The theory is of the view that the human infant is born with a biologically programmed system developed to allow for the formation of attachment or an emotional bond, with a primary caregiver. This attachment system

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allows for the infant to use their caregiver as a ‘secure base’ to explore their environment and whom, in times of perceived threat or danger, can be used as a source of comfort and protection (Holmes & Johnson, 2009).

Brumbaugh and Fraley (2006) state that as people start new romantic relationships, they discover that they have unintentionally recreated the same kinds of attachment patterns that characterised their relationship from the past. Although Bowlby was primarily focused on the nature of infant-caregiver relationship, he also believed that attachment characterized human experience from “the cradle to the grave”. Fraley (2010) states that Hazan and Shaver (1987) were the first researchers to explore Bowlby’s ideas in the context of romantic relationships and it gave birth to adult attachment theory. The assumption is that the emotional bond that develops between adult romantic partners is partly a function of the same motivational system (the attachment behavioural system), that gives rise to the emotional bond between infants and their caregivers. Johnson and Whiffen (2005) state that the application of attachment theory to adult relationships did not occur until the late 1980s and it was a revolutionary event for the modality of couple therapy. It is a theory that explains most reasons why adult romantic relationships endure (Domingue & Mollen, 2009). It became a theory of close relationships which offered the couple therapist a coherent, relevant, widely applicable and well researched framework for understanding the complex phenomenon of the adult love relationships.

Attachment theory is a theory of relationships. Adults have attachments to other adults to whom they feel close. Adult attachment behaviour occurs at times of emotional arousal, when an

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adult experiences joy, stress, anxiety and the need for comfort and understanding. Adult attachment theory concerns itself with personality formation, individual differences, affect regulation and mental health. It is a theory that has been used by professionals in dealing with adults courtship, dating, couples and romantic relationships (Howe, 2010).

One of the assumptions of Adult Attachment Theory is that the same motivational system that is responsible for the bond between infants and their primary caregivers is responsible for the bond that develops between adults in romantic relationships. In fact, there is a relationship between infant care-giver relationship and adult romantic relationships. Both infant-caregiver and adult romantic attachment have similarities.

For example, both adults and children:

- Feel anxious and restless when separated from their attachment figures
- Feel at ease when their attachment figures are nearby and accessible
- Engage in “baby talk” with one another

Furthermore their relationships are characterized by the same three defining qualities, often referred to as the features and functions of attachment: proximity-seeking, safe haven, and secure base (Heffernan, Fraley, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2012). The authors further clarified by using the quoted examples in the table below:

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Table 1

Similarities between attachment in children and adult attachment in romantic relationships

<p>Infants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seek proximity to their caregiver and feel comforted and protected when their caregiver is nearby. <p>Adults</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Also desire frequent close contact with their romantic partners, especially in the initial stages of a romantic relationship when couple members begin to fall in love.
<p>Infants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use their caregiver as a haven of safety when they are frightened or experience distress. <p>Adults</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Also turn to their romantic partners for support in times of distress.
<p>Infants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use their caregiver as a secure base from which to explore new environments, people, toys, and activities. <p>Adults</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Romantic partners serve as a secure base for one another from which to explore not only the familiar environments of day-to-day life but also novel environments and activities, such as new career paths, going back to school, or running a marathon”.

However, though there are similarities between the two, adult attachment differs from infant attachment in important ways. Firstly, the infant’s primary figure of attachment is a parent

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or caregiver whereas for adults is usually a sexual partner. Secondly, childhood attachments are complementary. The attachment figure provides care and security but does not receive. In contrast, adult attachment relationships are reciprocal. Each partner is both a recipient and a provider of care. Thirdly, infants require physical contact with an attachment figure to feel secure. Although the need for physical contact does not disappear, adults are able to feel secure with the mere knowledge that their attachment figures can be contacted if needed. This means that the attachment behaviour moves from the level of external observable interactions to internally represented expectations and beliefs (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

Adult attachment theory is of the view that people are biologically prepared to develop close attachments throughout the lifespan with a few other people, including romantic partners (Barry, Lakey, & Orehek, 2007). They further explain that securely attached people trust that their attachment figures will be open and helpful and are comfortable with intimacy as well as independence. In contrast, insecurely attached people show attachment anxiety and/or avoidance than the securely attached. According to attachment theory, positive experience with attachment figures as “safe havens” promotes constructive affect regulation by enabling the individual to acknowledge distress and cope with negative affect by seeking reassurance from others. An anxious attachment orientation is accompanied by hyper vigilance to negative affect while an avoidant attachment orientation has been linked to attempts to ignore feelings (Crowell & Treboux, 1995).

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3. ADULT ATTACHMENT THEORY IN MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Parker and Scannell (1998) examine attachment styles and how they change in the years of transiting to marriage and revealed that attachment and marital adjustments are linked together. Adult Attachment theory in couple relationships is based on the concept that the therapist's role is to help the couple form a thought-based attachment to his/her partner to create an "us versus them" mentality. The premarital counsellor helps individuals in creating couple cohesion by solidifying the couple as an entity separate and against the rest of the world. They use attachment theory to suggest that stable personality characteristics can be built up before marriage and ideas brought from family of origin contribute to one's ability to deal with stressful events and how well couples adapt to difficulties in marriage (Johnson & Whiffen, 2005).

Collins, Ford and Guichard (2006) state that adult attachment theory begins with the assumption that adults enter relationships with a history of interpersonal experiences and a unique set of memories, beliefs, and expectations that shape how they think and feel about their relationships and how they behave in those relationships. In premarital counselling, the theory helps therapists in improving couple's communication skills so as to gain insight into their past and present relationships. This implies that one of the therapist's roles is to assess deep into the client's previous attachment styles and see whether they will surface and affect the present relationship.

The theory also states that the spouse becomes the primary attachment figure for the majority of adults, and their main source of security and comfort. This theory assumes that most significant relationship problems identified in marriage preparation will be about the security of

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the bond between the partners, about their struggle to define the relationship as a safe haven and secure base. Hence premarital counselling focuses on addressing the need for comfort and the promotion of safe emotional engagement and responsiveness that is the basis of a secure bond (Johnson & Whiffen, 2005).

The partner's positive attachment behaviours such as responsiveness and availability will make the other partner feel secure, loved and confident. Negative attachment behaviours will lead to anxiety and distress, which will also lead to intense protest and searching (Fraley, 2010). Conceptually, therapists work with couples to move from insecure attachment to secure attachment through communication of attachment-related emotions, fears and needs. They watch for emotional responses that generate others, especially destructive ones such as withdrawal, which will eventually lead to demanding and criticizing. Hence the main role of a pre marriage counsellor will be to help couples deal with negative attachment behaviours in their romantic relationships (Domingue & Mollen, 2009).

4. CONCLUSION

The chapter discussed the adult attachment theory from which different explanation on marriage preparation programs can be derived. The theory is widely used by marriage preparation counsellors because it provides detailed information on dealing with positive and negative attachment behaviours that might affect the marriage. The chapter also discussed the use of IPA as a qualitative approach because the research focused on understanding the role of marriage preparation programs as perceived by recently married individuals. The next chapter presents the research methodology and procedure.

1. **CHAPTER INTRODUCTION**

The chapter outlines the method employed in this study. In addition, issues relating to the procedure of data collection and sampling are also discussed. The chapter later presents ethical considerations during the study. Finally, it also discusses the process of data analysis and limitations of the study.

1.1 *Point of departure and research questions*

Marriage therapy researchers' work has focused on the experiences of couples in their marriages and their research has mainly been qualitative. In addition, marriage researchers and counsellors explained that the first marriage preparation programs existed because of research on causes of divorce and found lack of marriage preparation as one of them. Though many of them focused on evaluating the program itself, some of them used the experiences of married couples to determine the usefulness of marriage preparation programs. In this frame of reference, they believed that experiences are a powerful tool that provides the rationale for marriage therapy research (Bruhn & Hill, 2004). Interesting to note is that, marriage preparation researchers originally used couples as their unit of analysis, however, ideas to focus on experiences of an individual as an entity in a marriage have been useful (Parrott & Parrot, 2003). It is in the light of these facts that this study employed the qualitative approach together with interpretative phenomenological analysis which centres on understanding the meaning people give to their

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experiences. The research questions and problem required an in-depth understanding of the role of marriage preparation programs through the narratives of people's opinions and experiences.

The following key questions were formulated from the problem statement, with the aim of gaining understanding on the topical issue.

- What do recently married individuals (3-5 years) perceive as the significant role of marriage preparation programmes?
- What are the experiences of individuals after attending a marriage preparation program?
- Which preventative and treatment strategies can service providers employ in their marriage preparation programs?
- How can research findings on marriage preparation programs contribute to the formulation of comprehensive policies to prevent marital distress and divorce in South Africa?

2. PHILOSOPHICAL POSITION

The following section provides the philosophical position of the research.

2.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is a qualitative research approach which was developed by Jonathan Smith. It is committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences. It is concerned with exploring experience in its own terms, where experience has larger significance in the person's life. When people are engaged with an experience of something major in their life, people have an ability to reflect on major experiences of their lives (Smith et al., 2009). IPA

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researchers seek to engage with the significance of these reflections. It focuses on the ways in which human beings gain knowledge of the world around them. It is also concerned with the individual's personal perception or account of an object or event. This is relevant to this research because it attempted to find out the role of marriage preparation programs drawing from the narratives of recently married individuals. Thus the researcher did not focus on investigating the role itself but rather what these individuals perceive as the role (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008).

Phenomenology is one of the main pillars of IPA. IPA is phenomenological in nature in that it involves capturing particular experiences as experienced by particular people. One key value of phenomenological philosophy is that it provides a rich source of ideas about how to examine and comprehend lived experience. It involves a careful examination of human experience. Phenomenological inquiry focuses on that which is experienced in the consciousness of the individual. It focuses on finding a means by which individuals come to accurately know and identify the essential qualities of their own experience. In addition, IPA research attempts to understand people's relationship with the world. It attempts to make meaning out of their activities and to the things happening to them (Smith et al., 2009).

According to Smith and Orsborn (2004), IPA is a suitable approach when one is trying to find out how individuals are perceiving the particular situations they are facing and how they are making sense of their personal and social world. IPA researchers are especially interested in what happens when the everyday flow of lived experience takes on a particular significance for

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people. IPA is informed by hermeneutics, which is the theory of interpretation. Its assumption is that human beings are sense-making creatures, therefore the accounts provided by participants will in turn reflect their attempts to make sense of their experience. Smith et al., (2009) stated that interpretation is not a matter of following mechanical rules but rather a craft or art that involves a combination of a range of skills. Part of the aim of the interpretative process is to understand the exact and objective textual meaning and individuality of the author or speaker. However, IPA acknowledges that the access to participants' experiences is dependent on what they narrate to us about their experience and it becomes the duty of the researcher to interpret and understand those experiences.

According to Smith et al., (2009), IPA researchers usually try to find a fairly homogeneous sample. The assumption is that if one is looking for a sample, it is not very helpful to use random sampling. IPA usually goes in the opposite direction and utilizes purposive sampling to find a more closely suitable group for whom the research question will be significant. In some cases, the research topic under investigation may be rare and define the boundaries of the relevant sample. In other cases, the sample may be drawn from a population with the same socio-economic status and demographic profiles. The researcher's sample should be defined by who is prepared to be in it.

In this research, the topic under investigation is not very common and there is not much literature available on marriage preparation programs, especially in South Africa. This entails that the topic under investigation defined the boundaries of the sample and the research only

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focused on participants from Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM). The researcher used purposive sampling to find individuals who qualify to give information on the role of marriage preparation programs. To come up with a more homogeneous sample, the researcher looked for participants who have been married for 3-5 years, attended a marriage preparation course and who were residents of BCMM.

IPA studies are usually conducted on small sample sizes. Its detailed case-by-case analysis of each participant's transcripts takes a long time. The aim of the act is to have information in detail about the understandings and perceptions of the particular group rather than prematurely making more general claims. The samples are selected purposively so that they can offer a research project insight into a particular experience (Smith et al., 2009). This allows satisfactory in-depth engagement with each individual case. It also allows a detailed examination of the differences and similarities between and across cases. In this research project, the researcher used a small sample of 15 participants in order to be able to gain in depth understanding of what each individual perceive as the role of marriage preparation programs.

IPA requires a flexible data collection instrument. The most suitable way to collect data in IPA studies is through the semi-structured interviews. The interviews allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participants' responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise. Therefore it is important for the researcher to produce an interview schedule before conducting the interview (Smith, 2008). Semi structured interviews were utilised to allow the

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participants' narratives on experiences and perceptions to be smooth without too much interruption. The semi structured interviews had open ended questions which allow the participants to speak freely about what they regard as the role of marriage preparation programs.

IPA analysis is interested in learning something about the participant's psychological world. This may be in the form of perceptions; beliefs and constructs that are suggested by the participants' talk (Smith, 2003). The meaning is central, and the aim is to try to understand the content and complexity of those meanings rather than measure their frequency. This involves the researcher engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript. The researcher attempts to capture and do justice to the meanings of the participant's explanations to learn about their mental and social world. However, those meanings are not transparently available; the researcher must be able to obtain them through a sustained engagement with the text and a process of interpretation. To achieve this, the researcher analyses each case and then goes on to notify differences and similarities. IPA has its own step by step analysis which starts with detailed examination of each case before moving to more general claims (Smith et al., 2009). This research followed the IPA step by step analysis as stipulated by Smith.

3. CLASSIFYING THE RESEARCH

3.1 *Qualitative research*

IPA was developed under qualitative psychology. The qualitative approach was adopted in this study because it seeks to help the investigator understand the experiences of other people

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(Royse, 2004). The qualitative approach is an umbrella term covering a range of interpretive techniques which seek to decode, describe, translate, and come to terms with the meaning of naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. It is therefore fundamentally a descriptive form of research (De Vos, 2002). It provides an in-depth study into a particular phenomenon from the point of view of those experiencing it. An advantage of qualitative research is that it can investigate these things that cannot be quantified such as the narratives of individual's marital experiences.

In the qualitative approach, the researcher is directly involved with the social world. The approach was suitable for the subject investigated by the researcher because it provides deep descriptions of social issues than quantitative studies that focus more on generalizations. In qualitative research, the researcher is not an observer but is rather involved. Researchers who focused on relationship education paid more attention to investigating the role of marriage preparation programs through evaluating the content of different types of programs that exist. Some of these researchers used quantitative studies to make generalizations. This research seeks to find out the role of marriage preparation programs drawing from the narratives of recently married individuals which makes the qualitative approach more suitable. The Qualitative method allows the researcher to have an in-depth understanding of what the individuals regard as the role of marriage preparation programs because their experiences are linked to their opinion (Royse, 2004).

The qualitative approach is also flexible because it allows the researcher to probe more on new concepts raised by participants during interviews. When conducting the interviews, the researcher was able to alter some questions depending on the participant's response (De Vos & Strydom, 1998). Finding out what individuals perceive as the role of marriage preparation is a

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subject that is difficult to tackle using close questions. The participants had different views based on their experiences therefore it was essential for questions to be flexible and mostly open ended to allow them to express their views in their own way.

However, qualitative research has its own shortfalls especially because of what they termed ‘data overload’. They stated that data overload is caused by the use of open-ended questions. They claim that these questions usually create lots of data, which take a long time to analyse. To overcome this challenge, an interview schedule was used to determine important questions to be asked when conducting interviews (De Vos, 2002). The questions were aimed at answering the research questions. The researcher overcame this challenge also by using a small sample of 15 participants so that enough time may be given in the transcription and analysis of the data.

4. DATA COLLECTION

4.1 *Recruitment*

According to De Vos (2002), population is a term that sets boundaries on the study units and it refers to individuals in the universe who possess specific characteristics. In this research, the population was all recently married individuals who attended a marriage preparation program in BCMM. The researcher identified some of the marriage preparation service providers in BCMM. The identified providers were (Families South Africa) FAMSA and Pastor K. Maphinda from East London Fellowship church. Marriage preparation services offered by FAMSA are open to everyone though they charge a means tested fee per session. Pastor K. Maphinda provides free premarital counselling to engaged couples through conducting face to face sessions, marriage

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seminars and gala dinners. He also reaches a wider community of BCMM through conducting marriage preparation sessions on Link FM (97.1 FM), a Christian community radio every Wednesday at 20H00-22H00. He also hosts marriage seminars/workshops which focus on marriage enrichment. His services are not only for his congregation but for anyone who is willing to attend. His seminars and databases were used to identify suitable participants for the study.

To gain access, the researcher wrote letters of request to East London Fellowship church and FAMSA to attain access to their clients who had attended their marriage preparation course. East London Fellowship church granted permission to the researcher and asked the researcher to give back a report of results found after the completion of the research. FAMSA director (Mrs T. Sishuba) granted the permission to the researcher verbally but the researcher did not interview any participant from their organization since their clients did not complete the marriage preparation program. This was probably because they could not afford to pay the fees that are paid per session.

4.1.1 Criteria for inclusion

A non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling was used because in IPA, participants are selected on the basis that they can grant the researcher access to particular perspective on the phenomena under study (Smith et al., 2009). Non probability samples are

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those in which the probability that a subject is selected is unknown and results in selection bias in the study. They include the most commonly used convenience/purposive sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling (Acharya S, Pakash A, Saxena P & Nigam 2013). This research utilised purposive sampling, also known as convenience sampling. A purposive sample is intentionally selected according to the needs of the study (Boeije, 2010). Often the respondents are selected because they are at the right place at the right time. Though the disadvantage is that the results cannot be generalised to the wider population, the method is less expensive and there is no need for a list of all the population elements (Acharya et al, 2013). IPA therefore uses purposive sampling to find a more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant. The individuals who participated in the study have been legally married for 3-5 years and has a marriage certificate, issued by the Department of Home Affairs to prove it. These individuals attended a marriage preparation program in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. The research did not include individuals who are engaged in the following marriages for the sole reason of limiting the scope of the study:

- Same sex
- Cultural marriages
- Polygamous marriages

This type of sampling technique is entirely based on the researcher's judgment in that the sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristic, representative and typical attributes of the population. The advantage of this type of sampling is that it allows the researcher to get a detailed experience of each participant (De Vos, 2002).

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4.1.2 Study setting

The research was undertaken in East London town, which falls within the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. Participants were identified from different locations in this area such as Amalinda, Southernwood, Mdantsane and Quigney. The visible service providers in this area are mainly religious leaders and professional counsellors. These providers realize the importance of marriage preparation programs as a preventive measure to reduce high rate of divorce. However religious leaders in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality provide marriage preparation to a larger population than professional counsellors.

4.2 Sample

A sample is a smaller selection of the total population from which investigations will be conducted (Neuman, 2009). The research targeted married individuals who attended a marriage preparation program before their marriages. The target population was individuals who have been married for 3-5 years. Individuals were chosen as a unit of analysis because the researcher wanted to investigate the experience of each in the institution of marriage (Parrott & Parrot, 2003). The sample consisted of 4 husbands and 11 wives. A sample of 15 individuals was chosen because the aim is to reveal something of the experience of each of those individuals (Smith et al., 2009). Choosing a sample from the wider population is advantageous because it saves time as well as finances.

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4.3 Response rate and omissions

The researcher was given 20 files of people who attended the FAMSA marriage preparation program. From these 20 files, 5 of them were men who were not willing to participate because they said they were not comfortable to share their marital experiences. Those individuals who were willing to participate could not because they did not complete the marriage preparation program. The reason behind this is suspected to be the fee that is paid per session. The organization is non-governmental and depends on donations and subsidies to operate. For this reason they charge a means tested fee per session. The 15 individuals who agreed to participate in the research participants were identified through East London fellowship church. The researcher attended a marriage seminar held at Mdantsane (a local suburb) by the founder of the church, Pastor Maphinda. The seminar included several people who had attended a marriage preparation course either with pastor Maphinda or any other religious leader in BCMM.

The researcher approached these individuals and set appointments with them to meet and discuss how the research was going to be conducted.

4.4 Interview schedule

An interview schedule was constructed as an interview guide, to help the researcher think about what the interview might cover. Questions were constructed with the aim of encouraging the person to speak about the topic with little prompting from the interviewer. It enables researchers to think of difficulties that might be encountered during that interview such as

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question wording or sensitive areas. This means that the researcher is able to find ways on how these difficulties might be handled before they are encountered. If the researcher thinks in advance about how the interview will proceed, it allows him or her to concentrate more thoroughly and confidently on what the participant is actually saying. In this research, an interview schedule was prepared prior to the interviews. The researcher was able to use it to note the sensitive issues when asking participants about their marital experiences (Smith, 2008).

4.5 Use of open ended questions

The interview schedule consisted of open ended questions to allow the participants to share their experiences. Since the research is phenomenological, it relied on questions that are able to draw out information from the participants. Open ended questions do not require a specific answer but rather gives a chance to participants to give their own answers using their own words. Questions were constructed gently with the aim of encouraging the person to speak about the topic with little prompting from the interviewer (Smith, 2008). The participants had different marital experiences as well as views about the role of marriage preparation programs; therefore they required questions that do not dictate answers. The prompts of the interview depended on what the participants said.

4.6 Interviewing

Fifteen participants were interviewed. Semi-structured in-depth face to face interviews were conducted for approximately 45 minutes - 1 hour each. The researcher's aim was to facilitate an interaction which permits participants to share their experiences in their own words

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(Smith et al., 2009). The interviews were conducted with the participant alone; this allowed them to feel free to express their thoughts. Smith (2008) is of the view that the location of the interview can also make a difference when it comes to in-depth interviews. Most participants feel free to express themselves in an environment that is comfortable to them, for example their homes. For this reason the interviews were conducted where the participants preferred most. Some of them preferred their homes while some preferred the researchers' home. The most interesting thing is that they preferred an environment where their partners could not listen to what they were saying.

4.7 Tape recording

In IPA, it is not possible to do the interviewing required without tape recording. The assumption is that if the researcher attempts to write down everything said by the participant, one might miss important points and only capture a gist. It also interferes with establishing a rapport and helping the interview to run smoothly. Therefore, IPA interviews are tape recorded and transcribed, including the interviewer's questions. The interviews were audio recorded and the researcher made a transcript for each showing the words that were spoken. The tape recording was done using the researcher cell phone recorder. The participants were first informed about it before tape recording the interviews. The tape recording was beneficial because it did not disturb the flow of the interview. The interviewer was able to pay enough attention to what the participant was saying and probe for more information where necessary (Smith et al., 2009).

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4.8 Interview costs

The researcher used public transport to go to participants' houses to conduct interviews. The taxis commute frequently to various locations of BCMM. Those who preferred to come to the researchers' house for interviews used their own cars. Tape recording did not cost anything since the researcher used a cell phone to record.

4.9 Benefits of interviews

Interviews allow the researcher to enter the psychological and social world of the participant (Smith, 2008). This means that they allow the participant to tell their story in their own words on the subject under investigation. The researcher also has control over the interviewing process and is able to ask relevant questions and read non-verbal cues. In addition, interviews also extract data in greater depths and large amounts because the researcher is able to probe and ask for clarity where it is not clear (Royse, 2004).

4.10 Data coding and analysis

The study used the step by step approach of IPA analysis because it is an interpretative work which the investigator conducted aiming to understand the content and complexity of meanings rather than measure frequency (Smith et al., 2009). The purpose of the research was to find out the role of marriage preparation program as perceived by recently married individuals. The steps as suggested by Smith et al., (2009) are explained below:

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Step 1 - Reading and re-reading: The researcher started the analysis by reading the first written transcript several times. This was done to make sure that the participant becomes the focus of analysis and to begin the process of entering the participant's world.

Step 2 - Initial noting: The researcher examined the content and noted anything of interest within the first transcript. The aim was to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data. Comments were made on similarities, differences and echoes in what the participant was saying.

Step 3 - Developing emergent themes: The step involved recalling what was learnt in the whole process of initial noting. The researcher reduced the volume of the data and analysed exploratory comments to identify emerging themes. The main task was to produce brief statements of what was important in the various comments.

Step 4 - Searching for connections across emergent themes: The researcher made a chart of developing themes and looked for connections between them. The focus was on making sense of the connection between themes which are emerging and see how they fit together.

Step 5 - Moving to the next case: The other cases were treated with their own individuality but themes from the first case also helped in the analysis of other interviews with different individuals. The researcher was able to discern repeating and new issues emerging and a final table of important themes was constructed through a master table of themes for the group.

Step 6 - Looking for patterns across cases: The researcher looked across the tables of themes for all cases to find connections. This led to finding the most potent themes and the final result of the process was presented in a master table of themes for the whole group.

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5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The research will be significant because it aims to

- Help practitioners to come up with strategies to increase people's engagement in marriage preparation programs.
- Provide marriage preparation service providers with feedback from narratives of these individuals so as to heighten their awareness on important factors to focus on when facilitating marriage preparation programs.
- Add to the existing body of literature because minimal research has been conducted which focuses on marriage preparation programmes in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality.

Furthermore, the South African Green Paper on families (2011) states that family life will be articulated via certain programs, for example, and not exclusively, promoting the institution of marriage through preparatory intervention. Hence this research will raise awareness to the wider community of the importance of marriage preparation and therefore encourage them to participate in these programs before they get married.

6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher was well aware of the sensitivities involved in discussing people's experiences in their marriages. The researcher is a registered social worker by profession who has the knowledge of the code of ethics and therefore made use of professional skills in giving appropriate support needed by participants in discussing sensitive issues about their marriages. The researcher was able to abide by research ethics as explained in detail below.

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6.1 Informed consent

According to De Vos (2002), obtaining informed consent means that all information on the aim of the investigation, the procedures, advantages, disadvantages, dangers will be rendered to their legal representatives. The researcher commenced the data collection by verbally readdressing the objectives of the study to the participants and the signing of the consent forms. The informed consent forms served as a tool to help participants understand the purpose and process of the research. It is unethical to record the participant without their consent so the researcher explained the reasons for recording so that participants can be familiarized with the process (Royse, 2004). The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time if they feel they cannot continue. The interviews were flexible since the interview schedule was used as a guideline not as a dictator of what the interview is going to contain. Participants were informed earlier to choose whether they want to be interviewed at their houses or at the researcher's house. Some of them were comfortable with the researcher's house. These individuals explained that they were not comfortable to be interviewed at their houses in case their partner could walk in and listen. The researcher respected the participants wish because when the participant feels safe and secure, they eventually feel free to explore their feelings.

Deception in research usually happens when researchers withhold any information in the consent process (Trotter 11 & Whiteford, 2008). Penslar (1995) also defines deception as not giving participants an opportunity to provide informed consent to participation before the researcher collects data. To avoid deception in this research, the researcher explained the process of the research verbally to the participants. The informed consent forms also helped participants to know the purpose of the research and give consent out of their own will.

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6.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

The participant's identities were protected through the use of codes. This was done to make sure that information given by participants could not be traced back to them. The researcher is also a social worker by profession who was able to abide by the professions code of conduct which put more emphasis on maintaining the client's confidentiality at all times. Therefore the researcher did not discuss the participants' information with their partners or anyone else.

6.3 Exposure to risk and harm

The researcher took into consideration the exposure to harm or risk of participants since the topic was sensitive. Some participants were afraid that information about their marital experiences would be exposed to spouses or relatives and might affect their marriages negatively. The researcher assured the participants that information gathered will be used for academic purposes only and would not under any circumstances be discussed with anyone or cause any harm to their marriages.

7. LIMITATIONS

The researcher was limited to find participants from religious leaders only as they are the largest groups of marriage preparation providers in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. Attempts were made to find participants from other professionals offering marriage preparation programs such as Families South Africa (FAMSA) but it was in vain. From all the files given to the researcher by the FAMSA director, 5 of them were men who were not comfortable to

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participate in the research because they regarded the topic sensitive. The rest did not complete the marriage preparation program.

8. CONCLUSION

The chapter provided a detailed explanation of the procedure on how the study was conducted. In addition, ethical considerations, significance of the study and limitations that were encountered in conducting the study were discussed. The following chapter presents the findings, data display and analysis.

1. CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter described the research methodology procedure that was used in this research. This chapter presents the findings gathered as well as the data analysed. The purpose of the study was to find out the role of marriage preparation programs as perceived by recently married individuals. An interview schedule was used as an instrument for data collection and information was gathered from narratives of 15 participants on their experiences in their marriages after attending a marriage preparation program. The data collected was analysed and then organized according to emerging themes.

The real names of participants were not used in this chapter for the sake of protecting the identity of the participants; instead, the codes are used to identify participants.

2. DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Before the interview, the participants were given a questionnaire with descriptive questions. These were used to collect identifying details of the participants. In addition to this, the first question of the interview required the participants to tell the researcher more about themselves. The sub themes that emerged from the demographic information were: age, gender, and place of residence, length of marriage, number of children, occupational status, and nature of the marriage preparation program and marriage preparation service provider. Table 2 shows the participants' age, length of marriage, occupational status, number of children and their pre marriage counselling provider.

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Table 2

Participant's age, gender, years of marriage, number of children and marriage preparation service provider.

Participant and code	Gender & age	Years of marriage	No of children	Marriage preparation service provider
Participant 01	M (33)	3	1	East London fellowship church
Participant 02	M(32)	3	2	Christ the seed of hope church
Participant 03	F (29)	4	0	East London fellowship church
Participant 04	F (32)	3	1	Assemblies of God church
Participant 05	F (29)	3	2	Christ the seed of hope ministries
Participant 06	F (32)	3	1	East London fellowship church
Participant 07	F (34)	5	2	Christ the seed of hope ministries
Participant 08	F (25)	3	0	Assemblies of God church
Participant 09	M (30)	3	1	East London fellowship church
Participant 10	F (27)	3	1	East London fellowship church
Participant 11	F (29)	3	0	Christ the seed of hope ministries
Participant 12	F (33)	5	2	East London fellowship church
Participant 13	M (35)	4	2	East London fellowship church
Participant 14	F (25)	3	0	East London fellowship church
Participant 15	F (28)	3	1	Christ the seed of hope ministries

2.1 Age

The sample consisted of 15 participants between the age of 25 and 35. Carroll et al., (2007) are of the view that people usually decides on entering marriage when they are in young adulthood. The authors further explained that it is around that phase that individuals feel they

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need to start their own family and to attach permanently to their partners. This probably explains why the youngest participant was 25 years old and the oldest being 35. Of the 15 participants, 4 were men between the age of 30 and 35 and 11 women between the age of 25 and 34.

2.2 Gender

Of the 15 participants, 4 were men and 11 were women. Previous studies on college-educated young adults have found that; though marriage preparation programs are equally effective for both genders, women report a greater interest to attend than men (Duncan et al., 2010). The authors' previous studies on college-educated young adults have found that women report a greater interest in marriage preparation than men. They further stated that some cultures play a part in this matter since men are expected to be strong and not to acknowledge having a weakness especially when it comes to intimate relationships. In line with this, the narratives given by men in this research showed that they acknowledged the influence of culture in some of their behaviours. This probably explains why some of the men approached by the researcher refused to participate in the research.

2.3 Years of marriage

All participants were married for a period that ranged from 3 to 5 years. 11 participants were married for a period of 3 years. 2 participants were married for 4 years and the other 2 for 5 years.

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2.4 Number of children

Six participants had 1 child; 5 of them had 2 children each and 4 had no children. Carroll et al (2007) concurs that child bearing is considered a goal by those couples who enter into marriage. This concurs with the findings because 11 participants had at least one child and those who did not wished to have but have had a problem of bareness or gave an excuse of still studying.

2.5 Marriage preparation service provider

All participants received their marriage preparation counselling from religious leaders around Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. 8 of the participants received their marriage preparation programme from East London fellowship church; 5 received it from Christ the seed of hope church and 2 from Assemblies of God church. Bruhn and Hill, (2004) concurs that most premarital counselling is performed by clergy or members of the religious community. They further stated that marriage preparation programs are an integral part of pastoral care. Churches are considered to have strengths, credibility, and they are grounded in communities. This offers them the opportunity to make a real difference in the societies.

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2.6 Place of residence

The research required participants who are specifically residing in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. The table 3 shows the four locations where each participant is residing.

Table 3

Participants' place of residence in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality

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Participant	Place of residence
Participant 01	NU 6 MDANTSANE
Participant 03	
Participant 04	
Participant 06	NU 1 MDANTSANE
Participant 09	
Participant 10	
Participant 08	QUIGNEY
Participant 11	AMALIND A

Participant	Place of residence
Participant 02	SOUTHERN WOOD
Participant 05	
Participant 07	
Participant 12	
Participant 13	
Participant 14	
Participant 15	

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The four locations above are all in BCMM, this fulfilled the researcher's aim of finding out the perceived role of marriage preparation programs that are offered in this area. 7 participants reside in Southernwood, 1 in Quigney and 1 in Amalinda. 6 participants reside in Mdantsane which is a very big suburb in BCMM, 3 of them stays in NU 6 whereas the other 3 resides in NU 6.

2.7 Occupational status

Table 4

Participants' occupational status

Participant	Occupational status
01	Mechanic
02	Packer
03	Beauty therapist (Self-employed)
04	Unemployed
	Packer

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05	
Participant	Unemployed
06	
Participant	Receptionist
07	
Participant	Unemployed (university student)
08	
Participant	Educator
09	
Participant	Unemployed
10	
Participant	Unemployed
11	
Participant	Domestic worker
12	
Participant	Shop owner (Self-employed)
13	
Participant	Unemployed (university student)
14	
Participant	Unemployed

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15	
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Six participants were employed in different companies whereas 2 turned to self-employment. Additionally, 7 were unemployed of which 2 of them were still students at local universities. Interesting to note is that the participants displayed a diverse occupational status. Most people who go to seek premarital counselling from therapists and professional counsellors are mostly white collar employees. However marriage preparation provided by religious leaders is open to anyone since it is usually free, therefore they are able to provide the service to a diverse population (Wilmoth & Smyser, 2010). This is evident in this group of participants where various classes of people are represented.

3. REASONS FOR ATTENDING THE MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMME

When asked about the reasons why they decided to attend a marriage preparation program, 9 participants said that it was because it is required by the church. They explained that their pastors motivated them to go for it. Interesting to note is that at first they just agreed to do it because the pastor said so but later realised the importance of doing it on their own. Participant 09 had this to say regarding why he attended the course:

“I did it because it is something that is recommended by our pastor, we all know that when someone wants to get married they go through those lessons. At first I just agreed doing it because he said so but to be honest after finishing it I saw that it is worth doing and am grateful

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to him. If he had not said we must do it, I was never going to do it and I would not know all the information he gave us” (participant 09, 2012: Interview).

Knutson and Olson (2003) estimated that about 75% of first marriages take place in churches. This means that religious leaders are the highest marriage preparation service providers because they usually offer free premarital counselling to large congregations. Bruhn and Hill (2004) found out that clergy and lay leaders are on the front lines of service delivery in counselling couples that are thinking of marriage. Many people get married the first time in religious settings where the performing clergy requires a certain amount of premarital counselling before the service will be performed. This is a possible explanation as to the reason those groups are the prominent providers.

Two participants contended that their decision to attend a marriage preparation course was based on their experiences with their parents' marriages. The divorce and marital distress of their parents led them into believing that the same thing might happen to them. Therefore these circumstances forced them to seek help to avoid history repeating itself.

“I did not want a marriage that will fail so I needed to get all the information that I need to be ready for it. I saw my parent’s marriage failing and it was not a good experience, I did not want to fall in the same trap and I definitely did not want my children to grow without a father” (Participant 11, 2013: Interview).

“I looked at my parents’ marriage it was not successful, they divorced, so I did not want the same to happen to me and for me it was not just a matter of being afraid of divorce but I was also afraid of facing a lot of violence and abuse in my marriage. I grew up seeing my mother being abused by my father and I could not stop thinking about it. It made me wonder if I was also going to encounter the same thing.” (Participant 07, 2013: Interview).

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Many young adults who have experienced the divorce of their parents may be concerned about how their parents' divorce will affect their marital choices. One of the purposes of marriage preparation is to deal with family of origin issues that might affect one's marriage negatively (Halford et al., 2000). It is clear that participant 07 and 11's reasons for attending the marriage preparation course emerged from the fear of ending up divorced just like their parents. Participant 07's reasons for attending the marriage preparation course were also based on how she witnessed her father abusing the mother.

According to attachment theory, people may experience new relationships in ways that are congruent with those from their past because representations of those previous relationships, when primed or activated, can influence the social perception process. Thus, if there is some degree of relationship between the new person and one's significant other, the significant other representation becomes active and guides the way the new person is understood (Brumbaugh & Frarely, 2006).

Two participants stated that they decided to attend the marriage preparation course because they believed it is a good thing to do. They said that they viewed attending a marriage preparation course as a good investment for their marriages. Participant 12 had the following to say concerning her decision to attend the course

“Well, I always believed that whenever you want to take a big step in your life you must find help....I wanted to learn more about marriage so I did it just because I thought it's a good investment for my marriage” (participant 12, 2013: Interview).

Participant 13 and 08 stated that the fear of not knowing what to expect in the marriage led them to decide to attend the marriage preparation program. They explained that the fact that

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they have heard different views about marriage confused and scared them to the extent that they did not know which experiences they were going to encounter in their own marriages.

“...because I wanted to get married but to be honest I was scared because I didn't know what to expect. You know my whole life I heard most people saying marriage it's so difficult, a few saying it's not, so I wasn't sure which is which”. I needed someone to enlighten me about the real issues of marriage” (Participant 08, 2013: Interview).

Society is one of the learning environments for most individuals. Young adults are growing in a society where divorce and marital distress are considered normal (Gardner, 2001). The author further stated that these young adults enter into marriage with an interpretation of marriage based on what they have heard or seen in the society. Therefore it is important for one to attend a marriage preparation course to help in understanding marriage as an institution.

Participant 01 went to a marriage preparation program because he had faced a traumatic heartbreak before. He acknowledged that he was in a bad space to go into marriage with a lot of hurt so he decided to go for premarital counselling:

“...because I was depressed from problems of my previous relationship. The lady that I wanted to marry got very sick and passed way. But what hurt me most was that she was sick with a deadly disease and never opened up to tell me but rather she disappeared and went to Cape Town and I later heard that she died, so yaa I wanted to start on a clean slate” (Participant 01,2013: Interview).

3.1 Nature of marriage preparation program

Since participants received their marriage preparation program from different providers, the nature of their programs differed. All participants related that they attended their program as couples. 9 participants revealed that their programs were more of face to face couple sessions which sometimes included discussions on various topics. Participant 02, 11 and 15 stated that

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theirs had various sessions which included church elders who would share with them a specific area of life which they had excelled in their own marriage. Participant 01, 13 and 14 revealed that they had some face to face sessions and had to follow up some of the other sessions on the radio. They stated that they enjoyed following up the sessions on the radio since they had difficulty in balancing their busy schedule and the face to face sessions:

“They were couple sessions and some we had to follow up on radio because it was difficult to balance time for going to work and going for face to face sessions” (Participant 13, 2013: Interview).

4. THEME ONE: CONTENT OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMMES

Question: What are the topics/lessons that you learnt in the marriage preparation course you attended?

In order to gain understanding of the role of marriage preparation programs in BCMM, the researcher found it imperative to understand the content first. The participant’s narratives contained the lessons/topics they learnt in their marriage preparation programmes. When asked about what they were taught in these programmes, interesting sub themes emerged. Though all participants acknowledged that they might forget some of the topics that they learned, they tried hard to give an account of what was learnt. The following are the sub themes that emerged from this discussion. Table 5 shows topics learnt by participants.

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Table 5

Topics/lessons learnt by participants in the marriage preparation program they attended

Key: √: learned the topic, - : did not learn the topic

TOPIC	p. 01	p. 02	p. 03	p. 04	p. 05	p. 06	p. 07	p. 08	p. 09	p. 10	p. 11	p. 12	p. 13	p. 14	p. 15
Communication	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Adjustment	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Problem solving	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Budgeting	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Sharing of responsibilities	√	√	-	√	√	-	-	-	√	-	-	-	√	-	-
Preserving fun	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Decision making	-	-	-	-	√	-	√	-	-	-	√	-	-	-	√
Total disclosure	-	√	√	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	√	-
Marriage readiness	√	-	-	√	-	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bedroom and sex	-	√	-	-	-	-	√	-	-	-	√	-	-	-	√
Commitment	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	-	-	-	-	-	√	-	√

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4.1 Sub theme 1 - Communication

All participants remembered that they were taught about communication in the marriage. Despite the difference in the teaching approach used by their providers, they all regarded good communication as a tool for problem solving and conflict resolution. Their narratives related that good communication can be used in both preventing and solving problems that arise in marriages. They made it clear that communication in marriage was not just about talking but talking while making sure that the other partner's feelings are not hurt. This is what they had to say:

“He said communication is the only way we will be able to know how our partners are feeling because if we guess we might miss it and it might cause conflict. He said there are little things that are not communicated in marriage that latter cause problems. He gave an example of coming late at home. He said if you know you that you are coming home late maybe because of work or something and you don't communicate with your partner, he/she might think you were with a girlfriend or boyfriend and that might lead to conflict. So by communicating we can prevent such problems. So everything must be communicated clearly” (Participant 03, 2013: Interview).

“She said good communication will help us to solve our problems without leading to more conflict” (Participant 11, 2013: Interview).

“He said that it is the key in a marriage; we must be able to communicate freely and honestly with each other, He said that this communication will help us in solving problems. He said when problems or challenges come; we must be able to sit and communicate calmly, without blame, to solve the problems” (Participant 12, 2013: Interview).

“I also learnt that together with communication, there is problem solving because she said there is no way we can solve the problem without communicating together. She said whenever there is a problem we must acknowledge that there is a problem, have time to sit and talk, find out the root of the problem together and help each other to find a way to solve it” (Participant 13, 2013: Interview).

However, besides learning that good communication is a tool used in problem solving and conflict resolution, 3 participants remembered being taught that communication is used in

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enhancing love in a marriage. They stated that communication is not only to be seen as a tool that comes into play when troubles come but rather be a daily tool to maintain peace, love and harmony in marriage. They related that communication is also important in strengthening love when couples use it to express their affection to each other.

“The other thing that really interested me was the topic about saying out with words exactly what you feel about your partner. He said don’t assume that your partner knows how you feel about him just because you are married. He said words or phrases like I love you..., I miss you, and you look beautiful..., are important because they make both of you to enjoy and appreciate each other” (Participant 04, 2013: Interview).

“He also said in the same way when your partner does something good you must appreciate with words or actions. He said communication is not only for problems but even if things are okay you can still communicate your feelings of love to your partner” (Participant 08, 2013: Interview).

“I remember another couple (the elders) who were there talked about understanding your partner’s love language so that you can please him or her. She said communication can be verbal and non-verbal and both can be used to rekindle the fire of love in a marriage. we must know the love languages like kissing, touching, acts of service, cuddling and that we are different and we might want one of those more than the other, so it is important to know your partner’s love language and use it to make him/her happy” (participant 11, 2013: Interview).

Relationship skills learned in marriage preparation programs include interactional processes and communication patterns that sustain or weaken marriages (Hawkins et al., 2004) . Bruhn and Hill (2004) described communication as the cornerstone for any relationship. They explained that teaching couples to communicate with one another is of paramount importance. Couples should learn and properly practice reflective listening and good attending behaviours because they are able to make better sense of the problem, arrive at equally agreeable solutions quickly and find hope for their relationship when they communicate constructively. Hence it would be wonderful if couples learned how to communicate well before marriage and avoid being overwhelmed by their problems when they eventually come.

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The ability to communicate accurately and effectively is generally regarded as a major component of mental health by counsellors and therapists of family life education. It is used as a tool for as problem-solving in human relationships. The foundation for good marital communication is laid in the premarital dating and engagement period. The process of preparation for marriage should include open discussions of the couple's relationship and how they communicate with one another. The discussion should enable them to think about the kinds of challenges and problems awaiting them in the marriage (Bowling et al., 2005).

4.2 Sub theme 2 - Problem solving

All participants stated that they learnt something about problem solving or conflict resolution in general. They explained that the problem solving topic started by acknowledging that the problems/challenges/conflicts or disagreements are bound to be there when people get married. Their narratives related that when two unique individuals are united by marriage, they still have different ideas about life in general and that might cause conflict if they are not taught how to deal with their differences without causing marital distress or divorce. Though participants received their counselling from different service providers, the concept of knowing which problems may exist and the provision of ways to solve them were found in each narrative. Participant 14 explained that before he went for the marriage preparation programme, he never imagined himself facing any challenge with his wife to be. He said it was probably because he was 'over the moon' with the fact that he was finally getting married, however he acknowledged that if he had not been warned about these challenges and ways to deal with them, it was going to be very difficult for him to solve them. This is what he had to say:

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“He also talked about marital challenges. I liked the fact that he said that challenges will always be there and getting married does not mean that we do not meet them. That time I had no idea that married people face challenges that may be financial, bareness, sickness of partner or child, negative interference from relatives and so on. He also said that though we love each other as partners there is a very high chance of liking different things and that may lead to disagreements or conflicts if we are not careful. Am glad I knew about it before getting in the marriage otherwise what I would have done if I encountered one of those problems without knowing how to solve it” (Participant 14, 2013: Interview).

In addition, all participants stated that they were taught about some of the ways to deal with marital challenges. Their narratives uncovered 4 ways to deal with the above mentioned problems. These are: talking about the problem, acknowledging that you are wrong, apologising and never involving relatives since there is a chance of taking sides and causing more conflict. They went on to explain that their counsellors stressed the fact that if they fail on their own, they must seek professional help from a counsellor, social worker or pastor. This is what participant 05 and 13 said:

“.....we must sit down and talk about it and find a way out of it without being angry or overstressed and make sure that our happiness in the marriage is not strained by those challenges. He also said when we are in a marriage we are not competing to see who is good at debating. If I am wrong I must be able to admit and ask for forgiveness” (Participant 13, 2013: Interview).

“She said it is not encouraged to call our relatives to come and sort the problems between the two of us since sometimes the other person will feel that they are taking sides and cause more conflict. She also said that when we run out of solutions or we feel we can't solve the problem we must go to her or elders of the church or look for professional counsellors to help us” (Participant 05,2013: Interview).

“...she taught us that that problems or challenges will always be there in marriage but what is important is to solve them or find solutions constructively without hurting your partner (Participant 07, 2013: Interview).

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One of the goals of marriage preparation programs is to help couples identify and discuss crucial, possibly problematic, areas of the life they will share (Aholou et al., 2009). Romance and fun in marriages is sometimes coupled with confusion, stress, and hardship. Individuals sometimes enter marriages with certain unrealistic standards and often feel disappointed when these are not fulfilled. This affects their relationships negatively and often brings disappointment, frustration, and distress in relationship development. Therefore there is a need for counsellors to warn couples about possible challenges that comes with marriage (Alexander, 2008).

4.3 Sub theme 3 - Adjustment

All participants stated that they have learnt something about adjusting from single to marriage life. Their counsellors stressed the fact that this transition requires a lot of work to adjust positively without straining the marriage. Their narratives related that this adjustment is all about detaching from previous attachments and attaching to one's partner. They made it clear that before marriage, an individual may be closely attached to parents, siblings, relatives or even friends. These attachment bonds may lead to marital distress if one does not successfully detach from them. In addition, they explained that detaching from these previous bonds does not necessarily mean cutting of one's family but understanding that the bond created with the partner should be stronger than all previous ones. This is what participant 06 said:

“He said that when a person is married, your partner comes first because you are joined together as one. However he did say it though that adjusting does not mean we are cutting ourselves off from our friends and family. It just mean you I have formed a more important bond with my husband and no other bond should be above it because that might cause misunderstandings and fights in my marriage” (Participant 06, 2013, Interview.

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Parker and Scannell (1998), examined attachment styles and how they change in the years of transiting to marriage and revealed that attachment and marital adjustments are linked together. Adult Attachment Theory is used by counsellors in couple relationships because it is based on the concept that the therapist's role is to help the couple form a thought-based attachment to his/her partner to create an "us versus them" mentality. Collins, Ford and Guichard (2006) are of the view that one of the counsellor's role is to assess deep into the client's previous attachment styles and see whether they will surface and affect the present relationship. They further state that the spouse becomes the primary attachment figure for the majority of adults, and their main source of security and comfort. Blair & Cordova (2009) are of the view that married people's commitment may be constrained by extraneous pressures placed on individuals by family or friends.

4.4 Sub theme 4 - Budgeting and saving

Budgeting is one of the sub themes that emerged when participants were asked about what they learnt in their marriage preparation course. All participants stated that their counsellors regarded budgeting of finances as one of the crucial topics since there might be conflicts that lead to marital failure if they are not handled well. They said that the important points discussed in their lessons concerning budgeting included being transparent to each other about what how much is earned, doing the monthly budget together, agreeing on the items to buy and settings aside some money for savings. This was said by participant 02:

"She said we must budget together; I must not take the money and use it without talking to my wife and we must not buy expensive things that we don't afford, we must always avoid taking loans or buying a lot of things on account as it usually becomes difficult to get out of debt and eventually cause problems. She also taught us that we must be able to save some cash per month. She said no matter how small we earn, we must be able to put aside money to save because that

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will help us in times of emergency or when we want to buy an asset” (Participant 02, 2013: Interview).

Married couples build more wealth on average than singles or cohabiting couples, while divorce and unmarried childbearing increase the risk of poverty for children and mothers. Heterosexual couples marriages are associated with better mental and physical health as well as great financial security (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006).

4.5 Sub theme 5 - Sharing responsibilities

Six participants stated that they were taught about sharing responsibilities in the marriage. They related that the sharing of responsibilities in the home was all about not being gender biased when doing house chores. They were taught to be flexible and focus on helping each other to put their homes in order. They stated that they learnt that sharing responsibilities does not only apply to house chores but even to taking care of children. The following are explanations from some of them:

“He also taught us about sharing responsibilities at home, that we should help each other maybe with bathing a child or washing dishes or general house chores. He said we must not have a mentality of saying, “I will not do this chore just because I am a man or a woman”. We must just concentrate on helping each other in everything” (Participant 09, 2013: Interview).

However, one of the above participants stated that the lesson for sharing responsibilities on the house chores was mostly directed to his partner because she is a woman. He claimed that on his part as a man, nothing much was said on doing house chores. This is what he had to say:

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“There was also a topic about sharing responsibilities but when it comes to things like doing house chores like washing and cooking, I think that one was more directed to my wife since she is a woman. Nothing much was said to me concerning that” Participant 13, 2013: Interview).

The participants’ narratives are in line with the view that disagreement about marital roles is one of the problems that causes marital distress (Larson et al., 2002). Van Akcer (2003) stated that expectations of marriage change with cultural and societal norms and with advances in gender equity. The author further stated that women’s increased participation in the ‘public sphere’ obliged men to take on new roles and challenges in personal relationships. This explains why marriage preparation service providers now include it as a topic in their courses.

4.6 Sub theme 6 - Preserving fun in the marriage

All participants related that they remember being taught about preserving fun in the marriage. Participant 02 called it the topic of ‘rekindling the fire of love’ in the marriage. Their narratives stated that there is need to frequently reconnect to enjoy the marriage and avoid boredom. Thirteen participants identified going out for dinner/movie as a couple as a way of enhancing fun in the marriage whereas participant 10 added buying each other gifts of appreciation as another way. Participant 15 identified making sex fun as a way of rekindling the fire of love in a marriage. These were her words:

“Yes she said we must enjoy each other’s company, we must make sex enjoyable in marriage and we must also go out and maybe have dinner and watch a movie just the two of us” (Participant 15, 2013: Interview).

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Markman et al., (2006) concurs that one of the role of marriage preparation counsellors is to maintain the key concepts of marital satisfaction and stability. They stated that counsellors teach their clients to strengthen positive connections by enhancing and protecting friendship and fun in the marriage.

4.7 Sub theme 7 - Decision making

Participant 05, 07, 11 and 15 stated that they were taught that decisions are made together as a couple in marriages. Their narratives made it clear that if decisions are taken by an individual without consulting one another, conflicts are likely to occur. They revealed that when a person gets married, he is tied to the partner and they become one, therefore there is no room for making decision as an individual or with other people who are not your partner. This is what participant 11 had to say:

“She said once we get married we are one, we make decisions together after discussing and agreeing. There is no partner who is supposed to make decisions with his parents, family or friends and then come and impose on the other because that might cause us to fight”
(Participant 11, 2013: Interview).

Ruppel and Curran (2012) concurs that married couples have several decisions to make in the course of their everyday life. The authors stated that individuals inevitably encounter conflicts of interest within their marriages when making these decisions. The decision making might occur on a small scale, such as deciding what to eat for dinner or on a large scale, such as deciding where to live as a couple. Marriage preparation counsellors educate their clients on how to make decisions together to avoid unhealthy disagreements on decision making.

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4.8 Sub theme 8 - Total disclosure

Participant 02, 03 and 14 mentioned that they were taught about total disclosure. They were taught that it is very important to disclose who you are to your partner before you get married. Their explanations made it clear that people enter into marriage with history, either good or bad, with some of it having a chance to affect the marriage negatively or positively. Participant 14 added that total disclosure of whatever has happened before marriage will allow the other partner to enter marriage willingly and prepared of what is coming. She also explained that it is this total disclosure that will help couples to build a marriage that is based on trust. This is what she had to say:

“He also said that a good marriage starts with a total disclosure of who you are to your partner. He said for us to be able to build a marriage that is based on trust; we must not hide our history or anything to our partners. He said people enter into marriage with bad and good history and some of it might have an effect on the marriage. He gave an example of a man who had a child with someone in his teenage years. He said if this is not disclosed to the other partner before marriage, conflict is likely to occur as soon as the partner finds out the truth. Hence he was saying my partner must know exactly who I am and my history so that he enters the marriage knowing” (Participant 14, 2013: Interview).

Aholou et al., (2009) is of the view that healthy people are able to disclose information about themselves to an optimal degree to at least one significant other. The authors considered the self-disclosure process to be critical to the development of intimate relationships, and self-disclosure has been linked to marital satisfaction. Most marriage preparation programs consider disclosure as a way to develop and maintain intimacy in relationships. Couples disclose their history, personal desires, anxieties and emotions. This is said to be important for the development of intimacy because such disclosure provides an opportunity for partners to affirm and demonstrate that they care for, support, and accept one another.

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4.9 Sub theme 9 - Marriage readiness

Participant 01, 04 and 08 related that their marriage preparation program started with a topic on marriage readiness. Participant 01 and 04 stated that their pastor gave them a set of questions to assess them on whether they are ready for marriage or not whereas participant 08 stated that hers also included a discussion of expectations that she had on the marriage. Their narratives elaborated on the following points: why an individual wants to get married, why you specifically chose your partner not others and expectations of an individual in a marriage. They stated that these concepts helped their counsellors to assess and help them as individuals to know if they are ready for marriage.

“The question that I remember very well was that of why I want to marry my partner. He asked us to think carefully of the reasons why I am choosing to be married to my partner. We further discussed about what our expectations in the marriage” (Participant 08, 2013: Interview).

Aholou et al., (2009) States that one of the goals of premarital counselling is to help partners examine, confirm or alter their decision to marry a particular person at a particular time. Premarital counsellors help couples make informed decisions about their commitment to marry. Alexander (2008) concurs that people typically enter their romantic relationships with standards or pre-existing beliefs about what makes a ‘good’ relationship. The author defines relationship standards as the beliefs or criteria people hold about the qualities relationships should have. He further stated that if these beliefs or standards are not altered, they have a chance to affect the

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marriage negatively. For this reason, marriage preparation counsellors need to assess their client's readiness for marriage.

4.10 *Sub theme 10 - Bedroom and sex*

Participant 02, 07, 11 and 15 narrated that they learned how to enjoy sex as well as making the bedroom a suitable environment for making love. They learned that sex is to be enjoyed and it is not to be done as a routine. Participant 07, 11 and 15 stated that decorating the bedroom and changing linen frequently is one of the ways to make it a suitable room for enjoying sex. Participant 02 stated that sex should not be used as a weapon to punish another partner if he/she does something wrong. In addition, he said that actions of good romance such as kissing, touching, cuddling and so on, prepare a way for satisfactory sex. This is what he said:

“She also taught us about sex, she said sex is important in the marriage she said we must not deny each other sex because we want to punish each other. She also said for us to enjoy our sex, we must touch each other and kiss, in fact do everything in your power to make sure that your partner is satisfied” (Participant 02, 2013: Interview).

Many premarital programs address sexuality in terms of the couple's present and future ability to communicate their sexual needs and expectations. They noted that married couples engage in sexual activity for bonding, recreation, and reproductive purposes. They further stated that couples usually enter into marriage with the conventional expectation of a happy and fulfilling sex life. The authors therefore believe that sexuality and sexual health should also be included as a crucial topic for discussion in premarital counselling (Aholou et al., 2009).

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4.11 *Sub theme 11 - Commitment*

Since participants reported that they received their marriage preparation course from religious leaders, their main explanation of this topic was biblical: based on the importance of keeping marriage vows. Participant 06, 07, 13, and 15 stated that wedding vows have to be honoured because marriage is an institution ordained and approved by God. They were taught that vows are only made not only before men but before God as well; therefore breaking them will not please God. In addition their narratives revealed that their providers emphasized that they should make efforts to make sure that they put their marriage first and everything else will follow. These participants said it is because of this that they treasure, honour and respect their marriage vows:

“The first thing that she said we must remember is that God loves marriages, he respects it and he does not love divorce. So she said we must honour and respect our marriage because the vows that we did were not only to men but to God. When he joins you together it is wrong in his sight to divorce” (Participant 13, 2013: Interview).

Commitment can be defined as an implicit attitude that motivates an individual to act in ways that maintain and improve relationship quality. A strong attitude of commitment will encourage behaviours that maintain relationship stability regardless of an individual’s particular feelings at a given point in time. Christian marriages are bound by the word of God which states that “two shall become one” (Mark 10:7). Although Christian spouses undergo the same experiences as non-Christians, they are expected to pass their married lives through a tradition that views marriage as a sanctified covenant. It is this covenant of marriage, a commitment in trust, based on mutual respect and affection, leading to cooperation and communion lays a basis

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in which individuals find life fulfilled and completed only in sharing and blending it with others (Ponzetti & Mutch, 2006).

5. THEME TWO: TOPICS EXCLUDED IN THE MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM

Question: Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you feel your counsellor should have included it?

The above question was asked with the aim of drawing out information that would help marriage preparation service providers to come up with a standard marriage preparation program that would include all important topics. It also answered one of the research questions, which was to find out which preventative and treatment strategies can service providers employ in their marriage preparation programs. Since the participants did not receive their marriage preparation program from the same service providers, there were differences in the content of the programs. The participants used their experiences to give answers on topics that were not included in their programs yet they felt it could have helped them in their marriages. Seven participants stated that their marriage preparation course was perfect and they could not think of any topic which was supposed to be added. According to the narratives of the participants, the following sub themes emerged as topic that were not included in some of the programs, yet the participants felt they were necessary:

- Sex
- Individual sessions
- Parenting

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5.1 Sub theme 1 - Sex

Six participants stated that their own courses were helpful but they could have been more helpful if their counsellors had included the topic on how to enjoy sex in the marriage. They revealed that their counsellors seemed to be reluctant to educate them about sex probably because they assumed it is a well-known topic. However these participants feel that it was supposed to be included because they believe that issues around sex in marriage can cause conflict that can strain the marriage:

“....it is very important because sometimes you find that your wife is acting just like your brother when you are trying to make love. Not that I'm perfect on those issues but I feel we both needed some lessons on that. Sex is one of the important things in marriage and if it's not exciting it causes infidelity which will lead to divorce” (Participant 01, 2013: Interview).

“I wanted more about sex in marriage. Not that I don't know how to have sex but sex in marriage and the sex that we used to have once a while before marriage is different and there is a probability of being fed up with it in marriage because you get it whenever you want it, so I wanted to know how to make it enjoyable in marriage” (Participant 13,2013: Interview).

The participants' narratives are in line with the view that couples typically expect that sexuality will be discussed during premarital counselling. In fact, it has been found that both clergy and couples are likely to place little emphasis on sexuality (Aholou et al., 2009).

5.2 Sub theme 2 - Individual sessions

Two participants stated that they would be happy if the lessons included individual sessions that dealt with their past issues as individuals. They revealed that they attended their marriage preparation sessions as couples yet they preferred some individual sessions to deal with some of their unresolved issues that concern them as individuals. Participant 01 revealed that before he entered into marriage, he had gone through a terrible heartbreak which he felt he

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needed to be dealt with individually before he engaged into couple sessions. Participant 14 revealed that she and her husband were coming from different backgrounds. She revealed that she had family of origin issues which included divorce of parents amongst other things. She stated that she also wanted individual sessions to address those matters before getting in couple sessions. This is what participant 01 said:

“I also wanted him to have some sessions with me as an individual since I had a lot of unresolved issues from my previous relationship. I desired to be counselled as an individual first but unfortunately they were couple sessions” (Participant 01, 2013: Interview).

“I would want him to include individual sessions because there are some challenges that need to be dealt with individually. We can do sessions the two of us yes but remember we are not at the same level of understanding marriage and our backgrounds are different” (Participant 14, 2013: Interview).

A marriage can only be as healthy as the least healthy person in it. If one person in the relationship is putting an effort to work on their issues while the other is unmotivated to overcome any challenge or to build the marriage; then the marriage can suffer. The maturity of one partner's personhood determines, in great part, the quality of the couple's love life. More important than what they will do is who they are in the marriage. If two people are motivated, growing and helping each other they sharpen each other in building their marriage (Parrott & Parrot, 2003).

5.3 Sub theme 3 - Parenting

Participant 01 stated that their marriage preparation course would have been more helpful if their counsellors had included a topic on parenting. The narrative revealed that marriages have

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a lot of responsibilities which demands equal attention and parenting is one of them. He stated that they are struggling with parenting issues in their marriage and he feels that it had been better if their counsellors had given them some parenting skills. This is what he had to say:

“I wanted him to say something on parenting issues because we are really struggling to balance between parenting and all other responsibilities in the house” (Participant 01, 2013: Interview).

6. THEME THREE: PERCEIVED ROLE OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Question: looking at your marital experiences, what would you regard as the role of the marriage preparation programme you attended?

When participants were asked about what they regard as the role of the marriage preparation course they attended, they came up with different opinions. Participants reflected on their experiences and explained on what they perceived to be the role of marriage preparation programs. It is because of this reason that the researcher found it impossible to separate the participants' experience and perceived role of marriage preparation programs. This theme gave answers to one of the research questions which were to find out the marital experiences of individuals after attending the marriage preparation course. It also gave answers to the main aim of the research which was to find out the role of marriage preparation programs as perceived by participants. It is important to note that the researcher did not seek to investigate the marriage preparation program itself but rather perceptions of those who attended it on its role. Table 6 shows the sub themes that emerged from their narratives.

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Table 6
Perceived role of marriage preparation programs

Sub themes
Improves good communication skills
Helps in managing finances
Helps dealing with some cultural beliefs that might affect the marriage negatively
Alerts individuals about potential marital challenges
Encourages seeking help from professional counsellors
Provides some of the ways to deal with marital problems
Improves marital commitment
Helps in marriage readiness

6.1 Sub theme 1 - Improves communication skills

Fourteen participants related that the marriage preparation course they attended improved their communication skills. They reflected on incidents where they used those communication skills in problem solving and it worked for them. They stated that when they encounter disagreements /conflicts in their marriage, they often remember the communication skills they were taught and use them. They explained that these communication skills usually prevent minor problems from escalating to a worse level. This is what participant 01 had to say:

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“I remember there was a time when I came very late from work; I did not call my wife earlier to tell her that I had car problems. Hey...when I arrived home she was still awake and very angry. I remembered that I was supposed to communicate. I sat down, acknowledged that I was wrong and asked for forgiveness. The moment I did that I could see it calmed her down because I did not shout back” (Participant 01, 2013: Interview).

In addition participant 08 and 11 said looking at their experiences they do not only use communication skills when problem comes but also to exchange feelings of affection for their spouses as taught in the marriage preparation course. Participant 08 stated she usually buys gifts as a token of appreciation to her husband while participant 11 explains that non-verbal communication of knowing her partner’s love language of preference plays a role in drawing them closer together.

“.....Well I loved the topic because from that exercise I decided to know my partner’s love language. I know that he enjoys some massage and cuddling and whenever I do that I just can’t keep him out of bed. It’s just a way of communicating that keeps the fire of love burning” (Participant 11, 2013: Interview).

Knutson and Olson (2003) conducted research on client satisfaction in marriage. They found out that couples who attended a marriage preparation course were happily married because of better communication and conflict resolution skills. They further stated that active listening skills are critical for marital success, and that couples value learning better communication skills because it results in higher levels of couple flexibility and closeness. In their analysis of one of the marriage preparation programs in the United States, the relationship evaluation (RELATE). It was concluded that couples who attended a marriage preparation course reported a greater

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understanding of the need for good communication in their relationship. Even those ones with few problems still acknowledged the value of discussing issues that arise in their marriages.

6.2 Sub theme 2 - Helps managing finances

Thirteen participants' narratives revealed that their marriage preparation course contributed to their ability to manage their finances. Participants 02, 05 and 07 stated that they are both working with their partners and they come together at the end of the month and do their budget together and agree on items to buy. Participant 04, 05, 06, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15 related that they are not employed, their husbands are but they are happy that they take part in handling finances. Participant 01, 09 and 13 stated that even though their wives are not employed, they do not regard their salary as their own alone but for the family. They said they are transparent about how much they earn and their wives take part in deciding the items to be bought as well as the amount to save per month. This is what they had to say:

“.....I bring the pay slip to my wife, she does the same, and we add together and then agree on things to buy and on how much to save per month. If we don't agree on buying the same thing we just look at the amount of money we have and let it decide for us” (Participant 02, 2013: Interview).

“Because I am self-employed, I have taxis that bring cash every day, when that cash comes in at night we agree on how much to take according to the needs in the house and then the other amount we put in the bank. My wife is unemployed but she is equally involved in running the business; she is the one who does banking of the savings” (Participant 13, 2013: Interview).

In addition participant 11 explained that they quite understood the concept of not buying all items on credit and they have no problem implementing it. She said that they have made an agreement with her husband to buy a less expensive car on account only. She further added that

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the rest of their property they rather buy them on lay bye or cash when they can afford them. Her narrative outlined that this decision helped them to stay out of the problem of debt. This is what she had to say:

“We made a decision with my husband that we are only going to buy a car on account and the rest we buy with cash or lay-by if we afford. Because of that decision, for the past 3 years we never had a problem associated with debt” (Participant 11, 2013: Interview).

6.3 Sub theme 3 - Helps in unlearning some cultural behaviours that might affect the marriage negatively

The research only included 4 male participants. All of them stated that they were raised in a society where culture divides labour in terms of gender. They admitted that they are still experiencing some challenges in sharing responsibilities at home, especially when it comes to doing house chores. However their narratives revealed that because of the marriage preparation course they attended, they know it is important to do it, they are trying and it is getting better with time. This is what participant 09 had to say:

“It was very helpful because I grew up in a family where those things are mostly done by women while men are sitting but even though it’s difficult for me I try to help my wife with the house chores here and there...I will eventually get there (laughing)” (Participant 09, 2013: Interview).

Participant 02 stated that it is not only the issue of doing house chores that he grew up regarding as women’s work. He further added that he was groomed in a culture where men are the providers in the family. He stated that he is working together with his wife as packers in a factory. After some months in marriage his wife was promoted to another department and started

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to earn more than him. He acknowledges that if he did not learn about sharing responsibilities, this experience was going to stress him since it contradicted with his cultural beliefs. This is what he said:

“It really helped me because I grew up in a society where men are the providers in the house. Three months after our marriage my wife got promoted and her salary became more than mine. Had it been not for those lessons it was going to disturb me a lot but I am fine because I understand that she is able, just like me” (Participant 02, 2013: Interview).

In addition, participant 13 stated that he used to believe that men are the only ones responsible for making major decisions that concerns their families. He related that he grew up in a society where women are not included in making major decisions in the family or community. He said that he saw it as normal since the women in the rural areas where he grew up never raised a complaint about it. However, he further explained that his marriage preparation course helped him to realise that it is important to include his wife in making decisions and he is able to regard her as an equal partner in making decisions that concerns the family:

“He also helped me to change my mind set about some things that we grew up believing and doing which not good for our marriages. I grew up in the rural areas of Mthatha and we knew that when we call important family or community meetings, women were not allowed to take part. It is after this marriage preparation course that I realized that it is actually not fair to exclude your wife in making major decisions and that it may eventually cause conflict. I really learnt a lot about that and I try by all means to include my wife in every major decision that concerns our family” (Participant 13, 2013: Interview).

In the past years, marriage concerned nurturing children and sustaining stability within the family. Gender roles were clearly organized: men were breadwinners in the public sphere; women were wives and mothers in the private sphere. However, marriage is now regarded a

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symbol of romantic love, involving the quality of a relationship between a man and a woman (Van Acker, 2003). Carroll and Doherty (2003), in their attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of marriage preparation programs revealed that those who participated decreased in their irrational beliefs about relationships and increased in their commitment to marriage.

6.4 Sub theme 4 - Alerts and prepares individuals on possible challenges to be met in marriage

Participants 09, 11, 14 and 15 revealed that before they attended their marriage preparation course, they regarded marriage as a problem free institution, where they were going to enjoy each other's company to the fullest without being stressed by challenges. However they explained that attending a marriage preparation course helped them to be aware of and prepare for problems that might come. They stated that they have experienced some of the problems that they were warned about in the marriage preparation course and it really helped them that they were warned against these possible challenges:

"....this really helped me because I think I was one of those people who were not even aware of these possible marital challenges, I just thought it will be just the two of us enjoying life without any challenge" (Participant 09, 2013: Interview).

"It helped me because that time I was clueless, I had no idea that married people face challenges that may be financial, bareness, sickness of partner or child, negative interference from relatives and so on, it was going to be a disaster for these problems to ambush me without knowing" (Participant 14, 2013: Interview).

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Larson et al., (2002) conducted research on the evaluation of the effectiveness of marriage preparation programs. They found out that couples who attended a marriage preparation course had increased an awareness of potential problem areas in the relationship.

In addition, their narratives revealed that it is this preparation they were given that made them get through the challenges they faced without giving up on their marriages. Participants 02, 05, 08, 12 and 15 stated that they had a problem of interference from the in-laws which they never expected to be terrible like that before they attended the marriage preparation course. The problems involving their in-laws included demanding financial support and interfering in making decisions. Participants 01, 04, 06 and 13 revealed that they encountered minor disagreements between them and their partners. The minor disagreements mentioned in the participants' experiences included issues around coming home late, parenting issues, spending more time with friends that at home, forgetting a partner birthday and so on. However they stated that they managed to resolve them through communication as taught in their marriage preparation course. This is what they had to say:

".... my in laws and his sisters because they usually demand money from my husband and yet we don't have that much, or sometimes they want to tell me how I should do things in my house...we communicated and agreed that we will only assist them if we can afford and if both of us agree. We also had a meeting with them and discussed the matter with them until they eventually understood our points" (Participant 08, 2013: Interview).

"I can't say we have encountered major problems as such but just disagreements, usually we disagree on ways to parent our daughter but so far we have managed to sit down, talk about it and solve them" (Participant 04, 2013: Interview).

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Relationships bring a unique set of challenges and marriage preparation programs provide coping strategies to reduce stress. If coping strategies are not available; some people end up choosing to stay in stressful relationships even after challenges (Hawkins et al., 2004). Carroll and Doherty (2003), in their research found out that individuals who participated in a marriage preparation course were more ready to deal with sensitive conflict areas and had increase in positive conflict resolution and lower conflict incidence in their marriages. Knutson and Olson (2003) stated that marriage preparation programs focuses on prevention because they provide couples with core skills and concepts for handling the inevitable issues and problems of married life before they arise.

6.5 Sub theme 5 - Encourages seeking help from professional counsellors

Participants 11, 12 and 15 stated that their preparation courses encouraged them to seek help from professional counsellors when they failed to solve their problems on their own. The counsellors mentioned in their narratives included social workers, trained counsellors and pastors. Participant 11 stated that when he encountered a problem of bareness, her marriage was about to break down since they were both taking strain. In addition, she revealed that though they were taught about solving problems through communication, it did not work when they encountered this problem. She explained that these professional counsellors helped them to deal with this problem and their marriage was preserved:

“Communication between just the two of us did not help because we were both devastated. When I saw that we were falling apart, I spoke to my wife and we went to FAMSA to look for counselling and it helped us to get through it” (Participant 11, 2013: Interview).

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One of the potential benefits of premarital counselling efforts is that couples can learn that there are others who can help them or refer them to help if they experience difficulties later in their relationship (Bruhn & Hill, 2004). Blair and Cordova (2009) found out that most couples, who did not go for marriage preparation course, usually divorce without seeking professional help or consulting a mental health professional. They further stated that participating in a marriage preparation program helps couples to access a broader support system in dealing with marriage problems and maintaining marital satisfaction.

Carroll and Doherty (2003) found out that premarital couples who receive counselling may be more willing to seek later therapy because the premarital preparation experience would increase their awareness of the challenges of early marriage. Duncan et al., (2010) stated that attending marriage preparation courses improves their familiarity with therapeutic resources, and increase their awareness of danger signals in their marriage that would suggest the need for additional support, including professional therapy. They further revealed that couples with premarital counselling experience might seek marital therapy more quickly, at lower levels of distress or instability than couples without premarital counselling. Seeking marital therapy early, before relationship problems escalate, is important because therapy is more likely to be effective the earlier it is undertaken.

6.6 Sub theme 6 - Increase the awareness of self, partner and the relationship

Participant 02, 05 and 06 revealed that marriage preparation programs helped them to be ready for marriage through increasing their knowledge of themselves as individuals, their partner as well as their relationship. Their narratives showed that knowing oneself as well as knowing

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the partner helps in identifying their strengths and weaknesses. This will help them to find ways to protect their strengths and work on their weaknesses before it's too late:

The discussions in the couple sessions allowed me to bring up topics that we were never going to talk about when we were alone, it gave me the satisfaction that I surely know myself, my partner and the relationship we are in (Participant 05, 2013: Interview).

In line with this, Larson et al., (2002) found out that couples who attended marriage preparation programs were able to increase their awareness of self and their partner. They further stated that these couples were able to know potential future problem areas. Marriage preparation helped them to discover some issues in their past that they have not fully dealt with. In addition, knowing their partner allowed them to be aware of their differences and similarities and how these might affect their relationship. They were also able to know the history of their current relationship.

6.7 Sub theme 7 - Improves marital commitment

Three participants believed that the marriage preparation courses they attended increased their level of commitment to their marriages. They revealed that before they attended the marriage preparation course, they regarded their marriage as important but after attending the marriage preparation course they realized how important it is to fully commit to one's marriage to make it work and to avoid unnecessary conflicts that can strain the marriage. Participant 06 revealed that learning about commitment increased his efforts to make his marriage better every day while participant 07 and 13 said that they remember the importance of the commitment they made at the altar (their vows) when they feel like the marital problems are overwhelming them.

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In other words the power of commitment helps them to soldier on not to look back in difficult times of their marriages:

“Whenever I feel like the challenges are too much, I remember that I have a responsibility to put an effort and make it work because I made vows before men and God” (Participant 13, 2013: Interview).

Blair and Cordova (2009) are of the view that commitment is one of the most common topics mostly covered in marriage preparation programs. They defined commitment as an attitude that encourages behaviours that serve to maintain and improve relationship quality. These behaviours are also sometimes called relational maintenance behaviours. They are of the belief that marital commitment is composed of a very important type of commitment termed personal dedication commitment. This type of commitment is the desire of an individual to maintain or improve the quality of his or her relationship for the joint benefit of the relationship. This level of commitment helps the married couple to stay strong for the sake of their relationship in times of challenges.

6.8 Sub theme 8 - Assist individuals to be ready for marriage

Participant 01 and 04 revealed that attending a marriage preparation course made them ready for marriage. Interesting to note is that before they attended the course, they thought they were ready, however they stated that after finishing the course that’s when they realized they were never ready. Their narratives pointed that when they thought of getting into marriage, they never questioned themselves whether they were really ready or not but after their providers taught them about being ready for marriage, they realized it required a lot of work to be ready for

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marriage. They stated that discussing issues around why one wants to get married, why you chose your partner and what you expect in the marriage opened their eyes to see exactly what they are getting into. This is what one of them said:

“.....honestly after attending the marriage preparation course that’s when I saw that even though I thought I was ready, I was never ready, it those questions and discussions helped me to assess myself on readiness for marriage and be actually ready for the marriage(Participant 01, 2013: Interview)”.

Marriage preparation programs assist couples or individuals to be ready for marriage. Alexander (2008) revealed that the pre-existing beliefs and standards which people enter their romantic relationships with are not always rational. These relationship standards are defined as the beliefs or criteria people hold about the qualities relationships should have. Standards include a partner’s preconceptions of what relationships should be like, what makes them satisfying and rewarding and what behaviours should be avoided. Marriage preparation counsellors assist their clients in re-evaluating their expectations of what marriage should be like and alter them to something that is more real and practical.

7. THEME FOUR: TOPICS PERCEIVED AS DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT

Question: Looking at your marital experiences, which topics were difficult for you to put into practice?

The main aim of the research was to find out the role of marriage preparation programs as perceived by these participants. The researcher had to fulfil this aim through getting deeper into

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the participants' experiences in the marriage. The question also helped fulfilling one of the research objectives; to find out the empowerment needs of these individuals. It is true that participants had learnt about various topics in their marriage preparation courses but attending does not guarantee that the participants were finding it easy to implement these lessons in their marriages. It is in the light of this view that the researcher decided to ask a question on the difficulties these individuals are facing in implementing whatever lessons they learnt. The participants revealed that they had difficulties in implementing four topics which are; enhancing fun in the marriage, sharing responsibilities, adjustment and budgeting and saving. However it is important to note that acknowledging having difficulties in implementing these topics does not necessarily rule out the effectiveness of these lessons in the individual's marriages. The participants indicated that though they have challenges in implementing these topics, they are trying their best. The following topics emerged as sub themes:

- Enhancing fun
- Adjustment
- Sharing responsibilities
- Budgeting and saving

7.1 Sub theme 1 - Enhancing fun

Though all participants stated that they remembered learning about enhancing fun in their marriage, all of them revealed that it was not easy for them to maintain the standard of rekindling the fire of love as taught by their counsellors. When asked about whether the fun is still the same as the one they used to have before marriage, they all said the level of having fun has deteriorated. Nine participants stated that they try by all means to enhance fun in their marriages

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but they are really struggling so they end up doing it once in a while. When asked about the reason why they are struggling, these participants cantered their blame on children and parenting. They stated that the moment they became parents, it became difficult to have fun as a couple since the kids are demanding much attention. They also stated that besides demanding attention, most of them do not have house maids to leave the kids with when they decide to go out so they end up being stuck with the children all the time:

“...you see now we have 2 children and they need attention and this boy is only months old, and I don't have a nanny. It is very difficult to have fun as husband and wife” (Participant 05, 2013: Interview).

“...because the child usually starts crying when I am trying to be romantic to my wife so my wife has to leave me and attend to the child..” (Participant 01, 2013: Interview).

“...we used to go out a lot before I gave birth to my first born but now it's difficult, its really not the same anymore” (Participant 12, 2013: Interview).

Participant 03 and 11 concurred that the topic of enhancing fun is difficult to implement as taught. Participant 11 said that they try to go out as couples but the level of fun in their marriage has decreased. Participant 03 revealed that the fun is not even there anymore. In addition, these two feels that the reason why the fun has decreased is because they are now ‘used’ to each other maybe to the extent that they don’t see anything that can spark the fun:

“... He did teach us about that but no fire burning at all and no friendship at all... I just think we are used to each other” (Participant 03, 2013: Interview).

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Participant 14 also revealed that the topic of enhancing fun is difficult for her to implement. She said that she is a student at a local university and she spends most of her time doing school work which makes it difficult for them to go out and have fun:

“...Yes it was helpful but because of pressure of work on my husband side and studies from my side we don't go out often” (Participant 14, 2013: Interview).

Participant 07 also said the topic is difficult to put into practice. When asked why it is difficult, she explained that she does not earn much therefore there is not much to spend on having fun:

“We try to do that but I'm just a receptionist and with the shortage of funds and these two children we just do it once in a blue moon” (Participant 07, 2013: Interview).

Participant 08 and 10 stated that they are also struggling with implementing the topic of enhancing fun in their marriages. When asked about the reason why they feel that their level of having fun is deteriorating, they said they do not know. These participants acknowledged that the fun in their marriages is not the same as before they got married but surprisingly they do not know why. This is what they had to say:

“...I always remind my husband to have some fun just the two of us and its exciting but it's no longer the same and I guess I don't know why” (Participant 08, 2013: Interview).

“I really don't know the reason but I just know that it's no longer the same anymore. I don't know.....really” (Participant 10, 2013: Interview).

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7.2 Sub theme 2 - Adjustment

All participants stated that their counsellors taught lessons on how to adjust from single to married life. They revealed that they were taught that a person who is married must detach from previous attachment such as parents, siblings and friends and make a stronger bond with the partner that is above all other bonds. All participants did not struggle to detach from friends or siblings. However 11 participants felt that the part of detaching from parents is a difficult topic to put into practice in their marriages. The problem that they face in their marriage around this issue is usually when their parents feel that it is in their right to be included in decision making or to be given financial assistance.

“...we once had an argument when my wife’s parents were always interfered with our decisions. They want to know everything, they demand money...I mean we need space, it was like they still want to dominate her life like they used to do before she was married” (Participant 02, 2013: Interview).

“...it is a very difficult situation mostly because my parents usually ask money from me and they will not expect a ‘no’...” (Participant 04, 2013: Interview).

“I didn’t have any problems from adjusting from friends but I did have challenges with my mother because I think the early days of my marriage she was really a thorn. She would want to be involved in every decision and step I take with my wife and that really stressed my wife (Participant 14, 2013: Interview).

7.3 Sub theme 3 - Sharing responsibilities

In explaining what they were taught about sharing responsibilities, participant 01, 02, 09 and 13 revealed that the topic of sharing responsibilities was difficult to implement in their marriages. Since these four participants’ were men, much of their problems were around issues

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of engaging in house chores. They grew up in African societies where roles and responsibilities were divided according to gender. They stated that it is difficult for them to start doing house chores that they have never done before when they grew up. Though they stated that they are trying to do it, they were also honest to say that it will take them time to get used to the idea:

“...hey I don’t want to lie, he did teach us but it is difficult for me to do those things, he told us that we must help each other in the house, I am really trying but most of the time it is my wife doing those things...” (Participant 01, 2013: Interview).

7.4 Sub theme 4 - Budgeting and saving

Only participant 03 reported that she is having difficulties in implementing the topic of budgeting and saving. She stated that she comes from a poor background and the husband comes from a very rich family and she claims that the husband does not understand when her parents ask for money because his own do not ask for it. This ends up putting her in a situation where she sends money to the family secretly:

“We do sometimes agree on what to buy but to be honest we don’t put all our money together mostly because of the difference of background, I would want some to send to my family secretly because if I try to do it openly he won’t understand since his family is rich” (Participant 03,2013: Interview).

8. THEME FIVE: TOPICS PERCEIVED AS MOST IMPORTANT

Question: Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

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The answers to this question can be used by marriage preparation service providers in detecting which topic to put more focus on in their programs and why. Since the participants could not separate their answers from their experiences, this will also help counsellors to know what their clients go through after attending marriage course and see how they can intervene in follow-up sessions. The question was not designed to render other topics useless but to know what is really regarded as the most crucial topic and the reasons behind it. Hence many participants had more than one topic to regard as most important but they were asked to choose only one. The sub themes that came out of this question were 4 topics which are:

- Problem solving
- communication
- Total disclosure
- Marriage readiness.

Table 6
Participants and the topic they perceive as most important

PARTICIPANT	TOPIC PERCEIVED AS MOST IMPORTANT
Participant 02	Problem solving
Participant 05	Problem solving
Participant 07	Problem solving
Participant 09	Problem solving
Participant 11	Problem solving
Participant 13	Problem solving
Participant 15	Problem solving
Participant 06	Communication
Participant 08	Communication
Participant 10	Communication
Participant 12	Communication
Participant 01	Marriage readiness

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8.1 Sub theme 1 - Problem Solving

Of the 15 participants, 8 of them regarded problem solving as the most important topic in marriage preparation. These participants related that marriage is an institution which is not free from problems; they stated that married couples face different kinds of challenges whether small or big and these usually cause stress that can strain the marriage. Though they did not face the same types of challenges, they all concurred that they had faced some and they are still facing some. They acknowledged that learning about problem solving skills enables them to use those skills to find a solution to their challenges or conflicts and move on without giving up. In addition, they revealed that a problem/challenge that is solved successfully in the marriage makes their marriages even stronger after conquering it:

“...because these problems are always, running away is not an option. We have been through a lot in our marriage but the problem solving skills we learnt help us not to give up” (Participant 02, 2013: Interview).

“...because there in every marriage there will be challenges and we really needed to know how to solve them. After you have overcome a challenge your marriage you get that satisfaction that says your marriage is solid. Solving problems without straining the marriage makes your marriage even stronger than before” (Participant 13, 2013: Interview).

8.2 Sub theme 2 - Communication

Four participants considered communication to be the most important topic in their marriage preparation course. They stated that good communication skills help them to solve problems and to resolve their conflicts without hurting each other's feelings. Their narratives revealed that they had situations where communication helped them to sort out conflicts and differences between them and their partners. They also stated that communication did not only

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help them in resolving conflicts but allows them to express their feelings of affection to each other which helps in keeping the love burning in their marriages:

“Yes we do have problems sometimes and we usually fight mainly because of my husband family. Sometimes he just goes there and brings them here without warning me that he is coming with visitors. I communicated with him and told him that I don’t like it and it has to stop. So we managed to agree that if he wants them to come he must communicate with me first then we agree. So we usually solve our conflicts through sitting down and talking about it until we understand each other” (Participant 05,2013: Interview).

“...because it allows me to speak freely about how we feel, how much I love him and also to be able to sit down together and sort out our disagreements without shouting at each other” (Participant 06, 2013: Interview).

“...good communication because it helps me and my husband to solve problems without hurting each other’s feelings” (Participant 08, 2013: Interview).

8.3 Sub theme 3 - Total disclosure

Participant 03 and 04 regarded a topic of total disclosure as the most important in their marriage. Participant 03 revealed that her partner opened up and told her about the secrets that he had been keeping before attending the marriage preparation course. She said that if she had found out on her own that would be the end of the marriage. This lesson helped them to be open to each other about their past and started building their marriage on trust. She also added that this act of being honest continued until present day and it makes their marriage enjoyable. This is what she had to say:

“...total disclosure because everything in marriage revolves around being honest. If there is no honesty in a marriage then there will be no trust and it causes a lot of problems, for me that topic helped my husband to open up and tell me his past. If I had found out later on my own I

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don't think I was going to stay in the marriage. We now made honesty a habit and it just work for us" (Participant 03, 2013: Interview).

"... if there is no disclosure there will not be trust, and it is difficult to enjoy marriage without trust" (Participant 04,2013: Interview)

8.4 Sub theme 4 - Marriage readiness

Only one participant regarded the topic of marriage readiness as the most important of all. Participant 01 revealed that he values that topic more because attending a marriage preparation course made him realise that he only thought he was ready but in the actual fact he was not. He said that because of all the stress he had gone through in his previous relationship, it was never good to start a marriage without being ready. He said the lesson allowed him to reflect on himself as an individual and make sure he is ready for the marriage he was getting into. This is what he had to say:

"Hey the one about marriage readiness, I must say that this topic I loved it because I had a lot of history from my previous relationship. It allowed me to think back and leave the past in order to be ready for the new commitment that I was about to make. It is when I finished the lessons then I realized that I always thought I am ready for marriage but I wasn't. The lesson helped me to be ready" (Participant 01, 2013: Interview).

9. THEME SIX: PERCEPTIONS ON DIVORCE PREVENTION

Question: In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended good enough to prevent divorce and why?

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The social problem that inspired the researcher to conduct a research on marriage preparation programs is the high rate of divorce and marital distress. This was asked by the researcher to assist in finding whether marriage preparation programs play a part in preventing divorce. However it is important to note that the answer to this question was based on what the participants perceive as the role of these programs in divorce prevention. According to these participants there are three things facilitated by marriage preparation programs that makes an individual/couple not to consider divorce as an option when things go wrong in their marriages. These are:

- Knowing potential marital problems before encountering them
- Availability of problem solving skills
- Emphasizing the value of marriage commitment
- Considering love as the primary reason for getting into marriage

9.1 Sub Theme 1 - Knowing potential marital problems before encountering them

Eight participants regarded their marriage preparation courses as helpful in preventing divorce. Their main reason was centred on how the courses alert couples on possible challenges that are usually met in marriage. They also stated that when people meet marital challenges after being warned and equipped in the marriage preparation course, it reduces the shock that comes with making irrational decisions such as separation or divorce:

“...because as for me, I never imagined facing any challenge in the marriage I was only thinking of positive things, which is good but the reality is problems will always be there. Being informed of potential problems that you might encounter reduces the level of shock when you meet them. And it really helped because it is this shock that usually causes people to panic and divorce

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didn't know how to go about it but we only knew how to handle it when pastor taught us” (Participant 02, 2013: Interview).

“.....if I had gone into marriage with those foolish expectations and then find something different, there was a high chance of me quitting if things get tough, so they do help people to prepare and not give up when the going gets tough” (Participant 08, 2013: Interview).

9.2 Sub theme 2 - Availability of problem solving skills

Five participants perceive divorce to be caused by lack of problem solving skills. According to them, divorce is usually considered when individuals feel that they are overwhelmed by marital challenges and they cannot do anything to make it work. They stated that marriage has challenges that bring stress but marriage preparation programs provide problem solving skills such as good communication and seeking professional help. This helps them to solve their marital problems/challenges or disagreements and not let them escalate to divorce:

“Yes I think they do because usually people divorce because they feel that the problems are too much but if you have learnt something about how to handle the problem there won't be pressure to give up on the marriage” (Participant 05,2013: Interview).

“Yes I think they do because marriage is full of challenges that bring a lot of stress and the good thing is that they provide problem solving skills such as good communication and seeking professional help if the problem escalates” (Participant 09, 2013: Interview).

9.3 Sub theme 3 - Emphasizing the value of marriage commitment

Participant 07 stated that the marriage preparation course she attended was good enough to prevent divorce because it stressed on the importance of commitment. She said that the

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counsellor gave emphasis on the fact that they should keep on honouring their vows. These vows keep them going and remind them not to give up whenever things go wrong. In other remembering the commitment made at the altar gives one motivation to make their marriage work. This is what they had to say:

“Yes I think so, because we were taught about the importance of commitment, that the vows that we made in the presence of God and men are not a joke. Those vows keep a person going and do not give a room for taking divorce as an option. I mean they make you to continue to remember that you must find ways to make it work so as to honour your promise” (Participant 07, 2013: Interview).

9.4 Sub theme 4 - Considering love as the primary reason for getting into marriage

Participant 01 believes that individuals usually divorce because they got into marriage for the wrong reasons. These reasons are status, wealth or physical appearance. He says if these outward appearances happen to vanish someday, individuals will not hesitate to consider divorce as an option because they would already be disappointed with losing the things they married for. He further added that marriage preparation programs stresses the fact that the primary reason for getting married to a person should be love and everything else will follow. That helped him to be ready for marriage and know that the love he has for his partner conquers all:

“...yes it does because a person will enter a marriage for the right reasons not for material things, status or physical appearance Sometimes what makes people to opt for is usually the fact that the material things that were attached to their partner when they got married are no longer there, therefore when things get tough, it’s easy for them to quit. The sessions also teach us to put God first in the marriage and makes people to continue to honour their vows and not break them” (Participant 01, 2013: Interview).

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Knutson and Olson (2003) concurs that the ultimate goal of marriage preparation programs is to help couples stay happily married and to prevent divorce. Furthermore, a 4-year follow-up by Evaluating premarital education showed that couples who had received marriage preparation counselling showed less negative interaction, more positive interaction, lower rates of relationship aggression, lower combined rates of breakup or divorce, and higher levels of relationship satisfaction compared with those who did not received it. Those who had participated in the programs were not at greater risk for marital difficulties.

10. CONCLUSION

The chapter discussed the narratives of fifteen married individuals who attended a marriage preparation course before their marriage. The participants' narratives revealed that they learnt various topics in their marriage preparation courses though the content was not the same since they attended from different service providers. They also revealed that the marriage preparation courses they attended play a role in preventing divorce. They believe that divorce is usually considered when couples/individuals feel that they are overwhelmed by their problems and there is nothing that they can do to stop it. Their marriage preparation courses provided them with skills to resolve conflicts and solve problems. However some of the participants stated that they still have challenges in implementing some of these topics and others were concerned with some topics that they regarded useful and yet were not included in their programs.

Chapter Six: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided the analysis of gathered data by the researcher. It revealed different aspects around the perceived role of marriage preparation programs. This chapter lays out the researcher's conclusions and recommendations drawing from the analysis conducted in the preceding chapter. The research's main aim was to find out the role of marriage preparation programs as perceived by recently married individuals. The chapter further includes a section of reflecting on the research aims and how these were met. It also provides some points on the implications in social work practice and the unique contribution of the study.

Table 7 provide a summary of findings and thereafter conclusions will be made on each theme identified on the previous chapter.

Chapter Six: Conclusions and recommendations

Table 7
Summary of findings

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS IN THEMES AND SUB THEMES	
THEME ONE: CONTENT OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMMES	<i>Sub theme 1 - Communication</i> <i>Sub theme 2 - Problem solving</i> <i>Sub theme 3 - Adjustment</i> <i>Sub theme 4 - Budgeting and saving</i> <i>Sub theme 5 - Sharing responsibilities</i> <i>Sub theme 6 - Preserving fun in the marriage</i> <i>Sub theme 7 - Decision making</i> <i>Sub theme 8 - Total disclosure</i> <i>Sub theme 9 - Marriage readiness</i> <i>Sub theme 10 - Commitment</i> <i>Sub theme 11 - Bedroom and sex</i>

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THEME THREE: TOPICS EXCLUDED IN THE MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM	<i>Sub theme 1 - Sex</i> <i>Sub theme 2 - Individual sessions</i> <i>Sub theme 3 - Parenting</i>
THEME FOUR: PERCEIVED ROLE OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMS	<i>Sub theme 1 - Improves communication skills</i> <i>Sub theme 2 - Helps managing finances</i> <i>Sub theme 3 - Helps in unlearning some cultural behaviours that might</i> <i>Subtheme 4 - Alerts and prepares individuals on possible challenges to be met in marriage</i> <i>Sub theme 4 - Encourages seeking help from professional counsellors</i> <i>Sub theme 5 - Increase the awareness of self, partner and the relationship</i> <i>Sub theme 6 - Increase the awareness of</i>

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	<p><i>self, partner and the relationship</i></p> <p><i>Sub theme 7 - Improves marital commitment</i></p> <p><i>Sub theme 8 - Assist individuals to be ready for marriage</i></p>
<p>THEME FIVE: TOPICS PERCEIVED AS DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT</p>	<p><i>Sub theme 1 - Enhancing fun</i></p> <p><i>Sub theme 2 - Adjustment</i></p> <p><i>Sub theme 3 - Sharing responsibilities</i></p> <p><i>Sub theme 4 - Budgeting and saving</i></p>
<p>THEME SIX: TOPICS PERCEIVED AS MOST IMPORTANT</p>	<p><i>Sub theme 1 - Problem Solving</i></p> <p><i>Sub theme 2 - Communication</i></p> <p><i>Sub theme 3 - Total disclosure</i></p> <p><i>Sub theme 4 - Marriage readiness</i></p>

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THEME SEVEN: PERCEPTIONS ON DIVORCE PREVENTION	<i>Sub Theme 1 - Knowing potential marital problems before encountering them</i> <i>Sub theme 2 - Availability of problem solving skills</i> <i>Sub theme 3 - Emphasizing the value of marriage commitment</i> <i>Sub theme 4 - Considering love as the primary reason for getting into marriage</i>
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2. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The following are conclusions and recommendations drawn from the findings of the research.

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2.1 Demographic Information

2.1.1 Conclusions

The sample's demographic information helped the researcher to find out the connection between the participants identifying details and the narratives they provided after being asked the crucial questions that guided the research.

The sample of the study consisted of individuals between the age of 25 and 35. Based on this, it can be concluded that many people enter into marriage in their 20's. This shows that they got married while they were young adults which explain why they needed to be equipped with marital skills from a marriage preparation course before they transit to marriage. Carroll et al., (2007) stated that individuals usually start desiring marriage in their early 20's or mid 20's.

The study also established that most of the participants had either a child/children. Those who did not have children had a problem of bareness or were still studying. It can be concluded that most of these participants entered into marriage, considering child bearing and parenting as one of their goals, which is the reason why they need to attend a marriage preparation course to equip them with parenting skills.

The study inquired about the participants' marriage preparation service providers. It found out that all participants attended their marriage preparation course offered by religious leaders. It can be concluded that religious leaders are the highest marriage preparation service providers in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. The fact that religious leaders are considers premarital counselling as an integral part of pastoral and offers it for free might be the reason why people choose to go there.

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The sample presented a diverse occupational status of participants. It consisted of different classes ranging from unemployed, studying, self-employed and white collar jobs. It can be concluded that marriage preparation offered by religious leaders is open to anyone, despite their status. This explains why the sample had different classes of individuals. This also explains why religious leaders are considered to be the group that provides marriage preparation to societies as compared to other providers.

The study consisted of a sample with more females than males. The researcher approached 9 men but only 4 accepted to take part in the research. It can be concluded that females are more open to discuss matters that concern their private life than men since the researcher approached more men but they stated that it is not easy for them to discuss matters concerning their marriage. It can be further concluded that cultural issues and beliefs about disclosing one's private life still has an impact on how men perceive things since those who participated acknowledged that it has an impact on some of their behaviour.

The study also sought to understand the reasons why the participants attended a marriage preparation course. Most of the participants attended because their religious leaders motivated them to, as it is required by their churches. It can be concluded that religious leaders play an important role in providing marriage preparation in societies. Religious leaders occupy a strategic position in making premarital education available whether by providing the program directly or by serving as gate-keepers whereby couples are referred to other providers (Wilmoth & Smyser, 2010).

The study inquired about the nature of the marriage preparation courses offered by providers in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. It can be concluded that providers use

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different methods ranging from face to face sessions with discussions, some invites couples who have excelled in a particular area of marriage to share experiences with their clients and others go on air to offer the service. Although each of the marriage preparation programs differs in format and scope, they all strive to strengthen relationships, build interpersonal skills and prevent marital distress (Bowling et al., 2005).

2.1.2 Recommendations

There is a need for awareness campaigns or outreach programs for young adults on the importance of attending a marriage preparation program. Targeting young adults in their 20's might be more effective since it is a period where their majority consider getting married.

There is a need for other professional counsellors such as social workers and psychologists to form a partnership with religious leaders in providing marriage preparation programs since most of the participants received theirs in a religious setting. This will increase the effectiveness of marriage preparation courses since the providers will be able to share skills together on how best they can deliver this service to the communities.

There is a need for marriage preparation counsellors to consider including child bearing and parenting in their courses since most participants had one child or more within a period of 3-5 years of marriage.

There is a need for government to set up more organizations that offer free marriage preparation courses since one of the reasons why participants chose religious leaders was because they do not demand cash or donation. This move might be effective in reaching low class or unemployed people since they cannot afford to pay for the service.

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It is recommended for providers to utilise radio stations to offer marriage preparation programs since clients made it clear that it is convenient for them because they are struggling to balance the time of going to work and attending face to face sessions.

2.2 Lessons/topics learnt in the marriage preparation course

2.2.1 Conclusion

In order to gain understanding on the role of marriage preparation programs as perceived by recently married individuals, the researchers saw it important to first know the lessons/topics that were taught in their courses. Because the research was drawing its information from the narratives of these individuals, the information gathered depended on what the participant remembered being taught. The research assumes that this information will assist marriage preparation service providers in the formation of comprehensive marriage preparation program that consists of all crucial topics concerning marriage life. When participants were asked to recall on the topics they learnt in their marriage preparation courses, they stated that they had forgotten some. The topics they remembered most were the ones that had a connection with their current marital experiences. The study consisted of individuals who had been married for 3-5 years, this period of time contributed to their forgetfulness since the lessons were learnt before marriage.

The topics recalled by participants as lessons learnt in their marriage preparation programs varied. The most common lessons recalled by all participants were communication, problem solving, adjustment, budgeting and preserving fun in the marriage. It can be concluded that these topics are crucial in the daily life of married individuals since they were able to quickly remember them. It is clear in the findings that attending a marriage preparation course

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from the same service provider did not mean that the individuals remembered the same way. Besides the above mentioned topics, other topics remembered by participants included lessons on sharing responsibility, decision making, total disclosure, marriage readiness, bedroom and sex and commitment. It can be concluded that forgetting some of the lessons learnt is a challenge that people who attended a marriage preparation program are facing.

It can be concluded that all participants attended their marriage preparation course as a couple as their counsellors recommended. However some individuals who had unresolved personal issues from previous relationships felt that it is important to start with separate individual sessions before engaging in couple sessions.

2.2.2 Recommendations

There is a need for marriage preparation service providers to come together and design a standardised marriage preparation program since participants showed some differences in the topics learnt. This will enable all clients to benefit through learning all the crucial topics that concerns marriage life.

There is a need for marriage preparation service providers to set up follow up marriage enrichment sessions with their clients after marriage. These will help their clients to keep on remembering what they learnt in the marriage preparation course. Furthermore these counsellors can use the follow up sessions to assess those clients who are finding it difficult to implement what they learnt and assist them in their problem areas.

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2.3 Topics excluded in some marriage preparation programs

2.3.1 Conclusion

It can also be concluded that some marriage preparation service providers does not include sex or sexual health in their marriage preparation course. This is so probably because they regard it to be a well-known topic. However couples who did not learn something on sexual health complained about having difficulties with issues that concerns the subject in their marriages. Hazan and Shaver (1994) are of the view that one of the behavioural systems involved in adult attachment relationships is sexual mating. They explained that there is a need for physical contact comfort in romantic relationship.

Other participants who had problems with parenting also felt that their marriage preparation programs would be more effective if their providers would have included the topic on parenting. It can be concluded that most couples engage into child bearing and parenting right after their marriages and they require skills to parent their children positively.

2.3.2 Recommendations

There is a need for marriage preparation counsellors to include sexual health since others did not include it in their programs. Sexual health sessions will help couples to fulfil their dream of having sexual fulfilment in their marriages. Furthermore, those who included sexual health in their programmes should not only focus on sexual fulfilment but also teach about issues that include HIV and sexually transmitted diseases.

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There is also a need for marriage preparation counsellors to include individual sessions when conducting premarital counselling since some clients feel they have unresolved individual issues that need to be dealt with first before they get counselling as a couple.

2.4 Perceived role of marriage preparation programs

2.4.1 Conclusion

Participants used their marital experiences to outline what they perceived as the role of marriage preparation programs. Participants' narratives revealed different roles of marriage preparation programs which included improvement of communication skills, alerting and preparing couples for possible challenges, helping in managing finances, unlearning negative cultural beliefs, increasing marital commitment, increasing awareness of self, partner and the relationship and encouraging seeking help from professional counsellors were regarded as the most important roles of marriage preparation programs. Drawing from the above mentioned roles of marriage preparation programs, it can be concluded that all of them were centred on prevention of problems that could affect the marriage negatively and lead to marital distress or divorce. Most participants' narratives on their experiences revealed that marriage is an institution which is not problem free, being equipped with possible ways to prevent and solve these problem helped them to hold on to their marriages and not to give up.

In addition, few participants regarded awareness of self, partner and the relation as another role of marriage preparation programs. Bowling et al., (2005) stated that one of the historical goals of marriage preparation is to help couples become aware of themselves and their partners. It can be concluded that marriage preparation sessions through discussions, provides a

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platform that will lead to the individual's deeper understanding of self, the partner and the meaning of the marriage they are entering into. This awareness enables couples to check whether they are ready for marriage.

Since participants used their marital experiences to outline the role of marriage preparation programs, it can be concluded that marriage is indeed not a problem free journey. Married people face diverse kind of challenges ranging from minor disagreements, financial problems, bareness, interference of in-laws and more.

It can be concluded that marriage preparation programs equip couples with problem solving skills that enable them to deal with marital challenges. However there are also some problems that go beyond their skills and seeking help from professional counsellor's helps them to overcome overwhelming problems. Knutson and Olson (2003) are of the view that the purpose of marriage preparation is to provide couples with core skills and concepts for handling the inevitable issues and problems of married life. Furthermore, couples are informed that others can be helpful when problems appear to unbearable.

It can be concluded that marriage preparation programs plays a major role in assisting individuals to be ready for marriage. Most participants revealed that before attending a marriage preparation program they thought they were ready for marriage but after, they realised that they were not. According to attachment theory, an individual's attachment styles predict what expectations and beliefs they have of their partners and their relationships. In addition their attachment styles are connected to the type of relationship goals they strive to achieve when they enter marriage (Domingue & Mollen, 2009). The topic of marriage readiness assist couples in

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dealing with thoughts, feelings and behaviours associated with what individuals regard as being ready for marriage.

It can be concluded that wedding vows are a source of strength that helps individuals endure stress in their marriages. The emphasis that is put by marriage preparation counsellors on the importance of commitment plays a major role in preventing divorce.

However, the participants' narratives were more focused on the role of marriage preparation programs as a preventive measure to marital problems than enrichment. Though participants were taught a lesson or two on how to enrich their marriage, their explanation on the role of marriage preparation did not regard enrichment as a major role of marriage preparation programs. Markman et al., (2006) stated that emphasizing positive factors in marriage education is seen as the foundation of healthy marriages and family relationships. Couples should learn to preserve and protect the positive side of their relationship.

2.4.2 Recommendations

There is a need for marriage preparation service providers to put more emphasis on the importance of marriage enrichment. This will help couples to fulfil their dream of marital success and fulfilment since marriage is not only about solving problems.

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2.5 Topics perceived as difficult to implement

2.5.1 Conclusion

In their narratives, participants were open enough to state that not everything was easy for them in their marriages, just because they attended a marriage preparation course. Though they stated that their marriage preparation programs were very helpful, they also reflected on their experiences to shade more light on the topics they considered difficult to implement.

Besides the fact that they attended a marriage preparation course, some of them are still struggling to implement some of the topics learnt in the marriage preparation programs. It can also be concluded that negative cultural beliefs on gender roles are still an issue when it comes to sharing of responsibilities equally in the marriage. Though participants stated that marriage preparation's role is to help them unlearn those negative cultural behaviours and attitudes, male participants made it clear that they are still struggling in putting the lessons into practice, though they are still trying.

Some participants are also struggling with enhancing fun in their marriages, Even though they were taught, their narratives revealed that they struggle to balance work, studies and parenting with enhancing fun in their marriages. They stated that these duties take too much of their time to the extent that they end up not having time for fun.

“Most people say they have ‘lost the love’. They are successful in their work but feel helpless and hopeless in their love. They take seminars, read books, listen to mentors but do not make the same investment in their relationships” (Markman et al, 2006, p. 13).

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The above authors further stated that busy lives are no excuse for not paying attention to one's relationship. Marriage education should teach couples how to balance work and play. They should learn strategies for prioritizing and protecting excitement, friendship and romance in the marriage in the midst of highly stressed and busy life.

It can be concluded that it is difficult for participants to separate from the attachment bond they have with their parents and this affects their marital relationship negatively. The participants revealed that it is difficult for their parents to accept that they are grown up and they can make good decisions with their partners. Brumbaugh and Fraley (2006) states that the assumption that existing representations are carried forward from one relationship to the next is fundamental to attachment theory. Attachment patterns can be transferred from one relationship to another. This is the reason why marriage preparation counsellors should assist couples in creating a strong which cannot be affected by previous bonds.

It can also be concluded that managing finances transparently is difficult for some married couples; they revealed that coming from different backgrounds makes them want to use their money differently and they end up not being transparent to their partners about how they are spending the money.

2.5.2 Recommendations

Educating marriage preparation clients about how to balance responsibilities at home, pressure of work and having fun in their marriages is very important. It is recommended for marriage preparation counsellors to provide them with strategies on how to enhance fun without popping out a lot of money since some of them gave lack of money as a reason not to have fun.

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There is a need for professional counsellors to educate young adults in communities on negative cultural beliefs and behaviours that can affect marriages. Unlearning these behaviours is a process that needs time. Educating these young adults before going to a marriage preparation course will give them enough time to unlearn these behaviours.

2.6 Topics perceived as most important

2.6.1 Conclusion

Though participants regarded all topics valuable, they had some that they regarded as most important. Their judgment was based on their experiences in their marriages, they believed that problem solving, communication and marriage readiness were the most important. It can be concluded that these topics play a major role in marriage life. Being ready when one enters into marriage, being able to communicate effectively and the ability to solve marital problems is considered to be what matters most to sustain a marriage. From an attachment perspective, communication is seen as a vehicle for fostering intimacy and trust in relationships due to partners feeling accepted and understood. Securely attached individuals tend to engage in direct communication than insecure adults because they are confident enough to be assertive and they trust that their partner will respond supportively (Domingue & Mollen, 2009).

2.6.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that marriage preparation service providers put more emphasis on problem solving, communication and marriage readiness in their programs.

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2.7 Perceptions on divorce prevention

2.7.1 Conclusion

All participants believed that the marriage preparation program they attended was good enough to prevent divorce. Their explanations were based on the programs' ability to make them aware of potential marital problems before encountering them, availability of problem solving skills, its emphasis the value of marriage commitment and teaching about considering love as the primary reason for getting into marriage. It can be concluded that marriage preparation programs plays a major role in divorce prevention. Tambling and Glebova (2013) states that premarital education programs provide one preventative approach for addressing many risk factors typically associated with marital distress and divorce. Engagement in marriage preparation is one way to decrease the likelihood of marital instability or divorce and increase positive outcomes experienced by couples.

2.7.2 Recommendation

It is recommended that marriage preparation service providers come together with the government to form and implement policies that allows the majority of the nation to know the importance of marriage preparation and eventually take part in the programs. Bruhn and Hill (2004a) also suggest that professional counsellors and therapists should continue to actively become agents of stigma-busting to change the perception with which the general public have on the importance of attending marriage preparation programs.

3. REFLECTION ON RESEARCH AIMS

This section provides a reflection on the aims and how they were met. The research aimed to find out what individuals perceived as the major role of marriage preparation programs. It aimed to understand what they think of the concept 'marriage preparation', to explore the aftermath experiences and to investigate the empowerment needs of individuals who attend marriage preparation programs.

The findings from the information provided by participants showed that individuals perceive marriage preparation programs as a preventive measure of divorce and marital distress. The lessons they learnt provides them with skills that enable them to strive for marital satisfaction through using their protective factors and dealing with negative behaviours that can affect the marriage. They perceive that marriage preparation programs improves communication skills, helps managing finances, helps in unlearning cultural behaviours that can affect the marriage negatively, alerts and prepares individuals on possible challenges to be met in the marriage, encourages seeking help from professional counsellors, Increase the awareness of self, partner and relationship, improves marital commitment and assist individuals to be ready for marriage

The data gathered from participants showed that individuals experience both positive and negative situations in their marriages that require them to practice what they were taught in the marriage preparation programs and they find it helpful. However, these findings also showed that in some experiences, they sometimes struggle to implement what they were taught.

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The research found out that even after marriage preparation, individuals need to be continually empowered to implement what they have been taught to achieve marital stability and satisfaction. The findings showed that there are certain negative behaviours that were learnt unconsciously by participants due cultural beliefs in their communities and family of origin issues. These negative behaviours are difficult to unlearn within short sessions of marriage preparation. One of the preventive measures could be educating youths in the communities about how negative cultural beliefs and behaviours affect marriages. Follow up sessions with them after marriage will help service providers to identify where they need help and offer it to them.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The following are summarised points on the implications of the findings on social work practice in marriage preparation programs especially in BCMM:

Partnership between social workers and religious leaders should be considered to be very important since it will allow professionals to come together and design a standardised marriage preparation program that each provider will use as a guide line.

Prevention intervention should not only be done with engaged couples but also with young adults in communities since some negative behaviour that can affect marriages take a long time to unlearn.

Marriage preparation counsellors need to come up with creative ways to enhance fun without spending a lot of money since some are failing because they regard the act to be too expensive.

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Follow up sessions with all clients who attended marriage preparation courses should be done to check on development and help those who are struggling to implement the lessons cope well.

It is important for marriage preparation counsellors not to assume that all sessions must be conducted with couples. Individual sessions are equally important since clients feel that they allow them to deal with the issues concerning self, which might affect the marriage negatively.

Social workers are encouraged to consider using media to provide marriage preparation service to people since it is convenient for most individuals with busy schedules and can also reach a wider population.

5. UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

There is limited South African-based literature concerning the topic of marriage preparation programs. This research will make a unique contribution because it provides literature drawn from South Africa, Eastern Cape, and more specifically, Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. This will assist local marriage preparation service providers in formulating standardised marriage preparation programs that meet the needs of local South African population.

6. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The study attempted to find out the role of marriage preparation programs in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality drawing from the narratives of recently married individuals. It can be concluded that narratives of participants greatly concurs with marriage preparation researchers who stated that marriage preparation programs plays a vital role in preventing divorce and

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marital distress. However, the study also found out that some marriage preparation programs in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality exclude some topics that are perceived as important by participants. In addition, some participants who attended a marriage preparation programs still have difficulties in implementing some of the topics. Professionals in this field are recommended to implement prevention intervention with young adults in communities since unlearning negative behaviours requires time. In addition, drawing from the findings, it is important for professional counsellors to form a partnership with religious leaders and bring ideas on how best they can provide effective marriage preparation programs to the broader community.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1: ETHICS RESEARCH CONFIDENTIALITY AND INFORMED CONSENT

Ethics Research Confidentiality and Informed Consent Form

My name is Rumbidzai Mujoko, a master of social work student with the university of Fort Hare. I am conducting research regarding **marriage preparation programs (premarital counselling)**. I am interested in finding out more about the **role** played by these programs in your marriage based on what you think. I am carrying out this research to help marriage preparation practitioners to come up with strategies that will increase people's engagement in marriage preparation programs. I am requesting you to answer some questions which I hope will benefit your community and possibly other communities in the future.

Please understand that you are not being forced to take part in this study and the choice whether to participate or not is yours alone. However, I would really appreciate it if you do share your thoughts with me. If you choose not to take part in answering these questions, you will not be affected in any way. If you do this there will be no penalties and you will NOT be prejudiced in ANY way. Confidentiality will be observed professionally.

The interview will be tape recorded but I will not be recording your name anywhere and no one will be able to link you to the answers you give. Only the researchers will have access to the unlinked information. The information will remain confidential and there will be no "come-backs" from the answers you give.

The interview will last for approximately 1 hour. I will be asking you questions and ask that you are as open and honest as possible in answering these questions. Some questions may be of a personal and/or sensitive nature. I will be asking some questions that you may not have thought about before, and which also involve thinking about the past or the future. I know that you cannot be absolutely certain about the answers to these questions but I ask that you try to think about these questions. When it comes to answering questions there are no right and wrong answers

If possible, once I complete my study, I would like to come back to your community to inform you and your community of what the results are and discuss our findings and proposals around the research and what this means for people in this area.

If you need to speak about any issues that may arise in the interview, feel free to contact the department on the number on the letterhead.

Please read and sign below

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT by Participant

I hereby agree to participate in this research study, acknowledging that:

- I understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can stop this interview at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively.
- I understand that this is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally.
- I will not receive financial compensation for participating in the study.
- I have received the telephone number of a person to contact should I need to speak about any issues which may arise in this interview.
- I understand that this consent form will not be linked to the questionnaire, and that my answers will remain confidential.
- I understand that if at all possible, feedback will be given to my community on the results of the completed research.
- I hereby agree that any data I may contribute may be used for this specific study and also re-used should there be similar studies undertaken in future.
- I hereby agree to the digital/tape recording of my participation in the study.
- This research has been approved by the University Research Committee who may need to inspect the research records

.....
Signature of participant

Date:.....

APPENDIX 2: A LETTER OF REQUEST TO IDENTIFY RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Department of Social work and social development

University of Fort hare, 50 church street

P O Box 7426, East London

5201

08 August 2012

Dear Pastor Maphinda

Re: Request for using your marriage seminars/workshops to identify participants for my research

My name is Rumbidzai Mujoko. I am a Master of Social Work student at the University of Fort Hare. I intend to conduct a research on the role of marriage preparation programs on individuals who have been married for 3-5 years in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. This letter serves to kindly request to use your marriage enrichment seminars/workshops to identify 15 willing participants for the research. The participants suitable for the research will have the following characteristics;

Be living in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality;

Be legally married for 3-5 years and

Should have attended a marriage preparation program before they got married

NB: the research does not include cultural and same sex marriages

Thank you for considering my request

Yours sincerely

Rumbidzai Mujoko

APPENDIX 3: RESPONSE FROM PASTOR MAPHINDA

EAST LONDON FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

P.O BOX 12732

AMALINDA

EAST LONDON

5252

SOUTH AFRICA

15 August 2012

Dear Ms R. Mujoko

In response to your request, I do have marriage seminars in the coming months which you can use to identify your participants for your research. Some of the people have gone through premarital counselling with me. I can give you access to my database in order to contact and find those you need. I also run a family program which consists of premarital counselling and marriage enrichment with Link Fm Christian Community Radio Station (97.1) every Wednesday from 20H00-22H00.

Regards

Pastor Khaya Maphinda

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The following is an interview schedule which was used by the researcher in conducting interviews. The interview schedule was used as a guide to start discussions. The prompts depended on the participants' response.

THEME	MAIN QUESTION	PROMPTS
<p>Demographic information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell me about yourself 	<p>Age Occupational status Educational status Number of children Marriage preparation service provider</p>
<p>Lessons learnt/ Perceived role of marriage preparation programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the topics/ lessons that you learnt in the marriage preparation program you attended and would you describe them as helpful? 	<p>The following topics may be used as prompts:</p> <p>Communication Sharing of responsibility Adjustment from previous attachments to marital attachment Problem solving Handling conflict Commitment Preserving and enhancing fun, Friendship</p>

<p><i>(marital experiences)</i></p> <p>Perceptions on topics excluded</p> <p>Topics perceived as difficult to implement</p> <p>Topics perceived as most important</p> <p>Perceptions on divorce prevention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it and why? • Looking at your experiences, which topic was difficult for you to put into practice? • Which topic would you regard as most important and why? • In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce? 	<p>All prompts to be directed at participants' opinion</p>
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APPENDIX 5: TEXT OF PARTICIPANTS' INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 01

Demographic Information

Male: 33

Where do you live?

In Mdantsane

What is your highest level of education?

Certificate in mechanics

What do you do for a living?

I work as a mechanic in town

For how long have you been married?

3 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

Pastor Maphinda from East London Fellowship church

How many children do you have?

1

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

I went for premarital counselling because I was depressed from problems of my previous relationship. The lady that I wanted to marry got very sick and passed way. But what hurt me most was that she was sick with a deadly disease and never opened up to tell me but rather she

disappeared and went to cape town and I later heard that she died, so yes, I wanted to start on a clean slate.

What was the nature of the marriage preparation program (individual, couple or group sessions?)

They were formal sessions with him face to face, it was me and my wife and I also listened to some he offers on radio.

What are the topics/lessons that you learnt in the marriage preparation program you attended and would you describe each topic as helpful?

The radio sessions were very helpful especially on marriage readiness, he told us to write down the reasons why you are marrying that person, and this helped me to know that I should not marry for the wrong reasons. For example If you marry someone for material things maybe after some time the material things will be finished and the marriage will be in trouble because what you married this person for is no longer there. It really helped me because honestly after attending the marriage preparation course that's when I saw that even though I thought I was ready, I was never ready, it is those questions and discussions that helped me to assess myself on readiness and be actually ready for the marriage.

He also taught us about communication, he said you must communicate with your partner, don't do things on your own, for example when you are coming late from work you should communicate, also the other partner will not know what you are thinking. I must not just do things without communicating.

I also remember a session on adjustment. He taught me how to adjust from being a single man to married man. I learned a lot about adjustment because I was doing things in my own way but he taught me to adjust from doing things on my own to knowing that we are now 2 in 1. I used to budget on my own but now we do it together. For example my wife might want to buy something and I won't like it, I must be able to adjust and meet her half way so that I can learn to accept the things that she likes that I don't like.

He also talked about adjustment of attachment to parents or guardians (family), I learned too much about that, but it is difficult because when I grew up I choose to be a born again Christian and all of my brothers are not. But through pastor Maphinda's teaching when I got married I managed to communicate with them that I have to put more focus to my wife but it was difficult to my brothers to accept because they used to ask me for things that they want me to buy for them and I tell them that I have to discuss it with my wife first but sometimes they don't understand and they eventually become angry with my wife.

How do you deal with them if they are angry with your wife?

Well as I was taught I continue to maintain that point that I am now married and I don't make decisions alone so eventually they understand.

Even at church I managed to adjust as well- I had to make it clear that I am no longer a bachelor to avoid those sisters who would want to throw themselves at me (laughing).

He also made it clear that getting married does not mean that we don't meet challenges. He said the challenges that we meet may be financial problems, negative interference from relatives, difficulty in raising children, differences in what we prefer and so on. I learned that if I make my wife angry or do something wrong I must go and apologize, or if we are both angry it does not help to stay angry for a long time but to sit down and discuss to resolve the problem. I have a problem with my wife I must not go and report to my family and she must not do the same but rather resolve it the two of us. If we can't resolve, we must go to someone who does not know us for example counsellors or pastor Maphinda

Can you share with me some of the problems you encountered and how you handled them?

Yes we do have disagreements and challenges here and there. I remember there was a time when I came very late from work; I did not call my wife earlier to tell her that I had car problems. Hey...when I arrived home she was still awake and very angry. I remembered that I was supposed to communicate. I sat down, acknowledged that I was wrong and asked for forgiveness. The moment I did that I could see it calmed her down because I did not shout back. We agreed that the person who is wrong must apologize. Sometimes we disagree on what type of

item to buy we just go to the budget and look if we can afford it or not, if we can't afford then the other person has to compromise.

Since you are employed and your wife is not, how do you do your budget?

I learned from the sessions that budgeting is done together therefore we do our budget together; we sit down and agree on the items that need to be bought. We write the budget down and I also give my wife my pay slip on my pay day. But the problem is that my wife wants to keep my bank card in her purse so that she makes sure that I don't go out of what we have planned (laughing) and I agree because sometimes I do go off budget.

I also learned that if you are married you are supposed to be committed; if I want to go for fasting or prayer I consult with my wife to see if she is comfortable with that.

VOWS.... Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering ten

I wasn't taught anything about that

Looking at your experiences, which topic was difficult for you to put into practice?

Sharing responsibility and enhancing fun

I was taught but the fun is not still the same with what it was like when we got married but whenever we go for a couples meeting it kind of rekindle the fun.

Why do you say the fun not the same anymore?

Because the child usually starts crying when I am trying to be romantic to my wife so my wife has to leave me and attend to the child but the married couples' enrichment sessions are helping us a lot.

What about sharing of responsibilities?

I was taught about that but you know it's difficult for us men to do women's work, my wife often complains about it but sometimes but it was helpful though because I do take care of the child sometimes

Were you taught to share responsibilities equally?

...hey I don't want to lie, he did teach us but it's difficult for me to do those things, he told us that we must help each other in the house, I am really trying but most of the time it is my wife doing those things, also because I am working she does most of the house chores

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

Yes it did a lot because it helps me to be aware of the problems that are coming and when they come I remember that pastor Maphinda once talked about this and he said we must deal with it this way, especially the in-laws....

How do you manage with your in-laws?

I told them that I am now married and my wife comes first and we now make decisions together.

In your opinion, do you think the marriage preparation course you attended was helpful to prevent divorce and why?

yes it does because a person will enter a marriage for the right reasons not for material things, status or physical appearance Sometimes what makes people to opt for divorce is usually the fact that the material things that were attached to their partner when they got married are no longer there, therefore when things get tough, it's easy for them to quit. The sessions also teach us to put God first in the marriage and makes people to continue to honour their vows and not break them.

If you were in pastor Maphinda's position what would you regard as the most important topic?

Hey the one about marriage readiness. I must say that this topic I loved it because I had a lot of history from my previous relationship. It allowed me to think back and leave the past in order to be ready for the new commitment that I was about to make. It is when I finished the lessons then I realized that I always thought I am ready for marriage but I wasn't. The lesson helped me to be ready

Looking at your experiences, which topic was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

Romance and sex: it is very important because sometimes you find that your wife is acting just like your brother when you are trying to make love. Not that I'm perfect on those issues but I feel we both needed some lessons on that. Sex is one of the important things in marriage and if it's not exciting it causes infidelity which will lead to divorce.

I also wanted him to have some sessions with me as an individual since I had a lot of unresolved issues from my previous relationship. I desired to be counselled as an individual first but unfortunately they were couple sessions.

Lastly I wanted him to say something on parenting issues because we are really struggling to balance between parenting and all other responsibilities in the house.

Thank you for your time

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 02

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Male (32 yrs)

Where do you live?

Southernwood, East London

What is your highest level of education?

Matric

What do you do for a living?

I work as a packer

For how long have you been married?

3 years but we cohabitated for 4 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

Pastor Mashudu from Christ the Seed of Hope ministries

How many children do you have?

2, first born girl with 6 years and a boy who is just 4 months

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

I went for marriage preparation because it is required in our church that before a person get married; he must go for premarital counselling sessions to prepare for marriage. For me I never thought about it and I did it as something that I was told to do not as something that I chose but later I realized that hey it is important to do it

What was the nature of the marriage preparation you attended (individual, couple or group sessions?)

It was not that formal, it was more of a discussion, and other elders in the church were also involved to talk about different topics and to help the pastor in explaining some marriage issues, so it was more of sessions of teaching and discussions.

What are the topics/ lessons that you learnt in the marriage preparation program you attended and would you describe them as helpful?

They were teaching us how to manage the marriage and how to solve problems in the marriage. She said if u have a problem you must sit down and talk, if you don't understand each other you must go to someone who can help you understand each other for example one of the pastors, elders or professional counsellors.

Did he tell you about some of the problems that you may encounter in marriage?

Yes he did, he said sometimes it may be quarrelling over our differences in what we prefer as individuals, he gave an example of maybe the wife preferring to buy KFC and the other would love Nando's or someone not brushing teeth at night and another brushing. He said those differences may lead to larger conflicts if we do not learn how to deal with them.

Can you share with me some of the problems you encountered and how you handled them?

Yes, in marriage you are bound to experience problems and some of them lead to arguments, we once had an argument when my wife's parents were always interfering with our decisions. They want to know everything, they demand money...I mean we need space, It was like they still want to dominate her life like they used to do before she was married. We sat down and I told my wife that I am not happy with what they are doing at all. We then agreed that we are not going to let them do it again. Actually we went there and talked to them nicely but making it clear that we are grown-ups and we can make our decisions on our own. If we want their input, we will ask. From there they got the message. When we disagree I talk to my wife so that we can solve the mater, if I am wrong I ask for forgiveness.

She also taught us that we must not keep secrets, she taught me that secrets destroy marriages we must trust each other.

Okay can you continue on other topics learnt?

She also taught us how to handle our finances and how to do our monthly budget. She said we must budget together; I must not take the money and use it without talking to my wife and we must not buy expensive things that we don't afford. We must always avoid taking loans or buying a lot of things on account as it usually becomes difficult to get out of debt and eventually cause problems. She also taught us that we must be able to save some cash per month. She said no matter how small we earn, we must be able to put aside money to save because that will help us in times of emergency or when we want to buy an asset.

It also allowed me to understand myself especially on checking whether issues in my previous relationships will not affect the current one.

Do you do the budget together now that you are married?

Yes, I bring the pay slip to my wife, she does the same, and we add together and then agree on things to buy and on how much to save per month. If we don't agree on buying the same thing we just look at the amount of money we have and let it decide for us.

She also taught us about how to handle our relatives especially the in-laws. We must agree together if we want to send money home, if they ask for something I must discuss with my wife first. I made it clear to my parents that it's now different because am now married so I have to put my family first. Though it is difficult for them to accept I continue to maintain that fact and I know they will get used to it.

She also taught us about separating from friends, she said I must not put my friends first; I can go and chat and watch soccer but not take the whole day. I must always know that being with my family is first priority. That one I am practicing it well, I do go to watch soccer with my friends but when it's finished I make sure I go to my family on time.

She also taught us that trust is the most important thing in the marriage. She taught me not to be jealousy, if my wife says she is going to town, I must not think otherwise. I must be

able to trust and believe that she is going there not anywhere else. On the other hand if I say I am going to town I must not take longer than expected without communicating with my wife. I have to avoid behaviours that make the other person to wonder.

I also remember that she said something about rekindling the fire of love in our marriage. She said If you are a man you are supposed to make your wife happy for example taking your wife out, helping with house chores in the house but I must say it's kind of difficult to take my wife out many times now that we have two kids, financially they are demanding.

She taught us that we must share responsibilities for example bathing the baby, washing clothes, doing dishes but I don't want to lie I usually do it once in a while when she is sick or busy.

She even said there is nothing wrong with us contributing equally to the needs of the house. It really helped me because I grew up in a society where men are the providers in the house. Three months after our marriage my wife got promoted and her salary became more than mine. Had it been not for those lessons it was going to disturb me a lot but I am fine because I understand that she is able just like me. I understood that responsibilities can be shared and it's not about who earns how much but our love for each other is important.

Why is it difficult for you to do these chores?

I think it's because of the way we grew up, we grew up knowing that all the house chores are supposed to be done by women so it's kind of difficult to start now but heywe are trying and we will eventually get there.

On that part of sharing responsibilities she even said there is nothing wrong if my wife supports the family.

She also taught us about sex, she said sex is important in the marriage she said we must not deny each other sex because we want to punish each other. She also said for us to enjoy our sex, we must touch each other and kiss, in fact do everything in your power to make sure that your partner is satisfied.

Since you dated and cohabitated for a long time, do you think there is anything that's changed now that you are married?

Yes because by that time I didn't trust her because since I was not staying together with her I felt like I really don't know what she is doing or what she is up to but now we are together almost every time.

I also feel like my wife loves me more than when we were boyfriend and girlfriend coz we are committed to our vows together, they bind us together. But anyway because of the kids I feel like my love is divided between the kids and the wife that's why we don't have much time together because the kids take a lot of attention and time.

Looking at your experiences, which topic was difficult for you to put into practice?

As I explained before, it is difficult to maintain fun and share responsibilities equally and adjust from your family and commit fully to your wife

If you were in your pastor's position what would you regard as the most important topic?

Problem solving...

Do you have any moments were you face situations that makes you remember what you were taught and put it into practice?

Yes, especially when we fight with my wife I always remember that pastor said we must not go to bed before solving those problems so I always make sure we solve it by sitting and discussing and the wrong person ask for forgiveness.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce and why?

Yes a lot..... because as for me, I never imagined facing any challenge in the marriage I was only thinking of positive things, which is good but the reality is problems will always be there. Being informed of potential problems that you might encounter reduces the level of shock when you meet them. And it really helped because it is this shock that usually causes people to

panic and divorce didn't know how to go about it but we only knew how to handle it when pastor taught us.

Is there any topic that u thought wasn't necessary?

No

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

I think she covered everything

Do you remember being taught about things like commitment, preserving your wedding vows or any additional thing?

I don't remember anything like that

Thank you for your time.

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 03

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Female (29 yrs)

Where do you live?

In Mdantsane

What is your highest level of education?

Certificate in beauty therapy

What do you do for a living?

I own a business for beauty therapy in Mdantsane

For how long have you been married?

4 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

Pastor Maphinda from East London Fellowship church

How many children do you have?

None

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

I decided to do it because I am fellowshipping at pastor Maphinda's church and there is no way he could wed us without completing the marriage preparation course first.

What was the nature of the marriage preparation program you attended (individual, couple or group sessions?)

It was formal; we had specific time, venue and topics to discuss in these sessions

What are the topics/lessons that you learnt in the marriage preparation program and would you describe them as helpful?

It played a big role because it united us. He taught us about communication and before our communication was poor but now we can sit down and discuss together. He said communication is the only way we will be able to know how our partners are feeling because if we guess we might miss it and it might cause conflict. He said there are little things that are not communicated in marriage that latter cause problems. He gave an example of coming late at home. He said if you know you that you are coming home late maybe because of work or something and you don't communicate with your partner, he/she might think you were with a girlfriend or boyfriend and that might lead to conflict. So everything must be communicated clearly.

He did not teach us about sharing responsibilities but because he taught us about communication I am able to communicate to my husband and ask him to do some tasks

Do you sometimes have problems that lead to conflict, if yes how do you handle them?

Yes we do have problems or arguments; we also solve our problems through communicating. He did teach us also about handling conflict but I must say it is difficult to handle conflict because my husband usually shouts and when he shouts I just keep quiet or he goes to take a walk.

When he comes back do you talk about it?

No we just talk about something else

He also taught us about adjustment, he said we must no longer act like we are single, for example we must be able to report everything that you do to your partner.

He did talked about adjusting from our parents, that we should discuss things first before we sent money to them but I don't want to lie, I find it difficult to do it, sometimes I just send money to my mother without telling him.

Why

Because we come from different backgrounds, in their family they are very rich and he doesn't see the need for supporting the mother because they already have everything but as for me, my mother is relying on me to send money so it becomes difficult for me because I am the only one who will be talking about supporting my family.

Were you taught about how to budget and how do you do your budget?

He did teach us about budgeting. Well he said we must put our finances together and plan on what to buy and how to serve. We do sometimes agree on what to buy but to be honest we don't put all our money together mostly because of the difference of background, I would want some to send to my family secretly because if I try to do it openly he won't understand since his family is rich.

Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering them?

No

Looking at your experiences, which topic was difficult for you to put into practice?

As I said before, this thing of being transparent about money is not easy. I also remember that he did teach us about that but no fire burning at all and no friendship at all.

Why do you say there is the fun not there at all?

I just think we are used to each other.

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

They did help us a lot because now we can at least sit down and talk about things, though we face some kind of problems but they did help here and there, it's just that there are things that need to be addressed on an individual level.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

Yes because mostly he addressed the need of knowing why you are deciding to get married to that person and why you think he is the best partner for you. This helps a person not to marry for the wrong reasons because I believe people sometimes opt for divorce because maybe the money that they married a person for is no longer there.

Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

The topic of total disclosure because everything in marriage revolves around being honesty, if there is no honesty in a marriage then there will be no trust and it causes a lot of problems, for me that topic helped my husband to open up and tell me his past. If I had found out later on my own I don't think ni was going to stay in the marriage. We now made honesty a habit and it just work for us.

Is there any topic that u thought wasn't necessary?

None

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

Can't think of any

Thank you very much for your time

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 04

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Female- (32 years)

Where do you live?

In Mdantsane

What is your highest level of education?

Grade 9

What do you do for a living?

I am unemployed, I take care of our baby girl while my husband goes to work

For how long have you been married?

3 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

My Pastor from Assemblies of God church in Parkside

How many children do you have?

1

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

I went for premarital counselling because my pastor told me that it is important for a person who is planning to marry, he said it lays a good foundation for a marriage

What was the nature of the marriage preparation course you attended (individual, couple or group sessions?)

It was a formal thing because there were lessons where we wrote questions and answers then we discuss, we were also given home works though some of the lessons we didn't finish because the pastor was so busy, he has a lot of work.

What exactly did you learn and in your opinion would you describe the sessions as helpful?

In the questions that he gave us, he told us to write the reasons why you want to get married. After that we discussed that's when he taught us that it is important to know why you want to get married and never to get married for foolish reasons like finances or status. Well.....it really helped me to understand that I should marry this guy not because of status, money or for the sake of getting married but love must be the foundation.

The other thing was writing about things that you will never tolerate when you get married. We wrote about those things and then later discuss them. One of the things that I said I will not tolerate is being lied to, I had to make it clear to my partner that if he lies to me then I will not tolerate it because I believe that when you get married you become one and you share problems, mistakes and everything so why would he lie to me? He also wrote about things that he would not tolerate and we discussed and agreed that each one of us will not disappoint the other by doing that thing.

He also taught us about sharing responsibilities at home, he said we must help each other with taking care of kids, house chores and all stuff like that.

It really helped me because I entered the marriage knowing the things that my husband won't tolerate and I will not do those things.

The other thing that really interested me was the topic about saying out with words exactly what you feel about your partner. He said don't assume that your partner knows how you feel about him just because you are married. He said words or phrases LIKE I love you..., I miss you, you look beautiful..., are important because they make both of you to enjoy and appreciate each other. I liked it because my husband was that type of a person who would do things or act to show you that he loves you but after those lessons he had to learn to say it out and I enjoyed

hearing things like you are beautiful, I love you, I miss you.... It helped both of us to be able to express your feelings.

So are you still enjoying the expression of feelings now that you are married?

Yes, he does tell me all those things and I enjoy (laughing).

The other thing he taught us was about knowing that it is God's plan to get married and to always remember to put God first. It helps me to know the importance of the vows that I made and respect them.

He also taught us about problem solving that whenever there is a problem or we disagree we must sit down and communicate and if we get to a point of failing to solve it them. He said some of the problems that we may face might be stress from work, difficulty in raising children, interference from the in-laws and more.

Do you sometimes have problems that lead to conflict, if yes how do you handle them?

I can't say we have encountered major problems as such but just disagreements, usually we disagree on ways to parent our daughter but so far we have managed to sit down, talk about it and solve them, and we haven't had a major problem or fight that needs intervention from anybody.

He also taught us that we must handle our finances together, the money that we have in the house does not belong to one person but to the two of us.

Since you are unemployed and your husband is, how do you do your budget?

Well I don't have a problem with that, we just implement what we were taught in those lessons, my husband always brings his pay slip and then we decide together on what to buy, not that he is not allowed to buy something for himself but he communicates then we agree before he buys.

He also taught us about adjusting from being single to a married person, he said when you get married you must always remember that you don't do things on your own but together as one, anybody else including in laws comes second not first

Did you ever had a disagreement with your husband about your parents and how did you solve it?

Yes I did, it is a very difficult situation mostly because my parents usually ask money from me and they will not expect me to say no, and my husband won't like the fact that they do not understand that we now make decisions together. It is difficult to solve but we end up compromising, for example if they want money we just check from our budget if we have it we give them but if we don't we just tell them that we don't have

Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering them?

No there was nothing like that

What about preserving and having fun in your marriage, were you taught something?

Yes we were taught that we should try by all means to keep the love burning and maintain the fun.

Looking at your experiences, which topic was difficult for you to put into practice?

Yes keeping the fun, the problem is that when you have a child there is more responsibility on the side of women and it is difficult to have more time for fun. As I explained earlier adjusting from being close to parents is also not easy.

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

Yes they did especially with communicating our feelings freely, talking about our problems and solving together.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

Yes, I think they really help because they make you to be ready for challenges that come with marriage so that when they come they don't overwhelm you to the extent of quitting.

Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

Total disclosure because if there is no disclosure there will not be trust, and it is difficult to enjoy marriage without trust.

Is there any topic that u thought wasn't necessary?

No

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

No

Thank you for your time

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 05

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Female – (29 years)

Where do you live?

In southernwood

What is your highest level of education?

Grade 12

What do you do for a living?

I work as a packer in a factory

For how long have you been married?

3 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

My pastor from Christ the seed of hope church

How many children do you have?

2

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

Because our pastor told us that we must go through some counselling before we get married, it is something that is done to everyone who wants to get married. But besides that I also later realized that it is really important to do it.

What was the nature of the marriage preparation course you attended (individual, couple or group sessions?)

They were kind of formal couple sessions but sometimes it was more of discussions, sometimes we didn't have specific topics for lessons.

What exactly did you learn and in your opinion would you describe the sessions as helpful?

She taught us about marriage being a big step so if you are married you will be one person, you will share many things and no one will say this is mine everything belongs to the two.

She taught us to know that when you become married there will be more problems but we have to solve them together.

Do you sometimes have problems that lead to conflict, if yes how do you handle them?

Yes we do have problems sometimes and we usually fight mainly because of my husband family. Sometimes he just goes there and brings them here without warning me that he is coming with visitors. I communicated with him and told him that I don't like it and it has to stop. So we managed to agree that if he wants them to come he must communicate with me first then we agree. So we usually solve our conflicts through sitting down and talking about it until we understand each other.

So were you taught about communication?

Oh yes! She said it is not healthy in a marriage if you are not happy about something then you keep quiet because it will lead to the bottling up of feelings and eventually lead to more and more anger that will destroy the marriage. If there is a problem we have to sit down, open up about how we both feel and resolve it together. So that's why I said if we have a problem we sit down and talk and see how we can solve it.

What do you do if you talk and you can't solve it?

She said it is not encouraged to call our relatives to come and sort the problems between the two of us since sometimes the other person will feel that they are taking sides and cause more

conflict. She also said that run out of solutions or we feel we can't solve the problem we must go to her or elders or look for professional counsellors to help us.

She taught us about finances that the money that comes in the house we must look at both pay slips and decide on what to buy and that is what we are doing every month; we bring the two pay slips together and decide on what to buy.

She also taught us that no matter how small the salary is, we must find something small to save. We must not use all the money and fail to find something to save in the bank.

She also taught us about how to make decisions in the marriage that we must be able to make decisions together. She said when we are in a marriage we do not make decisions as individuals since we are one.

She taught us about adjustment from attaching to parents to being one with your partner. So we sat down together with my in-laws and made them see that now we have a family, we have responsibilities and they should understand when we say we don't have.

She also taught us about sharing house chores at home; she said that we must help each other with everything.

She taught us about trust, that your marriage should be built upon trust.

She taught us about sex also and to make the bedroom environment inviting for example putting clean attractive linen. She also said that as a woman I must not be shy or feel bounded when I am in the bedroom; I must feel free to express my feelings.

The discussions in the couple sessions allowed me to bring up topics that we were never going to talk about when we were alone, it gave me the satisfaction that I surely know myself, my partner and the relationship we are in.

Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering them?

No, I don't remember but my vows make me to always remember not to give up even though things are tough.

What about preserving and having fun in your marriage, were you taught something?

Yes she did teach us that we must continue to enjoy but it's not the same anymore and it is really difficult to maintain the fun.

Why do you say the topic is difficult and why is the fun not the same anymore?

You see now we have 2 children and they need attention and this boy is only months old, and I don't have a nanny. It is very difficult to have fun as husband and wife.

Do you at least try to have a little time to have fun with your husband?

Yooo (taking a breath) to be honest I don't have that time anymore because of the reasons that I have mentioned before but at least we still have that friendship whereby I am free to tell him everything.

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

Yes they did because we spent many years cohabitating, being afraid of marriage because we did not know marriage itself and the things to expect in it. Those lessons helped us to know that the problems that we feared we can conquer them with what we learnt

I have times that I remember the things that she taught us when I face problems and I will know how to handle the situation.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

Yes I think they do because usually people divorce because they feel that the problems are too much but if you have learnt something about how to handle the problem there won't be pressure to give up on the marriage.

Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

The one of letting us know that in marriage problems will always be there but what is important is to solve those problems without straining the marriage.

Is there any topic that u thought wasn't necessary?

Not at all

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

I can't think of any

Thank you for your time

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 06

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Female (32 years)

Where do you live?

In Mdantsane

What is your highest level of education?

Grade 10

What do you do for a living?

I am unemployed

For how long have you been married?

3 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

My pastor from East London fellowship church

How many children do you have?

1

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

Because my pastor asked me to and mainly because I believed that it's a good thing to do for my marriage. I felt like I have to prepare for it because it's not a joke, it's a life time commitment and I needed to be sure if am ready for it.

What was the nature of the marriage preparation course you attended (individual, couple or group sessions?)

They were formal couple sessions

What are the topics/ lessons that you learnt in the marriage preparation program you attended and would you describe them as helpful?

Firstly he taught us about communication, he said we must be able to communicate freely about our feelings, not only feelings but everything. He said communicating will help us to make decisions together and solve problems.

He said when we have a problem we must sit down and find out how we can solve the problem and if someone is wrong he or she must be able to apologies. He also said if we cannot solve the problem on our own we must not turn to relatives and report each other but rather go to a neutral person like a pastor or counsellor.

Do you sometimes have problems that lead to conflict, if yes how do you handle them?

Yes we do have problems; though we never fought physically we sometimes disagree on issues like ways to discipline our children. My husband quickly resorts to smacking the child whereas I prefer talking to the child then maybe give a small punishment. We had to sit and talk about it and we finally agreed that we have to talk to our child first, give her maybe two warnings then give her some sort of punishment if she continues. So when we do we always try to solve them by sitting down, talking about it and see how we can solve them. Some of the problems that we could not solve on our own we went to him and he helped us.

I remember we discussed something about finances, he said that we should budget together and agree on things to buy and that the money in the house belongs to the two of us not to one person.

Since you are unemployed and your husband is, how do you do your budget?

Well it's not a problem doing the budget together, I think because of those lessons my husband understood that the money is for the family not for him alone so even though am not working it makes no difference.

He also taught us about adjustment from being attached from friends, parents, family or relatives in general. He said that when a person is married, your partner comes first because you are joined together as one. However he did say that adjusting does not mean we are cutting ourselves off from our friends and family. It just mean you I have formed a more important bond with my husband and no other bond should be above it because that might cause misunderstandings and fights in my marriage. He said that the in-laws or our parents are not there to dictate to us how we should handle our marriage or make decisions for us but rather they just give advice when we agree to ask for it.

Did you ever had an argument with your husband about your in-laws and how did you handle it

Well I cannot really say they were arguments but there are times where his parents wants to know a lot about what we want to buy and they usually want us to act according to their ideas but thank God my husband doesn't allow them, we stick to the idea of knowing that it's our marriage and it's our decisions.

Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering them?

He told us that marriage is an institution ordained by God so whenever I remember that it helps me to honour my vows.

Looking at your experiences, which topic was difficult for you to put into practice?

He taught us a little bit that we should always try to enjoy ourselves and have some fun together but it's not that easy.

Are you having some fun together?

Yes, but not frequently because there is a child now who needs my attention. Sometimes we do go out but when we go I have to take the baby with me because I can't leave her alone.

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

Yes they did because I wanted to get married but I had no idea what to expect in the marriage and they helped to know the challenges that you encounter and how to deal with them.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

Yes because usually people divorce because what they expect the marriage to be is not what they find when they get into it so I think the lessons are useful. For example I was one of those who never knew what to expect in marriage and if I had gone there without any form of preparation it was going to be tough for me. After all those lessons I was aware of the nature of our relationship, in the discussions you are able to know more about your partner and yourself.

Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

Communication, because it allows me to speak freely about how we feel, how much I love him and also to be able to sit down together and sort out our disagreements without shouting at each other.

Is there any topic that u thought wasn't necessary?

No

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

Sex, because I did not know much about that and I wanted to be taught about it.

Thank you for your time

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 07

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Female (34 years)

Where do you live?

East London, Southernwood

What is your highest level of education?

Grade 12

What do you do for a living?

I am a Receptionist in Vincent, East London

For how long have you been married?

5 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

My pastor from Christ the seed of hope church

How many children do you have?

2

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

Because my pastor said it's a good thing to do and also because I looked at my parents' marriage it was not successful, they divorced, so I did not want the same to happen to me and for me it was not just a matter of being afraid of divorce but I was also afraid of facing a lot violence and abuse in my marriage. I grew up seeing my mother being abused by my father and I could not stop thinking about it. It made me wonder if I was also going to encounter the same thing.

What was the nature of the marriage preparation course you attended (individual, couple or group sessions?)

It was not that formal because sometimes they were lessons but sometimes it was more of a discussion, we attended as a couple at all times.

What are the topics/ lessons that you learnt in the marriage preparation program you attended and would you describe them as helpful?

She taught us that marriage is an institution that is approved by God and it is from God, therefore we must be able to honour it. It helps me to always remember to honour and respect my vows.

She also taught us that in marriage we do not assume things but rather communicate and let your partner understand your feelings correctly. She said communication may be verbal or non-verbal, she gave an example of a person who might choose to sleep in the spare room while the other partner is in the bedroom; she said even though the person does not say anything by words, it is still communication because the actions will definitely mean something to your partner. So she made it clear that all feelings and actions must be communicated clearly.

On my part as a woman, she taught me about making the bedroom beautiful so that it will be a pleasing environment to play with my husband, she talked about decorating and putting clean linen and it helped me because that's what I do and I see that when I decorate the bedroom I just can't take my husband out of bed.

She also taught us about making decisions together as a couple. She said that decisions are not taken individually in the marriage; we sit together and decide on every matter. I found it helpful because with my husband we agreed that we don't make decisions individually but we do it together. Especially when it comes to the money that we have in the house, we plan together on how to use it.

I also remember problem solving, she taught us that that problems or challenges will always be there in marriage but what is important is to solve them or find solutions constructively without hurting your partner. I really found that lesson to be valuable because

there are times were my husband does things that I don't want and I will be angry but I always remember that in every situation I must be constructive in solving the problem.

Do you sometimes have problems that lead to conflict, if yes how do you handle them?

Yes we do, I usually had a problem with my husband's friends, they could call him anytime saying they want company and he goes. To him he did not take as something serious because I was quite, but I remembered that teaching about communication and I said to myself I will not bottle up feelings. I told him how I felt about it and he apologized and we moved on. From that day we never had that problem again.

She also talked about the in-laws, she said that we must always remember that we have moved away from our parents and we chose to start our family, we must not let them interfere a lot in our decisions or in our budget, even when we have a disagreement we must not call them to judge who is wrong or right but rather go to pastors, elders or social workers.

Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering them?

Yes, she told us that once we say those vows we should not think of turning back because God honours them too. When I feel like the marital problems are too much, I always remember the promise that I made to my partner before men and God and it helps me to go on.

What about preserving and having fun in your marriage, were you taught something?

Yes, she said that we must keep the fire burning; we must go out just the two of us and enjoy ourselves.

Looking at your experiences, which topic was difficult for you to put into practice?

Yes this one that I have just explained, enhancing fun, we try to do that but I'm just a receptionist and with the shortage of funds and these two children we just do it once in a blue moon.

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

Yes they did, though sometimes I feel that marriage is difficult I also sometimes remember what she taught us and how to deal with marriage stress.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

Yes I think so, because we were taught about the importance of commitment, that the vows that we made in the presence of God and men are not a joke. Those vows keep a person going and do not give a room for taking divorce as an option. I mean they make you to continue to remember that you must find ways to make it work so as to honour your promise.

Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

Problem solving because it's guaranteed that if you get married you encounter problems, it might not be fighting but there will be challenges here and there.

Is there any topic that u thought wasn't necessary?

No

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

Ummmh I can't think of anything right now.

Thank you for your time

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 08

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Female (25 years)

Where do you live?

In Quigney

What is your highest level of education?

Grade 12 but I am a university student.

What do you do for a living?

I am unemployed, still studying.

For how long have you been married?

3 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

My Pastor from Assemblies of God church

How many children do you have?

None

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

Because I wanted to get married but to be honest I was scared because I didn't know what to expect. You know my whole life I heard most people saying marriage it's so difficult, a few saying it's not, so I wasn't sure which is which. I needed someone to enlighten me about the real issues of marriage.

What was the nature of the marriage preparation course you attended (individual, couple or group sessions?)

I think it was more of a formal thing because we had sort of sessions with the pastor where we had question and answer discussions.

What are the topics/ lessons that you learnt in the marriage preparation program you attended and would you describe them as helpful?

Well we did most things as question and after we write our answers then we discuss. The question that I remember very well was that of why I want to marry my partner. He asked us to think carefully of the reasons why I am choosing to be married to my partner. We further discussed about our expectations in the marriage. After writing we discussed, it helped me a lot because I learnt that my reasons for choosing him should be valid and should be coming from a foundation of love. He said that if a person chooses to get married to a person because of material things, being handsome or beautiful, status, background without the foundation of love, the marriage will be at risk of breaking.

Why did he say the marriage will be at risk of breaking?

Because if something goes wrong with the finances or beauty, what then? That's people start to get bored with each other because the thing that brought them together will not be there anymore. So it really helped me to assess myself and see why I want to be married to him.

The other thing that I remember is the question that said do you think you will encounter some challenges or problems here and there when you get married? Wow! That one made me realize that I was totally lost on what to expect in marriage because my answer was based on the fact that the moment I get married it will be just the two of us living happily every second and no one will disturb us (*laughing*). He taught us that it is not going to be the two of us living in our own world because once we get married, 2 families are coming to relate together including extended family with different views which might cause disagreements on some aspects.

He also clarified that besides challenges coming from other people in the family, even the two of us we may disagree on something but what is important is to solve problems together in a

constructive way. He said we must sit down and talk about the problem and work together to find out how we can solve it.

He said communication is the key to a happy marriage, if you are not happy about something said or done by your partner you must feel free to say it and when you say it the other partner must not feel offended but see where he is wrong and rectify the behaviour. He also said in the same way when your partner does something good you must appreciate with words or actions. He said communication is not only for problems but even if things are okay you can still communicate your feelings of love to your partner. From that lesson, me and my husband we usually buy each other gifts, just to appreciate each other and it works.

You mentioned that you discussed something about problems probably coming from the members of the extended family; did you encounter any from them now that you are married?

Oh yes! Some they come from my in laws because they usually demand money from my husband and yet we don't have that much, or sometimes they want to tell me how I should do things in my house and I don't like it.

How do you deal with such problems?

Sometimes my husband would want to go soft on them but we usually sat down and discussed the matter, we communicated and agreed that we will only assist them if we can afford and if both of us agree. We also had a meeting with them and discussed the matter with them until they eventually understood our points. If there is no money it means we don't have it, there is nowhere we can take it so we tell them that we are sorry but we don't have it, but sometimes if we have it we just agree on how much to give them and then we give them.

Do you sometimes have problems that lead to conflict, if yes how do you handle them?

Yes we do and like I said before we try to sit down and look for ways to resolve the problem, if we disagree even in solving usually I end up giving in for the sake of moving on.

Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering them?

Not really, I don't remember that.

What about preserving and having fun in your marriage, were you taught something?

Yes, I had forgotten about it but he did teach us about it, he said once you get married you must not relax and say it's over but to continue working on spicing your marriage, for example going out for dinner just the two of you. It really helped me a lot because I saw the importance. I always remind my husband to have some fun just the two of us and it's exciting but it's no longer the same and I guess I don't know why.

Does it mean the topic is difficult for you to put into practice?

Yes

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

Yes they did because as I said before I entered into marriage very young and did not know what to expect so they helped me to know and also familiarize with possible ways to deal with marriage stress.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

In think they play a very big part because look at me, if I had gone into marriage with those foolish expectations and then find something different, there was a high chance of me quitting if things get tough, so they do help people to prepare and not give up when the going gets tough.

Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

Communication, not only communication but good communication because it helps me and my husband to solve problems without hurting each other's feelings.

Is there any topic that u thought wasn't necessary?

No

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

Sex, I wanted him to get deeper into sex issues because it's part of the marriage and I dint know much about it.

Thank you for your time

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 09

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Male (30 years)

Where do you live?

In Mdantsane

What is your highest level of education?

Diploma in education

What do you do for a living?

I am an educator but my wife is not employed

For how long have you been married?

3 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

Pastor Maphinda from East London Fellowship church

How many children do you have?

1

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

I did it because it is something that is recommended by our pastor, we all know that when someone wants to get married they go through those lessons. At first I just agreed doing it because he said so but to be honest after finishing it I saw that it is worth doing and am grateful to him. If he had not said we must do it, I was never going to do it and I would not know all the information he gave us.

What was the nature of the marriage preparation course you attended (individual, couple or group sessions?)

There were formal couple lessons

What are the topics/ lessons that you learnt in the marriage preparation program you attended and would you describe them as helpful?

Well the first thing that I remember very well is communication, he said that it is very important to communicate our feelings every time, he said that your partner must not guess what you are thinking or what you want but all things must be communicated clearly to avoid misunderstandings, it helped me a lot because I know about communication but I thought it is important especially in solving problems but he said it is important to communicate your love, intimate feelings to your partner so that your partner knows how you feel and I do that very often and see that it strengthens our love.

He also taught us about how to solve problems, he first told us that there will be challenges in a marriage but the most important thing is being able to solve these problems without straining or breaking the marriage. He said some of these problems maybe financial, difficulty in raising children, interference from the family or general disagreements between the two of us. This really helped me because I think I was one of those people who were not even aware of these possible marital challenges; I just thought it will be just the two of us enjoying life without any challenge. Well he said we try to solve these problems by sitting down, communicating and sometimes compromise. Because he said since we are two different individuals we are bound to disagree sometimes but we have to sit down and try to solve the disagreement by meeting each other halfway.

Do you sometimes have problems that lead to conflict, if yes how do you handle them?

Yes we do but most of the times if it's over the phone we wait until we get home and then we sit down and discuss and find out how we can solve it. We usually have the quarrels because I forget a lot. You know I am employed and my wife is not so sometimes she tells me to bring some things after work and I totally forget so she gets angry saying I forget those things because I don't know how important are they. But anyway, I know I am wrong and usually we quickly

settle the matter because I listen to her, I do not shout back and I apologize. So these days when she sends me to buy maybe baby's cough syrup I will just set a reminder on my phone, then I won't forget.

He also taught us about sharing responsibilities at home, that we should help each other maybe with bathing a child or washing dishes or general house chores. He said we must not have a mentality of saying, "I will not do this chore just because I am a man or a woman". We must just concentrate on helping each other in everything. It was very helpful because I grew up in a family where those things are mostly done by women while men are sitting but even though it's difficult for me I try to help my wife with the house chores here and there.....I will eventually get there (laughing).

He also taught us about finances, he said that the money that you work for as an individual in marriage is not for you alone; everything that you have it's for the two of you because you are one. He said that the budget of the house should be done together and we must both agree on things that we need to buy on that month.

Since you are employed and your wife is not, how do you do your budget?

To me it's not a big deal that she is not working, I know that it's not my money but our money, I just give her the pay slip and we do the budget together.

The last topic that I remember that helped me a lot was about adjustment. He taught us that when we get married our family members and our parents remains special to us but we have to detach from them and cling to our partner, we make decisions as a couple not with our parents, we support them but our partners and kids are our first priority and in helping them we make decisions together as a couple.

Did you have any problem that involved your family members and how did you deal with it?

Actually yes but most of the misunderstandings and problems comes from my parents, I think it's difficult for them to accept that I am married now and I do things with my wife, they

want to take part in every decision I make but I always tell them that I am a grown man who is married and I make decisions with my wife and they are slowly getting the point.

Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering them?

Not really but he just taught us that marriage is from God and we must honour it because God respects it too.

What about preserving and having fun in your marriage, were you taught something?

Yes he did he said we must go out together and have fun.

Looking at your experiences, which topic was difficult for you to put into practice?

Having fun just the two of us, we don't do it as often as he said because we have a child and it seems my wife's attention is more on the child than me. Not that I want to compete with the child but it is like we don't have time to enjoy being the two of us.

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

Yes generally they did because though we meet some challenges, most of them we are able to solve them.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

Yes I think they do because marriage is full of challenges that bring a lot of stress and the good thing is that they provide problem solving skills such as good communication and seeking professional help if the problem escalates.

Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

Problem solving because we really need help in solving these problems since we encounter a lot of them in the marriage.

Is there any topic that you thought wasn't necessary?

No

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

As I said before, sex, if they can add in their program something about sex, it was going to do more because sometimes we tend to forget that sex is the key in our marriages, we must enjoy it and be satisfied to the extent that we don't go and look for it outside because that will lead to infidelity which will eventually lead to divorce.

Thank you for your time

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 10

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Female (27 Years)

Where do you live?

In Mdantsane

What is your highest level of education?

Grade 9

What do you do for a living?

I am unemployed

For how long have you been married?

3 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

Pastor Maphinda from East London Fellowship church

How many children do you have?

1

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

Because our pastor and parents referred us to him to get counselling before we get married.

What was the nature of the marriage preparation course you attended (individual, couple or group sessions?)

They were formal lessons and we attended all of them as a couple.

What are the topics/ lessons that you learnt in the marriage preparation program you attended and would you describe them as helpful?

Well he taught us about marriage being something that is approved and respected by God and that we should respect it too. I must say it is helpful because it helps me to handle my marriage with care and dignity because I know that if I break it, it's not only me who is affected but God too.

He also taught us about communication, that every time we should freely communicate, whether things are good or bad we must communicate. He said communicating helps us to understand each other's feelings and to solve problems without causing our partners.

She said we also use communication as a tool to solve our problems without shouting at each other.

Do you sometimes have problems that lead to conflict, if yes how do you handle them?

Yes we do and we usually communicate so that we understand each other's ideas or feelings about the problems then if it's someone has made a mistake then he or she apologizes.

I remember he taught us about respecting each other, that we are partners and we need to respect each other not to look down upon each other because of background or status but to treat each other with love.

The other topic that I remember much was on finances when he said that we must plan our things together. We must do the budget together and not hide any funds that you have from your partner.

Since you are unemployed and your husband is, how do you do your budget?

We do our budget together and agree on what to buy but since my husband carries his bank card sometimes he ends up buying what we did not agree on

He also taught us about not attaching too much to our parents. He said that sometimes it is difficult for our parents to accept that we are married and we are now independent but it is our duty to explain to them that we are now making decisions as a married couple not individuals. He also talked about adjusting our attachment to friends. He said the way we used to hang out with friends will not be the same when we get married. When you are married your partner and children comes first. I must say my parents are a handful because they want to be involved in all decisions but we try to tell them that I am now married and my wife comes first.

Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering them?

No

What about preserving and having fun in your marriage, were you taught something?

Yes he said to avoid boredom we must go out and have fun just the two of us. He also said that we can buy each other presents just to show appreciation.

Looking at your experiences, which topic was difficult for you to put into practice?

We do go out sometimes but you know the excitement will not be the same as before.

Why do you say the fun not the same anymore?

I really don't know the reason but I just know that it's no longer the same anymore. I don't know.....really.

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

Yes, generally they did because most of the challenges that he said we will encounter we definitely encountered them and its better because we know how to try and solve them or cope with them.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

Yes I really do because marriage is a lot of work and before you get into it you need someone to prepare you for it and if you don't there is a chance of failing because you did not know what to expect.

Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

Communication because we cannot do anything without communicating

Is there any topic that u thought wasn't necessary?

No

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

I can't think of anything

Thank you for your time

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 11

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Female (29 years)

Where do you live?

In Amalinda

What is your highest level of education?

Masters in management of business

What do you do for a living?

Unemployed still looking for employment

For how long have you been married?

3 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

My pastor from Christ the seed of hope church

How many children do you have?

None

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

Because it is important to prepare for marriage before you get into it, I did not want a marriage that will fail so I needed to get all the information that I need to be ready for it. I saw my parent's marriage failing and it was not a good experience, I did not want to fall in the same trap and I definitely did not want my children to grow without a father.

What was the nature of the marriage preparation course you attended (individual, couple or group sessions?)

They were sessions yes but with more discussions and sometimes in those sessions the pastor called different elders to talk to us.

What are the topics/ lessons that you learnt in the marriage preparation program you attended and would you describe them as helpful?

The first thing that she said we must remember is that God loves marriages, he respects it and he does not love divorce. So she said we must honour and keep our marriage. We must never think of divorce as an option since God does not expect us to. It really helped me to understand that this marriage I am about to enter is not a joke and I respect it because God ordained it.

She also taught us about enjoying the bedroom. Especially when it comes to putting decorative attractive clean linen so that it invites my husband. She said that a bedroom is not a place to fight but to enjoy each other. This also helped me to know how to enjoy the bedroom and not to take matters or problems there, I understood that that time is to forget about problems and enjoy and then after that we can talk or we can resolve the challenge in the lounge and the when we come to the bedroom there is no carry over (*laughing*).

She also talked about decision making. She said once we get married we are one; we make decisions together after discussing and agreeing. There is no partner who is supposed to make decisions with his parents or family and then come and impose on the other. So we make sure that whatever we do we agree together and we don't let our families interfere in a stressful way.

I remember another couple (the elders) who where there talked about understanding your partner's love language so that you can please him or her. She said communication can be verbal and non-verbal and both can be used to rekindle the fire of love in a marriage. we must know the love languages like kissing, touching, acts of service, cuddling and that we are different and we might want one of those more than the other, so it is important to know your partner's love language and use it to make him/her happy. Well I loved the topic because from that exercise I decided to know my partner's love language. I know that he enjoys some massage and cuddling

and whenever I do that I just can't keep him out of bed. It is just a way of communicating that keeps the fire of love burning.

The other couple that was there taught us about budgeting and saving. They said that we must not hide our pay slips from each other. Everything concerning money must be transparent. They said we must sit down and plan on our budget and agree on what to buy. They also discouraged impulsive buying and buying everything on account. It really helped me because I realized that buying things on account really makes you poor than just to Save the money and buy the item with cash because with account you end up paying lots of money than you should. We made a decision with my husband that we are only going to buy a car on account and the rest we buy with cash or lay-by if we afford. Because of that decision, for the past 3 years we never had a problem associated with debt.

She also talked about communication and problem solving. She said that we need to communicate with each other in everything we do and solve our problems without causing more problems. She said good communication will help us to solve our problems without leading to more conflict. If there is a problem or challenge, we must sit down and communicate and find the solution. If we find ourselves failing to solve it, we must not leave like that but rather talk to a counsellor, elders or pastors.

Do you sometimes have problems that lead to conflict, if yes how do you handle them?

Yes and we usually try to sit down and talk about it so we can resolve it. However we have a problem of bareness. We do not have a child and by the time the doctor told us that there are slim chances for us to conceive, it hit our marriage so bad, I never expected to encounter that kind of problem, I always had it in mind that we will have children, I never imagined myself dying without children of my own. It is really a blessing that this type of problem was mentioned in the marriage preparation course, it helped us to deal with it without destroying our marriage. Communication between just the two of us did not help because we were both devastated. When I saw that we were falling apart, I spoke to my wife and we went to FAMSA to look for counselling and it helped us to get through it.

Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering them?

No, not really

What about preserving and having fun in your marriage, were you taught something?

Yes.., she said we must always remember to have fun, we must sometimes go out and enjoy just the two of us.

Looking at your experiences, which topic was difficult for you to put into practice?

The one about continuously enjoying and having fun; we usually do it just once in a while maybe because we are used to each other.

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

Yes they did because I had a lot of things that I did not know about marriage and I was taught and prepared to enter it.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

Yes I think they do because usually if you enter into marriage without being prepared, the challenges that you meet will come as a shock and people will end up making a decision to quit when they are in that shock.

Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

Problem solving because I think it's kind of guaranteed that if you get married you encounter some challenges and you will need to know how to deal with them.

Is there any topic that u thought wasn't necessary?

None

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

I can't think of any

Thank you for your time

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 12

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Female (33 Years)

Where do you live?

In southernwood

What is your highest level of education?

Grade 9

What do you do for a living?

Domestic worker

For how long have you been married?

5years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

Pastor Maphinda

How many children do you have?

2

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

Well, I always believed that whenever you want to take a big step in your life you must find help. And I wanted to learn more about marriage so I did it just because I thought it's a good investment for my marriage.

What was the nature of the marriage preparation course you attended (individual, couple or group sessions?)

It was formal; we attended sessions as a couple as he told us

What are the topics/ lessons that you learnt in the marriage preparation program you attended and would you describe them as helpful?

We learnt about communication; he said that it is the key in a marriage; we must be able to communicate freely and honestly with each other.

He said that this communication will help us in solving problems. He said when problems or challenges come we must be able to sit and communicate calmly to solve the problems. He said that challenges will always be there but they must make us stronger not to destroy us. He did say we may encounter financial problems, disagreements on our decisions; we may not like the same things though we are married and we may have different ideas on which asset to start buying on how to raise children. We can only resolve our problems in a successful way through communication.

Do you sometimes have problems that lead to conflict, if yes how do you handle them?

Yes he was right, we do have challenges here and there but we always talk about it so that we can resolve it together if it's something that we are failing to agree or resolve we go back to him and he usually gives us some counselling around that issue.

He also taught us that getting married is a process of adjustment that is adjusting from being a single lady to a married woman. He said that everything you do you must always remember that you are now attached to your partner and include him/her. For example if you want to go and visit your relatives you must talk to your partner first and have an agreement instead of just doing it.

He also taught us about how we handle the in-laws (our parents) he said that when we get married we still continue to love them but knowing that your partner comes first in decisions and everything that you do. We no longer consult our parents first when we want to do something but rather with our partners we can only consult our parents when the two of us agree to so.

He also talked about being very careful with our friends because sometimes other people tend to spend more time with friends than the family. So we are very careful of those things, we do have friends but we know that our family takes first priority.

Did you ever had an argument with your partner that included your parents or in-laws and how did you handle it?

Oh yes we did have those challenges. They came mostly from my mother in-law because she calls my husband and demand that he should come home to see her immediately or ask him to give her lots of money or buy gifts. At first my husband would just give her money then later tell me but I had to communicate to him how I feel about the issue and to remind him that we are in a marriage and we do things together, there is no third party in making decisions. So now we are fine with those issues because if she does that we first sit and talk and see if we have that kind of money, if we don't my husband will just tell her that we don't have.

The other thing that he taught us about was budgeting. He said that the budget of the family should not be done by one person, he said that if someone is not transparent about money issues it may lead the other partner to think negative things for example one may think that you are not transparent about your money because you are support your girlfriend somewhere. So people must sit and agree on the things to buy.

Since you are unemployed and your husband is, how do you do your budget?

Well that is a bit simple for us, we don't have a problem. I know the salary of my husband because he shows me his salary; we just sit and do our monthly budget together.

Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering them?

No

What about preserving and having fun in your marriage, were you taught something?

Oh yes he did, I had forgotten about that. He told us to continuously go out and have fun just the 2 of us but yhooh, I must say we used to go out a lot before I gave birth to my first born but now it's difficult, it's really not the same anymore.

Why do you say the fun is not the same anymore

I don't know really maybe it's because of the kids, they need me all the time and time to have fun is shortened.

Does it mean it is a topic you are struggling to implement?

Yes, it is really difficult

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

Yes they did because I am using most of the skills that I got from those sessions.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

Yes because most people divorce because they are overwhelmed by marriage challenges and they give up because they feel they cannot cope but if you attend these premarital counselling courses you will have skills or ways to deal with the challenges.

Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

Communication because that's the key to understand each other

Is there any topic that u thought wasn't necessary?

No

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

I wanted him, to include bedroom stuff, I don't know what exactly but I feel I needed to be taught more on issues of sex and bedroom issues.

Thank you for your time

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 13

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Male (35 years)

Where do you live?

In southernwood

What is your highest level of education?

Grade 10

What do you do for a living?

I own a business in Mdantsane

For how long have you been married?

4 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

Pastor Maphinda from East London Fellowship church

How many children do you have?

2

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

Because from the beginning I couldn't wait to get married but I was afraid because I thought it is a very difficult thing because most people usually say it is, so I needed someone to enlighten me about this whole thing.

Why did you think marriage is very difficult?

Because I saw the experiences of my parents, they ended up in divorce, my brothers as well they say they are not enjoying it so that's why I thought it is actually difficult.

And after the marriage preparation course, did you still have it in mind that it is difficult?

Not really, it became clearer to me that yes challenges or problems will be there but as long as those problems are solved without hurting each other's feelings then your marriage will remain solid.

What was the nature of the marriage preparation course you attended (individual, couple or group sessions?)

They were couple sessions and some we had to follow up on radio because it was difficult to balance time for going to work and going for face to face sessions.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

I learnt about communication, that in everything you do communication is the best thing in the marriage. He said that we communicate when things are not okay, maybe where there is a problem and we also communicate when things are okay. He said our marriages remains exciting when we continue communicating our feelings for example complementing your partner and telling her that I love you or that she looks hot.... It really helped me a lot because I understood that we must communicate when something is not going on well but I never thought it's important to frequently say things like I love you, you look beautiful or I miss you. So I understood that, I do it to my wife and she loves it.

I also learnt that together with communication, there is problem solving because she said there is no way we can solve the problem without communicating together. He said whenever there is a problem we must acknowledge that there is a problem, have time to sit and talk, find out the root of the problem together and help each other to find a way to solve it. As I said before, he said problems are there but we must sit down and talk about it and find a way out of it without being angry or overstressed and make sure that our happiness in the marriage is not

strained by those challenges. He also said when we are in a marriage we are not competing to see who is good at debating, if am wrong I must be able to admit and ask for forgiveness.

Do you sometimes have problems that lead to conflict, if yes how do you handle them?

Yes we do have disagreements and I know it's normal to disagree. We normally sit down when I come back from work and talk about it and try to solve it together until all of us are satisfied with the solution.

He also talked about trust. He said some time the stress that people have in marriages are because they are stressed if they don't know what their partner is up to, things like what is she doing now, with who, where. He said that those thoughts are stressful and they usually lead to misunderstandings and fights. So it is very important to trust your partner, to have that rest in you that says wherever she is, she is thinking about me. So hey, it helped me because I was that kind of guy who was too jealous which was not good.

Some of the things I forgot but I remember he also talked about finances. He said transparency is very important, he also said that the finances belongs to the two of us not to one person and we must do our budget together

Since you are employed and your wife is not, how do you do your budget?

Because I am self-employed, I have taxis that bring cash every day, when that cash comes in at night we agree on how much to take according to the needs in the house and then the other amount we put in the bank. My wife is equally involved in running the business; she is the one who does banking of the savings.

He also taught us about putting our partners or families first. He said it is very important to be able to adjust well from being a bachelor to being a married man or woman. He said that our parents are still part of us; we don't reject them when we get married but our partner comes first. It means that we don't make decision with friends, family members or parents and leave our partners but we make decisions with our partners and telling the third party must be a decision that is agreed by both of us.

Did you ever had a challenge or problem that involves your parents or friends and how did you handle it?

I didn't have any problems from adjusting from friends but I did have challenges with my mother because I think the early days of my marriage she was really a thorn. She would want to be involved in every decision and step I take with my wife and that really stressed my wife. I went home, I took her and we talked about it, I told her that I am now married, it's no longer the same, I now make decisions with my wife not to consult her in everything I do. Even though it took time for her to understand the situation but I made it clear to her and she is getting there.

The last thing I remember was about sharing responsibilities at home. Even though my wife is not working, during the weekend I sometimes help with the kids and chores. It also helped me because I grew up in an environment where those chores are done by women only so it made me see that it does not make you less of a man if you cook or wash dishes. Though it was difficult to implement but I try.

There was also a topic about sharing responsibilities but when it comes to things like doing house chores I think that one my wife can do better since she is a woman. However once in a while I try to cook.

He also helped me to change my mind set about some things that we grew up believing and doing which not good for our marriages. You know before I moved to east London, I grew up in the rural areas of Mthatha and we knew that when we call important family or community meetings, women were not allowed to take part. I thought it was normal because even the women in the community did not complain about it. It is after this marriage preparation course that I realized that it is actually not fair to exclude your wife in making major decisions and that it may eventually cause conflict. I really learnt a lot about that and I try by all means to include my wife in every major decision that concerns our family.

Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering them?

The first thing that he said we must remember is that God loves marriages, he respects it and he does not love divorce. So she said we must honour and respect our marriage because the vows that we did were not only to men but to God. When he joins you together it is wrong in his sight to divorce, so because God himself respects my marriage I do value my vows as well. Whenever I feel like the challenges are too much, I remember that I have a responsibility to put an effort and make it work because I made vows before men and God.

Looking at your experiences, which topic was difficult for you to put into practice?

I remember he taught us about having fun and maintaining friendship, he said we must go out and have fun just the two of us so that we rekindle the fire of love. It was helpful because we go out once in a while. It's just that it's a bit difficult now because of these kids who need attention, the time for fun is little now.

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

For me individually they did because I grew up in a family where marriages are failing and I thought I won't handle it too. The preparation helped me to be ready for the marriage and to know ways to deal with challenges that comes with it.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

Yes because if you are not prepared for the marriage you are likely to be shocked when you meet that challenges and then think divorce will be the way out for you.

Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

Problem solving because there in every marriage there will be challenges and we really needed to know how to solve them. After you have overcome a challenge your marriage you get that satisfaction that says your marriage is solid. Solving problems without straining the marriage makes your marriage even stronger than before.

Is there any topic that u thought wasn't necessary?

None

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

I wanted more about sex in marriage. Not that I don't know how to have sex but sex in marriage and the sex that we used to have once a while before marriage is different and there is a probability of being fed up with it in marriage because you get it whenever you want it, so I wanted to know how to make it enjoyable in marriage.

Thank you for your time

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 14

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Female (25 years)

Where do you live?

In southernwood

What is your highest level of education?

Grade 12

What do you do for a living?

I am studying at a local university

For how long have you been married?

3 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

Pastor Maphinda from East London Fellowship church

How many children do you have?

None

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

I just heard him at the radio teaching about marriage and I decided to follow up the premarital sessions with my partner.

What was the nature of the marriage preparation course you attended (individual, couple or group sessions?)

They were few formal sessions which we attended as a couple and we followed up most of them every Wednesday at the radio when we were relaxing at home.

Why did you choose to listen to the teachings on the radio rather than going to make an appointment with him face to face?

Because I was very busy at the university with my work and my partner also did not have time because it was hectic at his work place and he had to prepare UNISA exams.

Well I remember he taught about communication, he said that communication is very important and that we must communicate everything together clearly. He said that it is not only a matter of communicating but making sure that we communicate without hurting each other's feelings. One of the things that I liked most about communication is when he said we must always remember that when we don't communicate our partners will struggle to guess what we are feeling or what we want and therefore it may lead them to wrongly interpret each other's actions.

He also said that our communication must not only be mere talk, it must go along with our actions, for example if you say I am sorry your actions must mean it and also show seriousness by not doing it again, or you cannot say I love you when your actions are saying am fed up of you. It really helped me to understand the importance of communication and I do make sure that I don't assume that my husband knows what I want or what I feel but I communicate.

He also talked about marital challenges. I liked the fact that he said that challenges will always be there and getting married does not mean that we do not meet them. It helped me because that time I was clueless, I had no idea that married people face challenges that may be financial, bareness, sickness of partner or child, negative interference from relatives and so on. He also said that though we love each other as partners there is a very high chance of liking different things and that may lead to disagreements or conflicts if we are not careful. Am glad I knew about it before getting in the marriage otherwise what I would have done if I encountered one of those problems without knowing how to solve it. So he said if there is a problem we must sit down and find solutions together creatively without straining our marriage. He also said liking different things is not a bad thing but what is important is to meet each other half way and

compromise it was helpful to me because I thought that if people are in marriage you must like the same things but I learnt that we are different individuals and we must compromise and enjoy our differences.

Can you share with me some of the problems you encountered and how you handled them?

Yes my husband was retrenched from his previous work and it was a difficult time for my marriage because I am not employed as well. However we tried to sit down and talk and find ways to deal with it. We finally agreed to go and seek help from professional counsellors and it helped us. The counsellor even helped my husband to get a job and we bounced back.

He also talked about being one another's strength. He said when you get married you are one and it is not wise to criticize each other because of our weaknesses but to be strong for your partner when your partner is weak. For example if your partner is forgetful, it does not help to criticize him/her but help in reminding. It helped me a lot because that's what I do, my husband is not very good in remembering so I make sure I remind him to do things whenever necessary without forget.

The other topic that I remember is when he talked about marriage being from God. He said God approves and respects marriage so we must do the same. God expects us to work things out not to divorce. I also benefited from it because now I know God's opinion about marriage and if am facing challenges I trust that God will give me the grace to solve them.

The other thing I remember very well was about finances and budgeting, he said that the money that we have in the house is for the two of us not for one person so we must agree on whatever we do with the money.

How do you do your budget?

We just come together and then we usually buy the basic items first then the rest we agree on how to use it and how much to save

He also said that a good marriage starts with a total disclosure of who you are to your partner. He said for us to be able to build a marriage that is based on trust; we must not hide our

history or anything to our partners. He said people enter into marriage with bad and good history and some of it might have an effect on the marriage. He gave an example of a man who had a child with someone in his teenage years. He said if this is not disclosed to the other partner before marriage, conflict is likely to occur as soon as the partner finds out the truth. Hence he was saying my partner must know exactly who I am and my history so that he enters the marriage knowing.

Since you are a student and your husband is working, how do you do your budget?

Well even though I am a student I get money sometimes from student loan though my husband earns money per month we still do the budget together, I know his salary and we don't have problems with budgeting together.

Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering them?

No I don't remember anything that

What about preserving and having fun in your marriage, were you taught something?

Yes I just remember a session where he was saying partners must go out and enjoy themselves so that they keep that joy in the marriage. Yes it was helpful but because of pressure of work on my husband side and studies from my side we don't go out often, we just do it once in a blue moon.

Does it mean it is a difficult topic for you to put into practice?

Yes and detaching from parents as well, as I explained earlier

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

Yes they did because personally I was damaged goods; I felt I won't do justice to myself if I enter into marriage without going through some preparation first.

What do you mean?

I had been disappointed in my previous relationships and I just had it in mind that I will not be successful in this one again.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

Yes they do, it helps you to understand marriage and the things that you encounter and how to attempt solving it.

Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

The one of challenges because for me I thought getting married means you are so in love that you cannot fight or disagree so at least It made me to be aware of some skills to solve these problems.

Is there any topic that u thought wasn't necessary?

No

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

I would want him to include individual sessions because there are some challenges that need to be dealt with individually. We can do sessions the two of us yes but remember we are not at the same level of understanding marriage and our backgrounds are different.

Thank you for your time

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 15

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Female (28 years)

Where do you live?

In Southernwood

What is your highest level of education?

Grade 10

What do you do for a living?

I am unemployed

For how long have you been married?

3 years

Who was the provider of the marriage preparation course you attended?

Christ the seed of hope church

How many children do you have?

1

Why did you go for premarital counselling?

Because our pastor told us that it's an important thing to do before a person goes into marriage.

What was the nature of the marriage preparation course you attended (individual, couple, group sessions?)

Some were sessions and some were discussions which included other elders of the church

What are the topics/ lessons that you learnt in the marriage preparation program you attended and would you describe them as helpful?

We were taught that marriage comes from God because he created them male and female. God said it is not good for a man to be alone. So I learnt that marriage is not something to play with, we should cherish and respect it since God also respect it. This made me to understand that divorce is not an option because God does not like divorce. Whatever challenge we face we must work it out.

She also taught us about the hierarchy in the house. She said the man is the head of the house and therefore I must give him respect as the head. He was also told that I am his helper and he should treat me with love and respect. I liked it because it made us to understand our role in the house. Even though he is the head it doesn't mean that he has to exploit me but love me as his wife and me also I must be his helper in everything.

She also taught us about oneness, she said that once we get married we are one. That means that there is no one who must say this or that belongs to me because everything we have belongs to us. So I learnt that whatever I get even if I work for it individually at the end it's for the two of us. She also said that we must budget the money together, she said everything must be clear and we must be able to save not just use all the money every month.

Since you are unemployed and your husband is, how do you do your budget?

We do everything together, even though am not working I am happy that I have a say in what to buy and how much to save so it's really working for me.

She also taught us about solving our problems. She said if we have a problem we must sit down and talk about it and solve it without shouting at each other. She made it clear that good communication is very important in a marriage. She also said when we have children we must never argue in front of children because that will affect our children negatively. She said if we fail to solve a problem on our own we must nit call a friend or relative to help us since there is a

chance that they may take sides and cause more problems. She said that we must rather go to the elders of the church or to a pastor or counsellor.

Do you sometimes have problems that lead to conflict, if yes how do you handle them?

Yes we do but we always try to sit down and communicate, find out where things are wrong and find a solution together. The major problem we had was about my in laws, they wanted to interfere with our decisions a lot and they demanded a lot of money from my husband. It got so worse than I ever imagined. My husband did not see it, he continued to say his parents needed our support but I felt it was too much and they were doing it deliberately, it really affected our marriage until we decided to go back to the pastor and she helped us solve it.

She also said a lot about the bedroom. That it is a sacred room and we must never take it for granted. She taught us about putting clean linen, decorating it and keeping it clean. She also talked about sex that we must enjoy our sex life. She said it takes two and we must both be active. I loved the topic of sex because I never had anyone to talk to about it since in our culture we don't discuss sex a lot.

The other elder who was present taught us about how to handle the in laws and relatives. They said that we must be careful not to let them cause problems between us. We still love them yes but we must know that we are one now and we don't make decisions with them.

Did you ever had an argument that includes you're in laws and how did you deal with it?

Yes we did it was an issue of his mother demanding money and questioning us if we do things without telling her. We tried to sit and talk about it but it seemed as if my husband took it lightly and for me it was frustrating until I had to go and ask the pastor for help. We went for counselling with her and it worked. Now my husband is not afraid to tell that he is now married and he does not make decisions with her anymore. Though it was difficult at first to accept it now we are fine

She also taught us about trust. She said a good marriage is built upon trust. We must trust each other and know that even when my partner is not around, I can still trust that he is not doing anything mischievous like cheating. She said trust will give you rest and peace. She also taught

us that on the other hand we must not do things that make the other partner to think otherwise. Things like communicating if you will arrive late are very important so that there won't be any doubt in your partner

Where you taught something about the importance of vows and how to keep on remembering them?

Not really

What about preserving and having fun in your marriage, were you taught something?

Yes she said we must enjoy each other's company, we must make sex enjoyable in marriage and we must also go out and maybe have dinner and watch a movie just the two of us.

Looking at your experiences, which topic was difficult for you to put into practice?

Preserving fun is not easy, it was a good lesson though we don't do it as often as she said because we have a child and we don't have anyone to leave her with.

Did the lessons generally help you looking at what you are experiencing now?

Yes they did because most of the challenges that I meet my mind go back to what she said and I said remember how she said we must deal with it.

In your opinion, was the marriage preparation program you attended helpful enough to prevent divorce?

Yes because I think divorce is mostly about these marital challenges and people feeling they can't cope then they quit, so I believe if people get such preparation they will know that challenges are there what is needed is to solve them without hurting each other.

Which topic would you regard as most important and why?

Challenges and solutions because I am facing some of these problems but it is better because I know how to deal with some of them

Is there any topic that u thought wasn't necessary?

No

Looking at your experiences is there any topic that was not included yet you felt your counsellor should have included it?

Can't think of any

Thank you for time