

**TILL DEATH DO US PART: PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF
PREMARITAL AND MARRIAGE COUNSELLING IN THE BOLAND,
HEIDELBERG AND TYGERBERG SUB-DISTRICT AREAS, WESTERN CAPE
PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Victoria Justine Christians declare that till death do us part: perceptions and experiences of premarital and marriage counselling in the Boland, Heidelberg and Tygerberg sub-district areas, Western Cape Province, South Africa is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references.



Signature



Date

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this PhD study to my father, the late Cornelius (Neelsie) Julie. Today my heart is broken writing this dedication to you. I always envisioned you being the first one I would inform about completing my studies as this was not only my dream but yours as well. Now I am sitting here contemplating how to dedicate this PhD to someone that has been my foundation, who taught me what I know and who has been my lifelong cheerleader and biggest supporter. Dedda, I want to thank you for being my father, guide, teacher and spiritual leader. You showed me through the life you lived what it means to be a protector, provider and sustainer. Throughout your life, you put God at the center and through your love for people, you showcased the love of God. You were not only “all things to all men” (1 Corinthians 9 verse 12) but you were “like a tree, planted by streams of water, yielding its fruit in season, whose leaves does not wither, and who prospers in all he does” (Psalm 1 verse 3). Today, I want to thank you, I want to SALUTE you and I want you to know that I love you and miss you every single day. Dedda I want to tell you that I made it! This is for you!



**In loving memory of Cornelius Julie
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ABSTRACT

Marriage is an important part of society that affects the way society is formed, organised and functions. With the growing trend in divorce rates, the institution of marriage is under threat. Divorce affects divorcees, children and society as a whole due to its severe negative effects, causing disruption on a micro, meso and macro-level of society. Several counselling programmes have been developed over the years to help couples deal with and overcome their adversities in order to find happiness in their relationships. However, even with such interventions, divorce rates continue to rise. The current study aimed at exploring and understanding the perceptions and experiences of the usefulness of premarital and marriage counselling from the perspectives of counselling providers and married individuals. The study further aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of how counselling providers can better cater to the needs of couples and for couples to voice their needs and expectations from counselling. In order to do this, a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design was employed. Data were drawn from semi-structured in-depth individual interviews with counselling providers who resided in the Boland and Heidelberg area, and from married individuals from the Tygerberg sub-district, who took part in focus groups and a workshop. Overall, the study was mainly focused on the Western Cape areas. A theoretical framework, Social Role Theory, was utilised as a lens through which marriage can be viewed, specifically in terms of role socialization and expectation. The findings demonstrate that couples regard premarital and marriage counselling as beneficial and useful, and that effectiveness increases when couples commit to each other and the process. Additionally, training for counselling providers is critical, as this has an impact on the effectiveness of counselling. As a result, this study developed a strategy that could be useful to counsellors by identifying topics for premarital and marriage counselling that were recommended by married individuals. This strategy should potentially add value to the existing approaches used by counselling providers.

Key words: marriage, divorce, premarital counselling, marriage counselling, counselling approaches, social role theory, qualitative research

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the sanctity of marriage and its recognition in society today, the institution of marriage appears to be under threat (Akyina & Oduro-Okyireh, 2015; Zikhali, 2009) especially with the divorce rate steadily increasing across the globe, including South Africa. According to Unified Lawyers (2022), the global divorce rate has increased by 251.8% since 1960. Some of the countries with the highest divorce rates include Luxembourg at 87%, Spain at 65% and the United States at 46%. According to Nielsen, Davidson, Hviid and Wohlfahrt (2014), a significant proportion of all marriages, especially in the Western world end in divorce. Bramlett and Mosher (2002) estimated that 40% to 50% of marriages will end in divorce, especially first-time marriages. A few years later, the statistics remained static and similar results were found by Rogers (2004) and again by researchers Stevenson and Wolfers (2007), and were confirmed later through research conducted by Williamson, Nguyen, Bradbury and Karney (2016). Furthermore, according to Clark and Brauner-Otto (2015), divorce rates in Sub-Saharan Africa are comparable to those in Europe, with divorce rates being the lowest in West Africa near the Sahel (i.e. Nigeria) and higher on the east coast of Africa (i.e. Uganda and Ethiopia). In Sub-Saharan Africa, divorce, not widowhood is the leading driver of union breakdown and family instability, with the greatest rates observed in war-torn nations such as the Central African Republic (Clark & Brauner-Otto, 2015). South Africa is also one of the countries affected by divorce, with approximately one-third of all marriages ending in divorce, according to Preller (2013) and roughly half of all first-time marriages ending in divorce (Williamson et al., 2016).

Divorce does not happen in a vacuum, it affects the divorcing persons and their families (Everett & Volgy, 1991; Venter, van der Berg, van der Merwe & van Rensburg, 1995). This points to ways in which divorce can cause great strain within the family system as it constitutionally facilitates the fragmentation of the family unit (Lawler & Salzman, 2017). According to Trivedi, Sareen and Dhyani (2009) divorce, amongst other life events, has the most stressful impact on the persons going through it. Additionally, the effects that marital dissolution has on the family are usually negative (Gähler, 2006). These effects include problems within the social, psychological, physical and economic spheres of their lives (Gähler, 2006), such as the experience of “low levels of psychological well-being, more health problems, greater risk of

mortality, more social isolation, less satisfying sex lives, greater levels of depression, alcohol use, lower levels of happiness and self-acceptance” (Bramlett & Mosher, 2001, p. 2). Most of the time, the economic consequence of divorce is severe for women as children mostly remain with the mother after a divorce. This is also the case due to the man not contributing to the household any longer or only providing a small amount monthly (Anderson, 2014). Whereas, for the men, on the other hand, “the retention of income combined with a decrease in family size may actually result in an increase in his new household income per capita” (Wilkinson-Ryan & Small, 2008, p. 109). Some of the children that come from divorce households display a decrease in academic achievement, undergo depression, show behavioural problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, premarital sexual intercourse at an early life stage and being arrested (Anderson, 2014).

The decision to divorce is due to various factors that differ from one person/couple to the other according to Mooney, Knox and Schacht (2011). Some of the contributing factors include poor communication, lack of conflict resolution skills, incompatibility in values and goals, sexual incompatibility, extramarital relationships, jealousy, employment, finances, difficulty coping with change and stress relating to parenting and illness as well as cultural and ethical differences (Mooney et al., 2011; Preller, 2013). These contributing factors, if not mitigated, worked on or fixed have the potential to damage a bond between a couple. With this said, a relationship struggles to survive if issues between a couple is not resolved which can contribute to a decision to separate or divorce.

With the rise in the divorce rate globally and its negative effects, many countries have developed and implemented premarital counselling programmes to influence the decision to divorce for married couples. Regardless of whether these counselling programmes have been successful or not, it shows an effort in the attempt to reduce the risk of divorce. Several studies conducted, therefore, have focused on the effectiveness of premarital counselling. For example, in Australia and New Zealand, a study was conducted by Parish in 1992 focusing on assessing the effectiveness of a premarital assessment programme to evaluate its potential for enhancing positive growth with premarital individuals. Furthermore, the results of a study conducted by Williamson, Ross, Karney and Bradbury (2018) suggest that premarital education participation is linked to later help-seeking by empowering couples to take steps to maintain their relationship throughout their marriage. An article by Stucky, Eggeman, Eggeman, Moxley and Schumm (2008), entitled “Premarital counselling as perceived by newlywed couples: An exploratory

study”, engaged the perceived effectiveness of premarital counselling programmes in the United States. Furthermore, in Egypt, Onsy and Amer (2014) examined the relationship between religious marriage and marriage satisfaction, as well as factors associated with attitudes towards pursuing couples counselling. They found that there is a need for designing better couples counselling services in Egypt. Also, in 2014, in Zimbabwe, a research study was conducted by Mutanana and Gasva who were interested in testing the different modes of counselling amongst married couples. Their findings revealed that married couples generally have a positive perception of all the tested modes of counselling. It can be seen from the aforementioned studies that the main focus has generally been on the assessment of premarital counselling programmes. With respect to South Africa, only one dissertation conducted could be found that examined the perceptions of premarital counselling contrary to testing the effectiveness of counselling programmes as per the international studies. Nonetheless, the dissertation focused on the “Unwillingness of couples to present themselves for premarital counselling: A preliminary investigation” and through the investigation, Zikhali (2009) found that the engaged couples experienced high levels of relationship satisfaction and therefore not being very susceptible to marital issues or problems and divorce. Consequently, the state of their relationship determined how they would perceive premarital and marriage counselling (Zikhali, 2009). A study by Keverenge, Kipnusu, Tarus and Karimi (2020), revealed that premarital counseling is still not widely accepted in Lugari (Kenya). Consequently, couples engage in couple marital programs that convey a different, preventive strategy for predicting and focusing on the risk variables associated with couples' disappointment and separation (Keverenge, Kipnusu, Tarus and Karimi, 2020). Zikhali (2009) supports this view in his study which found that there is a lack of awareness into what premarital counselling entails and that often, couples perceive this as an intervention that should be feared. He further describes that couples' perception of premarital counselling is that only those who do not have control go for counselling, and are therefore against having an external party prescribing to them on how to manage their marriage. Couples describe the physical format of counselling as an uncomfortable experience (Zikhali, 2009). These perceptions on premarital counselling are also experienced by couples in many states in the United States of America (Tambling, Glebova, 2013; Valiente, Belanger, Estrada, 2002). However, in some African communities, biblical therapy in marital counselling is perceived to be effective for several reasons: firstly, Christian counsellors are thought to be spiritually equipped to follow a step-by-step therapeutic procedure developed to "target the root issue(s)," rather than just treat the symptoms. Secondly, a Christian marriage counsellor is expected to know God's word and to seek the Lord's presence in each

session through prayer, and thirdly, a Christian counsellor is able to recommend appropriate Scripture for each specific marital counselling case that is presented to him or her (Sodi, Esere, Gchinga, Hove, 2014).

It is apparent that there is evidence to suggest that premarital and marriage counselling can be effectively implemented with couples that are open to it and willing to learn and engage it in practical ways. However, counselling providers, internationally and locally, need to know and understand how marriage and premarital counselling is perceived by these couples to make an effective impact. Therefore, this study aims to explore perceptions that couples and counselling providers have on the usefulness of premarital and marriage counselling. It is endeavoured that such a study will assist us to get a better understanding of perceptions held and from these develop counselling programmes that are relevant and take into consideration how people perceive counselling. Having relevant counselling programmes could contribute towards equipping couples with the necessary skills to handle the challenges they face in their relationships, therefore reducing the likelihood of divorce and creating stable families.

1.2. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND BACKGROUND

Marriage rates differ considerably across countries according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2018). In countries such as Portugal, Chile and Slovenia to mention a few, marriage rates are very low, whereas, in others, they are very high (e.g. Turkey, Lithuania and the United States) (OECD, 2018). According to the OECD (2018), marriage rates, in many parts of the world (e.g. Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States, Mexico, Japan etc.), have declined over the past few decades. In 1970, most countries had marriage rates that were between 7 and 10 marriages per 1000 people. By 1995, it had declined to around 5 to 7 marriages per 1000 people. “Declining rates of marriage have been accompanied by the increase in rates of divorce” (OECD, 2018, p. 3). Even with the increase in divorce rates, successful marriages are still viewed as a highly valued goal in countries such as the United States of America (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). It is reported that “more than 70% of Americans believe that marriage should be a lifelong commitment that should only be broken in the most dire of circumstances and 93 percent of Americans rank having a good marriage as one of their most important goals (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). For example, communication breakdown, sexual incompatibility, domestic violence, infidelity, alcohol and drug abuse to mention a few (Moore, Jekielek, Bronte-Tinkew, Guzman, Ryan & Redd, 2004). Prior to 2000, the Institute for American Values (1995) anticipated that positive attitudes about marriage

appeared to be declining and that a third of all adults do not see marriage as more beneficial than being single.

In South Africa, the number of divorces fluctuated between the period of 2008 to 2011 with a consistent increase from 2012 to 2017 (SSA, 2017, p. 6). Between 2017 and 2018, there was a slight decrease of 0.4% indicated in divorces (SSA, 2019). Furthermore, divorces classified by population group for the period from 2008 to 2019 showed that Black African couples had the highest number of divorces compared to the other population groups (SSA, 2019). Whereas, during the earlier years of 2002 to 2007, the White population used to completely dominate the number of divorces, according to SSA, 2011. According to SSA, 2015, SSA, 2016, SSA, 2017, SSA, 2018 and SSA, 2019, the provincial distribution of divorces indicates that the Western Cape is amongst the provinces with the highest number of divorces year on year from 2015 to 2019. The number of divorces granted in 2015 in the Western Cape was 4854 (SSA, 2015). This number increased in 2016 to 6224 (SSA, 2016). In 2017 there was a slight decrease to 6050 (SSA, 2017). The number increased again in 2018 to 6274 (SSA, 2018) and in 2019 there was again a slight decrease to 6108 (SSA, 2019). However, no mention is made of the trend for divorces granted for the coloured population in the Western Cape although statistics for the coloured population, in 2011, displayed that “there was a notable increase in the proportions of divorces from 13.9% in 2010 to 16.6% in 2011” (SSA, 2011, p.5) which were not confirmed, contradicted, amended or outlined up until the 2019 SSA Annual Report.

According to Lamania and Riedman (1997), the divorce rate will certainly increase in the next generation of married couples, with up to two-thirds of marriages resulting in a breakup, and two-thirds of these break ups taking place within the first decade of being married. Additionally, SSA (2019) noted that “almost half (43.1%) of the 23 710 marriages in 2019 were marriages that lasted for less than ten years” (p. 7) in South Africa. These divorces were mostly from individuals who had been married for the first time (SSA, 2019). Therefore, despite the desire for successful, life-long marriages, couples marrying for the first time continue to face roughly a 40 to 50% chances of divorce during their lifetime (NCHS, 1996).

Many factors contribute to the breakdown of a marriage. Equally important, the empowerment and emancipation of women, for instance, can also be added, however, not as a factor per se but more as a contributor to the destabilisation of the marriage (Sodi et al., 2010). This is one

way of looking at it. However, the other view is that the empowerment of women, especially the employment of women is beneficial to marriage and the household.

In view of the first point mentioned above, research has shown that the emancipation of women causes the marriage to be unstable which can contribute to the decision to divorce. For instance, according to Kalule-Sabiti, Palamuleni, Makiwane and Amoateng (2007), the improvement in women's status through modernisation in terms of education, urbanisation and penetrating the economy as well as the employment outside the home, have affected attitudes towards marriage, divorce and dissolution of marriage as well as parenting. This notion is supported by Vignoli, Matysiak, Styrac and Tocchioni (2016, p. 3; 2018) saying that the rates of marital dissolution have risen over the same period to when “women’s labour force participation has been increasing across all industrialized economies for over at least half a century” now.

On the other hand, the empowerment and emancipation of women are seen as positive in general, but specifically in this study, in marriage or a partnership. According to Parker-Pope (2010), there has been a shift in the economic roles of husbands and wives, and this has had a staggering effect on marital stability. Males taking on more household chores and females making more outside the household have had a positive effect and impact, contributing to the lower divorce rates and happier marriages. Additionally, other studies conducted “have shown that a gradual increase in men’s involvement at home can help reduce the workload and work-family tensions experienced by women, and therefore, may lower the risk of divorce among employed women” (Mencarini & Vignoli, 2014; Sigle-Rushton, 2010, as cited in Vignoli et al., 2016, p. 6).

The empowerment of women affecting the divorce rate seems to be more prominent in countries with more traditional views of male and female roles. But then again, this does not exclude non-traditional countries, as in many of these countries there are couples with a more traditional view of gender roles in marriage. According to Parsons (1940), gender roles in society and marriage were established many centuries ago, and as the labour market opened up for both genders, it resulted in competition for the same occupations, resulting in increased tensions in the home and ultimately, leading to divorce for some. However, as time progressed, “the organisation of the household has moved away from the focus on production and role specialisation, towards a focus on consumption and the pooling of resources. As a consequence, two incomes may be necessary to satisfy a couple’s material aspirations, especially given the ongoing destabilisation of men’s employment careers” (Cherlin, 2000; Sayer & Bianchi, 2000;

Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007; Raz-Yurovich 2012, as cited in Vignoli et al.,2016, p. 5). Furthermore, other scholars such as Simpson and England (1981), Coltrane (2000) and Sayer and Bianchi (2000) found that in contemporary societies, women do not occupy all of their time and efforts at their homes or households, whether the couple or partners engage in similar economic activities and have like interests could be more important for the stability and strength of their marriage or partnership. With this being said, it is clear that the roles of men and women have evolved within the household and economically over the years with some exception of static gender roles within more traditional countries. Yet, despite the latter, divorce rates are still on the rise and are still a worldwide problem.

Novell (2009, as cited in Idiana, Hazlina, Zaharah, Azidah & Zarawi, 2022) opines that researchers should pay closer attention to the state of marriage and give priority to finding ways in which divorce rates could be decreased. Markman, Floyed, Stanley and Storaali (1988) contend that as opposed to treating the issue of separation or divorce, researchers and counselling providers ought to rather concentrate on preventing marital distress while the couple is still happy and content. The latter can be achieved by providing premarital and marriage counselling. Past research has called for the teaching of premarital counselling focusing on various programmes that could be followed, for example, the 5 C's. The five C's of marriage counselling are communication, commitment, conflict resolutions, children and church (Decker, 1996; Williams, Riley, Risch & Van Dyke, 1999). Engaging these aspects and ensuring that attention is given to them, may contribute towards the decrease in divorce rates.

The high rate of marital dissatisfaction, separation and divorce have increasingly led to the preparation of different programmes for marriage (Farnam, Pakgozar & Mir-mohammadali, 2011). Despite all these programmes, it appears that there are certain premarital and marriage counselling programmes or education programmes that are mainly used by counselling providers to assist engaged couples in preparing for marriage as well as assist married couples in strengthening their marriage. The reason for these programmes is based on the assumption that the earlier couples face their problems or issues and make them a priority for discussion as well as learn marital skills, the fewer issues they will encounter (Marripedia, 2016). Some of these programmes include Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), PREmarital Preparation and Relationship Enhancement and Enrich (PREPARE/ENRICH) and RELATionship Education (RELATE). These will be discussed briefly below.

Firstly, PREP was developed more than 30 years ago by Howard Markman and Scott Stanley of the University of Denver and later revised by Markman, Renick, Floyed, Stanley and Clements (1993). PREP provides skills and assists in the creation and maintenance of happy relationships, which is useful in analysing married people's perceptions of marital satisfaction (Markman, Stanley & Blumber, 2010). Ultimately, it is aimed at raising the likelihood of marital happiness and decreasing the likelihood of divorce (Markman et al., 2010). Therefore, the aim of this prevention programme is to offer skills that are essential for a good marital union or partnership. For example, couples are taught skills such as efficient and effective communication, problem-solving skills, improved teamwork, conflict management and resolution, preservation and enhancement of love and friendship as well as commitment towards each other and the marriage (Markman et al., 2010; Carlson, Barden, Daire & Greene, 2014). According to Carlson et al. (2014), studies that evaluated the effectiveness of PREP reported that, compared to couples who did not receive the training, couples who participated in PREP had greater levels of relationship satisfaction, ongoing enhanced relationship and sexual fulfilment, and lesser conflict intensity three years after taking part in the programme. They also demonstrated markedly improved communication skills and fewer adverse problems with their interaction. These positive findings were not restricted to the United States of America; studies in Austria and Germany, where the programme was also implemented and evaluated, corroborated them (Carlson et al., 2014).

Secondly, PREPARE/ENRICH is a 195-item inventory that assesses relationship areas such as “marriage satisfaction, personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial supervision, activities related to leisure, sexuality, the role of the equality of men and women, relatives and friends, religious orientation, children and child rearing” (Rezaee & Foruzandeh, 2016, p. 56). It was developed by the University of Minnesota family psychologist David Olson (Olson, 1996). Ultimately, PREPARE/ENRICH’s main objective is to improve a couple’s relationship by increasing their awareness of the relationship strengths and growth areas and providing them with the skill to improve their relationship (Olson, Olson & Larson, 2012). The PREPARE part of the programme focuses on helping couples prepare for marriage while the ENRICH part of it assists in the enrichment of already married couples (Olson et al., 2012). To test its effectiveness, a study conducted in 2003 showed the impact of premarital inventory questionnaires evaluated through a feedback session in averting marital anguish. The percentage of married couples classified as ‘most satisfied’ with their marriage increased by 52 per cent using this strategy. The other couples increased their relationship rating by more than

half. Even couples with serious relationship issues improved by more than 80 per cent, shifting into a more optimistic grouping (Knutson & Olson, 2003).

Thirdly, RELATE is a tool that requests the respondent's impression and perceptions of his/her partner and not simply himself/herself. It was built upon the experience of former surveys and created by the Relationship Institute in Michigan in the United States by a group of family professors, researchers and educators (Busby, Holman & Taniguchi, 2001). It additionally has the benefit of giving direct feedback to the couple just as to the experts/counselling providers (Busby et al., 2001).

The last two instruments, PREPARE/ENRICH and RELATE have achieved robust scientific validity, according to Holman (2002) and they have:

solid evidence for reliability, comprehensiveness, ease in administration and scoring and practicality. Furthermore, using these questionnaires as part of premarital counselling increases the couple's interest and investment in the process provides a convenient and concise way to provide a couple with feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship, themselves as individuals and their social context, and provides a way for couples to set goals for improvement before they marry (p. 206).

There are a few things to take note of. Firstly, despite the utilisation of these counselling programmes discussed above and the evidence of effectiveness in marriage preparation and marriage stability illustrated and documented, the divorce rate is still on the rise. Secondly, it is important to note that all these counselling programmes were developed in the United States of America and therefore may not necessarily be applicable or relevant in other parts of the world. In South Africa however, some organisations have adopted these programmes. One such organisation is FAMSA (Families South Africa), a family life centre that is well-known in South Africa which focuses on all aspects of family life including marriage preparation and enrichment. In preparing couples for marriage, they make use of the PREPARE/ENRICH programme not only to provide direct counselling, one-on-one or one-on-couple but they also train professional and lay counsellors in this technique (FAMSA, 2019).

Other counselling organisations within South Africa use various types of counselling techniques. For example, LIFE COUNSEL which also deals with marriage preparation, amongst others, makes use of the Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT), which was developed by

Harville Hendrix from Statesboro, Georgia, United States of America (LIFE COUNSEL, 2019). The IRT is also used by an organisation called LIFE LINE (LIFE LINE, 2019). As can be seen from the aforementioned, there seems to be a leaning towards the adoption of internationally developed programmes by South African counselling organisations. There does not seem to be any evidence readily available indicating whether these programmes were checked or adapted for the South African context. Based on this, it may be assumed that programmes get imported due to a lack of locally developed and easily available programmes. The development of context-relevant counselling programmes is particularly important due to the diverse nature of South Africa. The aforementioned, therefore, highlight the need for marriage and premarital counselling programmes which could be relevant for the South African context.

To this end, this research study attempted to develop a strategy that could be useful in enhancing counselling providers' helpfulness in premarital counselling as a way of contributing towards the possible reduction of divorce rates. Consequently, the study adopted the Social Role Theory as a framework that I deemed relevant to guide my study. I am interested in how people 'play' out their roles within marriage and how these contribute towards the success of marriage or failure thereof. The theoretical framework is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

1.3. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of the study was to explore and understand married individuals and counselling providers' perceptions of the usefulness of premarital and marriage counselling. In line with this aim, this study is premised on the assumption that an exploration of views will contribute towards a better understanding and knowledge of marriage counselling. In order to achieve the aim of the study, specific objectives that are aligned to the aim were adopted:

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Explore married individuals' perceptions of the usefulness of premarital and marriage counselling.
- Get an understanding of the counselling providers' perceptions of the usefulness of premarital and marriage counselling.
- Develop a strategy that can be useful in enhancing counselling providers' helpfulness in premarital and marriage counselling.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions provide grounding upon which the research objectives are formulated and addressed:

- What are married individuals and counselling providers' perceptions of the usefulness of premarital and marriage counselling?
- What possible strategies could be put in place to enhance counselling providers' helpfulness in premarital and marriage counselling?

1.5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative research approach and made use of a phenomenological design. This methodology was chosen because it “aims to explore, describe and explain or report on person’s experiences, behaviours, interactions and social context without the use of statistical procedures or quantification but rather through data or words” (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002, p. 717). Additionally, understanding the perceptions marriage counsellors and married individuals have on the usefulness of premarital and marriage counselling was important in this study. Therefore, phenomenology served its purpose as a design by helping me understand participants’ direct or indirect experiences of premarital and marriage counselling, because phenomenology, as a technique, assists in explaining how the world is viewed and interpreted and through this, is focussed on offering a real experience of the world (Baldwin, 2008). Two separate data collection and data analysis methods were used to gain a greater understanding of the perception of the reality of what marriage and premarital counselling mean to the participants. Thus, for marriage counsellors, face-to-face in-depth individual interviews were conducted with the interpretive phenomenological analysis used to make sense of the data, whereas focus groups and a workshop were organised for married individuals and from this collected data, thematic content analysis was utilised.

1.6. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In **Chapter 2** the literature review is discussed where the construct of marriage is explored, divorce statistics and its effects are given attention and premarital and marriage counselling are examined in order to identify the shortfalls and gaps to their effectiveness. The chapter further engages the theoretical framework I drew upon and used as a lens to make meaning of the phenomenon under investigation. The technique and design of the research study are outlined in **Chapter 3**, which emphasize qualitative research as an approach and phenomenology as a

design. The research design includes participant selection, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. In **Chapters 4 and 5**, the results of the study are reported. The discussion of the results is the topic of focus in **Chapter 6**. This chapter knits the results of the study, the literature and the theoretical framework together. **Chapter 7** discusses the conclusions, recommendations, and limitations of the research study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the growing knowledge regarding what makes a marriage work, the condition of marriage appears to be grim (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001; Markman, Stanley & Blumberg, 2001). The divorce rates are high, cohabitation is on the rise, and many young adults are opting out of marriage. Although premarital and marital education programmes have significant beneficial impacts, particularly in teaching communication and conflict resolution skills, many couples do not receive the quality and quantity of premarital preparation and marriage counselling they require (Olson, 1999; Markman et al., 2001). In this chapter, marriage, marriage statistics, implications of marriage, cohabitation and family policy are explored and discussed. This will be followed by divorce, its statistics, the causes and consequences of divorce and its effects on children and society. Thereafter, marriage counselling, as well as premarital counselling, are discussed. Finally, the theoretical framework, Social Role Theory are also given attention to.

2.2. MARRIAGE

Marriage is an institution that provides “an important ‘nomic’ function, in which individuals from different backgrounds come together to create a reality that is consistent with the social norms and values that surround them and in which reality is created and reinforced, resulting in a feeling of belonging for the marriage participants” (Bergner & Kellner, 1964, as cited in Curran, Utley & Muraco, 2010, p. 348). Furthermore, marriage is also the coming together of two people committing to spend and share their lives together (Carrol & Doherty, 2003). According to Voster (2010), marriage is defined as an exclusive and intimate bond developed between a man and a woman when they make the commitment to leave their family home and start a new family. Furthermore, it is a pure and holy relationship, analogous to Jesus Christ's eternal unity with His church (Voster, 2010). According to Ferraro (2004), “a marriage takes place between a man and a woman” (p. 194). Ferraro’s definition is very limited as it does not acknowledge same-sex marriages which are recognised in many countries, including South Africa. Even though the South African constitution recognises same-sex marriages, this research study only focused on heterosexual marriages. The following section outlines the marriage statistics in South Africa.

2.2.1. Marriage statistics

Statistics South Africa (SSA) published its latest marriage statistics of 2019 in 2019. This statistical report offers information on civil marriages, customary marriages and civil unions based on data from the South African national marriage registration systems of the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) (SSA, 2019). Information provided on civil marriages will take preference in further discussion of this chapter and research study. Additionally, information on civil marriages and divorces is relevant in this research study to understand the nature of marriage relationships.

According to SSA (2019), 129 597 civil marriages involving South African citizens and permanent residents were recorded, with the majority of these being solemnized by DHA marriage officers. With the exception of a 0.6 percent increase between 2015 and 2016, the number of registered marriages has steadily decreased throughout the last ten years (2010-2019) (SSA, 2019). In addition, the largest number of marriages occurred in 2010 (170 826) and the lowest occurred in 2019 (129 597) throughout the period 2010-2019 (SSA 2019). As a result, there has been a significant decrease in numbers, implying that people are less likely to marry, and that marriage is becoming a less desirable option for many couples today. Instead of getting married, there appears to be a desire for cohabitation. The topic of cohabitation is covered in greater depth later in this chapter.

Furthermore, “the majority of civil marriages in 2019 for both brides and bridegrooms were first time marriages with women generally entering into marriage at a younger age than men” (SSA, 2019, p. 8). The median age of both brides and grooms for first-time marriages has risen. Brides' median age for marriage was 29 years for five years from, 2008 to 2012, before rising by one year in 2013, to 30 years (SSA, 2012; 2013). From 30 years in 2013, there was another rise in the median age of 31 years in 2014 and 2015 and again in 2016 and 2017 to 32 years (SSA, 2017). According to the SSA (2019), the median age rose once again from 32 years in 2017 to 33 years in 2019. While the median age of bridegrooms was 32 years in 2008 to 2009, it grew to 33 years in two years (2010-2012) and then to 35 years in 2013 and 2014 (SSA, 2012, 2013). According to the SSA (2017), the median age increased even more, rising from 35 years in 2013 and 2014 to 36 years in 2015 to 2017. Besides a decrease in marriage over the last couple of years, there also seems to be a shift for couples who decide to marry where the age at which people enter into marriage has increased, with people entering the union of marriage later

in their lives (Thornton, Axinn & Xie, 2008). There are several implications for marriage, which could be considered by couples and possibly influence their decision to marry or not to marry. These implications are outlined in the following section.

2.2.2. Implications for marriage

Marriages have both positive and negative aspects and implications. When compared to single individuals or unstable marriages, marriage has been found to have various benefits for physical and emotional health, including increased happiness, life satisfaction, and lower mortality, to name a few (Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003). Unstable marriages, on the other hand, have social and financial consequences for both the spouse and the community (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Despite the fact that conflict in relationships is inevitable:

studies reveal that marriages and relationships lose intimacy and satisfaction because of the couple's inability to resolve conflict and thus to heal their ruptured connection. Relationship conflict may develop from many sources: infidelity, sexual dysfunction, posttraumatic stress, past trauma, and domestic violence. One partner may feel misunderstood by the other partner. Couples in difficult relationships frequently do not have the knowledge they need to resolve conflict and lack the understanding, skills, and tools that are necessary to mend the break in their connection (Gottman, 2000, Protinsky, Spark & Flemke, 2001, as cited in Talan, 2007, p. 187).

This is usually where couples start to either look for help from counsellors, parents, family members or church leaders. The couple's background (e.g. culture, religion, beliefs, values etc.) determines where they will seek support and advice.

Many issues faced by couples mainly originate from childhood experiences. Poor attachment in childhood, especially, is often related to attachment issues in adult relationships (Hendrix, 1992, 2001; Solomon, 2002). The reason for this might be because children and adolescents model behaviour about family formation based on what they see in their own families. According to Sodi et al. (2010), youngsters staying with both their biological parents show the strongest support for marriage, but there are also teens, who in the same nuclear family setup, feel the opposite. Bramlett and Mosher (2002) found that females brought up in a household with both their parents are at low risk of experiencing the collapse of their first marriage compared to females brought up without two parents in one household during childhood. Contrary to this, commitment to marriage for children that come from divorced parents'

households, stepparent households, or single-parent households have a lower marriage expectation (Axinn & Thornton, 1996) and have a more positive attitude towards cohabitation. “Such meanings of marriage will possibly dictate how individuals view their own romantic relationships which will influence future generations of individuals” (Curran, Utley & Muraco, 2010, p. 348).

2.2.3. Cohabitation

With the evolving of marriage, “expectations of the marital relationship have broadened to include friendship, support, fun, intimacy, and good sex. Power struggles result from misunderstandings or boredom, partners working, the women’s movement, free love, open marriage, cohabitation and the possibility of divorce have all affected traditional marriages” (Talan, 2007, p. 187). Cohabitation has been prevalent in Western societies since the 1980s (Smock, 2000) and it seems to be one of the biggest threats to marriage since it is more commonly viewed as a substitute for marriage and is most acceptable for young adults (Manning, Longmore & Giordano, 2007). For instance, in the United States of America, marriage rates are declining and cohabiting rates rising (Kreider & Elliot, 2009; Pinosof, 2002). The number of cohabitating couples had reached 7.7 million, in the United States, by 2010 and the proportion of marriages followed by cohabitation for those married after 1996 is greater than 60 per cent. Cohabitation in Europe has seen a similar increase, with more than 80 per cent of people in Northern Europe cohabitating before marriage (Zhang, 2017).

In South Africa, along with other Southern African countries, particularly Botswana and Namibia, a growing trend in cohabitation or ‘living together’ partnership was observed over the last two decades (Mokomane, 2004). The 1996 census indicated that 1.2 million people identified themselves as living together with a partner, while the 2001 census reported that nearly 2.4 million people lived in these partnerships, almost double the 1996 estimates (South African Department of Social Development (SADSD), 2013), meaning that the trend of cohabiting is on a stupendous rise. Unlike in marriage where parties have numerous legal rights, SADSD (2013) states that domestic relationships such as cohabitation are not legally recognised or protected. In South Africa, the only way to be protected is to conclude a law-abiding cohabitation agreement. Cohabitation refers to ‘living together’ or having a domestic partnership. It is not recognised as a legal relationship internationally and by local law and therefore, no law regulates the rights of parties in a cohabitation relationship (Leza Legal Wise, n.d.). In general, cohabitation refers to people who live together without being validly married

to each other, regardless of gender. Put simply, the rights and duties of married couples do not lie with men and women living together. If the law does not accept their relationship as a marriage, the privileges and obligations granted by marriage do not apply. This is the case irrespective of the length of the relationship (Leza Legal Wise, n.d.). Studies both from developed countries and developing countries have revealed that in the absence of any legal recognition of this form of partnership (cohabitation), women and their children often are left with a host of socio-cultural and economic issues (Bachrach, Hindin & Thomson, 2000; Manning, 2002; Mokomane, 2004, as cited in SADS, 2013). For example, a study concerning cohabitation in Botswana, concluded that “unlike married women who, at least technically, have legally enforceable contracts that guard their property rights in the event of union dissolution, cohabiting women do not have such legal protection especially in terms of property, inheritance and maintenance rights” (Mokomane, 2004, p. 197). Likewise, in the United States “cohabiters are less likely to pool financial resources, are less sexually exclusive, and are more dependent on families or orientation, compared to married couples” (Bachrach et al., 2000, p.4). While cohabitation may be used to test partners and reinforce the marital bond by serving as a trial marriage (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002), Kulu and Boyle (2010) argue that cohabitation before marriage has a higher risk of marital dissolution if marriage is the end goal. Marriage views have shifted over the years, often associated with increasing individualism and secularism, sexual revolution and feminism. Changes like these have decreased the desire for women and men to marry and the acceptance of cohabitation as a form of partnership has been amplified (Preller, 2013). Therefore, cohabitation can be seen as a significant component of the major shifts in marriage and family development and formation (Bumpass, Sweet & Cherlin, 1991; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Casper & Bianchi, 2002; Manning, 1995). Therefore, it is important to find out how the family is defined and what family policy, especially for this research study, in South Africa looks like. This is discussed next.

2.3. FAMILY DEFINED

According to Waite (2000) and Belsey (2005), family is seen in all societies as one of the foundational social structures, however difficult to define. The United Nations (1990) pointed out that the “term ‘family’ may differ in some respects from state to state” or country to country, and “even region to region within a state or state” (p. 17), so a standard meaning cannot be given to the term. This is indeed clear from the various disciplinary definitions and interpretations of the family. Sociologically, for instance, family is often characterised as a

group of interacting people who recognise a relationship between themselves based on a shared parentage, marriage and/or adoption. Demographers and economists, on the other hand, often use the “residential family” definition of “a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together” (Belsey, 2005, p. 11). Others such as Levine (1990) have asserted that “family members are individuals who by birth, adoption, marriage, or declared commitment share deep, personal connections and are mutually entitled to receive and obligated to provide support of various kinds to the extent possible, especially in times of need” (as cited in Belsey, 2005, p. 11). However, as Amoateng and Richter (2007) point out, “there appears to be broad consensus that families are social groups that are related by blood (kinship), marriage, adoption, or affiliation with close emotional attachments to each other that endure over time and go beyond a particular physical residence” (p. 14). The various definitions of family above indicate that the concept cannot be pressed into one particular box or model and therefore in this study the demographers and economists’ definition of family is adopted.

Furthermore, family and marriage cannot be viewed separately as family is an important part of society. Belsey (2005), for example, takes the view that the family affects the way society is formed, organised, and functions. It is primarily through the family that each generation is replaced by the following generation that children are born, nurtured, socialised and cared for until they gain independence, and that each generation fulfils their care obligations (Waite, 2000). While dysfunctional families, in which conflict, misbehaviour, neglect, or violence occur constantly and frequently, have the potential to promote and legitimize the exploitation of some family members, particularly women and children. An established body of research evidence from different parts of the world has shown that healthy, stable and supportive families are linked with many positive results (Amoateng, Richter, Makiwane & Rama, 2004). These include higher levels of self-esteem, lower levels of stress and greater self-efficacy to coping with socioeconomic difficulties, higher levels of job productivity and satisfaction, lower levels of antisocial behaviour such as violence and improved school attendance and performance for children, to mention a few (Amoateng et al., 2004). With the aforementioned, it can therefore be assumed that:

Healthy families are at the heart of strong societies and that it is within the family environment that an individual’s physical, emotional and psychological development occurs. It is from our family that we learn unconditional love, we understand right from wrong, and we gain empathy, respect and self-regulation.

These qualities, therefore, enable us to engage positively at school, at work and in society in general. However, the absence of a stable, nurturing family environment has therefore a damaging impact on the individual, often leading to behaviour which is profoundly damaging to society (Centre for Social Justice, 2010, p 6).

In South Africa, according to SSA (2019), there are about “22 084 children aged less than 18 years who were affected by divorces” which is of concern due to the negative impact divorce has on children (p. 8). As a result, it is critical to examine South African family policy and how it is developed with the hope to cater to the stability and strengthening of the family structure, especially because strong and “stable families demonstrate high levels of social capital and resilience and contribute to the smooth functioning of society and hence social cohesion”, according to Ziehl (2003, as cited in Department of Social Development, 2021).

2.3.1. Family policy in South Africa

South Africa’s establishment of family policy can be traced back to the systematic segregation of population groups that existed during the apartheid era (Amoateng & Richter, 2007). Following the end of apartheid and the establishment of a new democratic dispensation in 1994, the post-apartheid government implemented a variety of policies and legislative reforms aimed, inter alia, at realigning the institutions of the country to transform the South African society. In particular, the negative effects of colonial apartheid policies on the family (such as land dispossessions, and the migrant labour and homeland structures causing the division of families) needed to be updated because they are connected to the multiplicity of social ills that continue to threaten contemporary South Africa. However, the family was not explicitly addressed in many of these policies. Addressing the family in policies is important because the family has a major impact on society, but is also affected by policies because, while indirectly, most socio-economic benefits indirectly trickle down to the family. For example, the country’s five main social assistance policies focus primarily on particular persons, namely: aged people (The State Old Age Pension), disabled people (the Disability Grant), and children (the Child Support Grant, the Foster Care Grant, and the Care Dependency Grant). It is noteworthy, however, that the needs of such individuals may not necessarily be congruent with those of the family unit. Past and present poverty analyses and intervention approaches have often centred mainly on individuals, as opposed to communities, thus leading policies to neglect the country’s intra-family dynamics.

Against this backdrop, the lack of a clear policy framework or structure on the family in South Africa has been described over the years by politicians, scholars, civil society and concerned citizens as a critical shortcoming that needs to be addressed urgently (Department of Social Development, 2012). In an attempt to address these social ills of the South African society, a *White Paper for Social Welfare* was issued in 1992. As the first overall social welfare policy under the post-apartheid regime, the Paper reaffirmed the determination of the country to secure basic welfare and human rights, focussing on the family and its life cycle: children, young people and the elderly. It outlines strategies for promoting family life and for strengthening families, and it guides the implementation of pro-family policies and services in the country through its developmental paradigm. In 2001, the Department of Social Development developed a draft National Policy Framework for Families. Its 'final draft version' was released in 2005 with the objectives of protecting and empowering families through effective and efficient delivery of service; creating an enabling environment geared towards family self-reliance, and fostering inter-sectoral cooperation between stakeholders in service provision. In the pursuit to finalise this 'final draft version' the South African Cabinet approved the Green Paper on Families, in September 2011, whose aim is to "promote family life and strengthen families in South Africa". The Green paper was then released in October 2011 and open for public comment. This White Paper on Families has its roots in the Green Paper (Department of Social Development, 2012).

Despite its well-documented advantages, the family has not always had a high priority in the political and social sciences of South Africa. Zeihl (2003) asserts that "the liberation and class struggles have always been deemed a more important topic of academic debate and research than the family. This has translated into a situation where we have very little empirical data that can provide a picture of the family as a whole" (p. 217). Processes of family formation and dissolution, including the age at marriage and why various people marry, cohabit, remain single, divorce or remarry are viewed as necessary for the well-being of society (Islam & Ahmed, 2001; Rowland, 2003; Hosegood, 2009). Thus, the government needs to focus on marriage and family since this is where the heart of a strong society lies. By doing this, marriages might be saved and strengthened as well as divorce rates decline since the divorce rate is on the rise according to the latest divorce statistics from Statistics South Africa (2019).

2.4. DIVORCE STATISTICS

The latest divorce statistics were published by Statistics South Africa (SSA) and the statistical publication provided “data of divorces granted by the Department of Justice and Correctional Development” (SSA, 2019, p. 8). This information is important to understand the dissolution of marriage relationships in the research study. According to SSA (2019), 23 710 divorces were granted and finalised in South Africa in 2019, showing a decline of 6.2 percent from 25 284 in 2018. Furthermore, “the total number of divorces decreased from 2010 to 2011, followed by a consistent increase in the years 2012 to 2017 and a slight increase of 0.4% between 2017 and 2018” (SSA, 2019, p. 6).

From the divorce statistics by population group, Chapter 1 showed that the Black African population group dominated the number of divorces in the country by nearly half of 10 677 (45,0%) of the 23 710 divorces recorded by SSA (2019). Followed by 5 268 (22,2%) from the White population, 4 502 (19,0%) from the Coloured population and 1 299 (5,5%) from the Indian/ Asian population (SSA, 2019). The rise of the divorce rate amongst the Black African population group over the years might be a result of the changing socio-economic position of some Black people (e.g. income, employment status etc.), relaxed cultural traditions as well as female empowerment and emancipation. According to SSA (2017), many male and female divorced persons were indicated as professionals. Many males are managers and administrators (3 530 translating to 13,9%) and 3 481 (13,7%) are “employed in professional, semi-professional and technical professions”, while female divorcees work primarily in “professional, semi-professional and technical professions (3 959/15,6%) and clerical and sales professions (2 717 /10,7%)” (SSA, 201, p. 6). The SSA (2019) shows professions for males to be different and employed in service occupations while the same occupations still apply for the female divorcees. In consideration of the foregoing, it might be carefully assumed that the more financially independent one becomes, regardless of race, gender and age, the less likely one is to stay in an unhappy marriage. The coloured and Indian/ Asian population divorce rates seem to have remained the same over the years. All these marriage dissolutions, regardless of their reasons, were mostly from persons who had been married for the first time (SSA, 2019). This is important to note, especially for this research study due to its specific focus on first-time marriages for couples.

According to SSA (2019), the highest “number of divorces [6 225 (26,3%)] came from marriages that lasted between five and nine years. This group is followed by marriages that lasted between ten and fourteen years [4 964 (20,9%)] and marriages that lasted for less than five years [3 996 (16,9%)] (p. 7). Thus, nearly half (43,1%) of the 23 720 divorces in 2019 were marriages that had lasted for ten or fewer years (SSA, 2019) since divorce has become such a common solution to addressing marital problems (Kgoleng, 2013, as cited in Mohlatlole, Sithole & Shirindi, 2018). The SSA (2019) showed that more women initiated requests for divorce compared to previous times when many chose to stay in unhappy marriages. According to Neuman (2014), various factors influence the choice to stay despite being unhappy, including money, being afraid of disconnecting with the husband’s family, losing common friendships, feeling isolated, and not having to raise children up alone. However, regardless of these reasons, there are more than half of divorces (13 264 [55,9%]) from families with children 18 years and younger that were impacted by this decision (SSA, 2019). This is cause for concern, especially because of the impact and effects that divorce can have on a child’s perspective, views and decisions of marriage and life in general. Further details on this are discussed later in the chapter.

2.5. DIVORCE

Despite the legally binding agreements that people across social classes, racial and ethnic groups make to love, honour, cherish until death, an increasing number of these promises end in divorce (Giddens, 2010). The term, divorce, according to Engelbrecht, Rencken and Venter (1999) is defined as “a choice that two people make, not to live together as husband and wife” (p. 4). This means they sign the divorce papers legally, even though the other spouse might sign against his or her will (Engelbrecht, Rencken & Venter, 1999).

Divorce has become a common feature and troublesome trend in all developed and developing nations around the world (Abanyam, Sambe & Avanger, 2014). According to Schaefer (2008), “the media frequently reports that one out of every two marriages ends in divorce” (p. 354). Gurman (2010) adds that in most developed countries, there is a growing divorce rate of more than 50%. Whereas, Mark (2004) adds that most studies estimate that between 45-50% of all first-time marriages fail and that the divorce rate for also non-first marriages now exceeds 50%. For many centuries, marriage was regarded as virtually indissoluble in the West and other parts of the world. Divorce was only given in extremely specific situations, such as non-

consummation of marriage (Giddens, 2010). Today, however, as mentioned above, legal divorce is possible in nearly all of the world's developed and developing societies, although most countries have made divorce easier (Giddens, 2010). To provide an example, in South Africa, one person may be able to proceed with a divorce and end it without the knowledge of the other and some people may even divorce their spouses through desertion (Englebrecht, Renchen & Venter, 1999).

“The rising trend in divorce rates in most parts of the world may be partly because problematic marriages can be ended with ease and divorce is no longer the social stigma it was in the olden days, it is more or less socially acceptable now” (Abanyam et al., 2014, p. 130). This societal acceptability arises from the recognition that while every marriage will continue, some marriages are difficult from the start and have reached a point where they are harmful to both partners (Abanyam et al., 2014). The relationship breakdown and disagreement are associated to a slew of negative socioeconomic and wellbeing outcomes (Schofield, Mumford, Jurkovic, Jurkovic, & Bickerdike, 2012), with disastrous effects for youngsters, households, and communities. Thus, the couples are basically enabled to find ways of ending their marriage through divorce, whether in a form of separation or desertion. There are many causes and consequences of divorce, and these are discussed next.

2.5.1. Cause and consequences of divorce

As straightforward as it seems, divorce is typically unpleasant, unwanted and dysfunctional for people, households and society as a whole. The rise in divorce rates in today's society could be attributed to the effects of urbanization and population growth (Abanyam et al., 2014). According to Abanyam et al. (2014), the most crucial element linked with the reasons for divorce is public approval of divorce. Schaefer (2008) notes:

Perhaps the most important factor in the increase in divorce over the last hundred years has been the greater social acceptance of divorce. It's no longer considered necessary to endure an unhappy marriage. More important, various religious denominations have relaxed their negative attitude towards divorce, so that most religious leaders no longer treat it as a sin (p. 355).

As a result, social approval and accommodation of the dissolution of marriage play a part in the decision to divorce.

Other causes of divorce are related to social factors such as population, age, education and religious beliefs according to Abanyam et al., (2014). Divorce is greater among certain groups of the population. In urban areas, for example, there are more divorced persons than rural ones. Women in urban areas, in developed countries, are more likely to file for divorce because of greater education and more job opportunities outside their homes (Abanyam et al., 2014). Only when they are dissatisfied with their marriage and can support themselves, then they are unlikely to remain in the marriage (Abanyam et al., 2014). “Women in rural areas and in developing countries have fewer options, even though they may be just as unhappy as their divorcing counterparts. As a result, divorce rates tend to be higher in industrialized, urban-oriented societies around the world and lower in less-developed, agrarian societies. But the lower rates of divorce in more rural communities do not automatically mean healthier marriages” (Olson & Defrain, 2002, as cited in Abanyam et al, 2014, p. 131). Divorce, however, is not affected by nationality. Olson and Defrain (2002) argue that regardless of ethnicity or cultural history, in romantic relationships conflict occurs between men and women. Although couples strive for mutual love and care, there is yet to be misunderstanding and conflict.

The ages of married couples also have to do with the probability of divorce, particularly if the spouses are both teenagers when they marry. Teenagers who marry have almost twice the likelihood of divorce compared with those who marry at a later stage, according to Abanyam et al. (2014). This is probably because inexperience and immaturity can be disastrous to marital adjustment. One of the main reasons newlywed couples find adjustment of marriage very difficult, is because they are typically idealistic. Olson and Defrain (2002) have noticed that premarital relationships are often filled with false impressions and misconceptions with the notion that after they are married, the partners will change undesirable or unwanted traits.

Unfortunately, marriage does not change people, nor does it make change easier for others. However, couples who marry later in life, tend to have focussed more on gaining an education that affords them a higher standard of living, they are more emotionally and intellectually mature and sensible, and also, they are less likely to marry because of pregnancy or against parental opposition like a teenager might do which could be possible reasons why the probability of divorce is less likely to occur amongst more educated couples that took their time to get married compared to couples that got married as teenagers (Olson & Defrain, 2002). Additionally, religion and religious beliefs also play a role in the decision to get married. According to Abanyam et al. (2014), conflicting faith and religious convictions among married

couples have a higher failure risk than marriages between couples who share the same religious beliefs. Pryor (1999), Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen and Booth (2000), and Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger and Elder (2006) opine that the above-mentioned factors are not the only reasons and ramifications of relationship breakdown, and that it also involves isolation from safety nets (e.g., family, friends, church, etc.), lower income and standard of living for both children and parents, lack of responsibility of children for males, depression and lack of identity for females. Mental disorder is another cause, indicating that “separated and divorced people are over-represented in mental institutions and more likely to die from cardiovascular diseases, cancer, pneumonia, and cirrhosis of the liver, and more prone to die from accidents, homicides, and suicide” according to Hughes and Kroehler (2008, p. 345).

Another cause of divorce is family violence which is usually accompanied by physical abuse due to the lack of control over impulses. Wife battery occurs especially during difficult times and abuse of substances could also spark physical violence that leads to divorce, according to Abanyam et al. (2014). Unsatisfactory sex life is also often linked to divorce. Sexual gratification among couples can be an important instrument in solidifying the couples’ relationship. However, the above sexual desire, communication problems constitute the central reason for divorce. Effective communication skills are essential for a happy marriage. Moreover, financial issues are the primary reason for divorce. When breadwinners (referring to men) are unable to adequately satisfy the requirements of their households, they may lose ‘respect’ and ‘authority’ (Abanyam et al., 2014). Abanyam (2013) observed that “financial issues are the most common stressors couples and families face, regardless of how much money they make” (p. 90). Both men and women experience economic instability because only a small number of divorced women/mothers receive financial help from their children’s fathers which subsequently affects their standard of living, while men also experience an economic decline by supporting their partners (Clarke-Stewart et al., 2000; Abanyam et al., 2014). According to researchers, financial difficulties and unemployment have a negative impact on family dynamics (Abanyam et al., 2014; Olson & Defrain, 2002).

According to Abanyam et al. (2014), the first years have the greatest risk of divorce. Apparently, the divorce rate is at its peak in the third year. Again, Olson and Defrain (2002) note that the first year or two of marriage were the most challenging for many couples, even if they lived together before the marriage and thought that they had a strong relationship. Marriage

is a more complicated transition than most couples expect, mostly because couples expect marriage to be easy and to be similar to what they have experienced with each other before.

As indicated, divorce rates are on the increase as evidenced by statistics both in South Africa and globally. I have thus far discussed the causes of divorce and the effects it has on both families and communities. I now turn to how divorce affects children.

2.5.2. Effects of divorce on children

As mentioned, children are no exception to the ills of divorce since more than half of divorced couples have children. Charles (2010) indicates that:

these defects spill over to children who experience trauma at the time of parental divorce. This leads to juvenile delinquency and crime among such children. The children are likely to have unfulfilled childhood; dependency needs, develop low impulse, have difficulty in trusting others and can also project hostile feelings in them on to other children. Divorced families also have the tendency to become abusive families by having appropriate expectations of children. Such families expect children to behave like adults and contribute early in life to the upkeep of family through the performance of menial jobs like hawking and other lowly paid services. Such families too witness high levels of tension, and at times, violence (p. 367).

Divorce reduces the psychological well-being of children and they “die, on average, four years sooner than adults who were raised by parents who did not get divorced” (Hughes & Kroehler, 2008, p. 345). Children of separated parents have higher levels of worry, sadness, stress, violent behaviour, and school challenges, and are thus more prone to drop out of school and become mothers at an early and vulnerable age (Hughes & Kroehler, 2008). Children's emotional growth and personality development are influenced by their parents' mental health. Again, according to Charles (2010), emotionally disturbed parents produce emotionally disturbed offspring. As a defensive tactic to overcome fundamental shortcomings, these children are more likely to demonstrate animosity and become bullies. Stress, dissatisfaction, antisocial behaviour patterns, and poor views about marriage can all result from such impaired social behaviour. It may also cause the child to have a bad attitude towards marriage and to be afraid of having a failed relationship or a failed marriage. This tends to have damaging effects on society, which is outlined in the following section.

2.5.3. Effects of divorce on the society

Society is also severely affected by divorce. Growing drug use and criminal activity present serious challenges for society's general welfare. Additionally, divorce can contribute to the so-called "feminization of poverty", a phenomenon in which women-led families with no husbands are more likely to live in poverty. The phenomenon suggests that more women and children are homeless or on welfare, possibly as a result of increased divorce rates (Christensen, 2019). This could lead to an unstable and fragile society, with a possible rise in criminal statistics.

Because of the peculiar importance of marriage for individuals, families and society, it becomes important that marriage should be closely watched, safeguarded and strengthened as the rates of divorce around the world are pretty high. This stems from the fact that marriage faces multiple issues, including dissonance between the couple, communication problems, domestic abuse or financial problems, to name just a few, which may lead to divorce. These numerous problems faced by married couples could be tackled in several ways that aim at assisting couples to overcome the difficulties they face (Abanyam et al., 2014). One of the avenues to be followed is counselling. There are numerous counselling possibilities available, including specific counselling designed for married people, namely, marriage counselling.

2.6. COUNSELLING

Counselling, in general, seeks to help people gain understanding and insight into the nature of the problems and the causes and factors that cause them (Harper, 1961). Counselling, even though initially birthed in the United States of America, has always been assumed to be an approach that can be applied universally without taking context into consideration. The counselling methods employed have been found to not always be applicable or relevant to all contexts (Juma, 2011) especially because their mainstream approaches were centred around White, middle-class activities that operate with many distinctive values, assumptions and principles (Ridley, 1995; Lago & Thompson, 1996; Sue & Sue, 1999, 2003). These imported approaches were used in South Africa as well for a long time, before the move towards adopting more culturally sensitive and context-specific approaches. African counselling approaches made their appearance in Sociology and Psychology to make room and accommodate all cultural backgrounds, beliefs and ideologies that contributed to the formation and expansion of psychologies tailored to fit each culture around the world (Graham & Baker, 2007). Traditional

forms of counselling are practiced from an Afrocentric perspective by traditional counsellors.

Traditional counselling, according to Chiboola (2019), is provided by:

traditional leaders (chiefs, village headmen, and other eminent people), religious leaders (clergymen/women with leadership roles in the church), traditional healers (diviners, herbalists, and spiritualists), elderly family members, and grandparents. They are collectively referred to as traditional counsellors. Although not formally trained in the field of traditional counselling, a majority of traditional counsellors are experienced and knowledgeable people with varying social skills and competences, which they acquire mainly through apprenticeship and interaction with elderly family members, through their leadership roles in the church and community, through life experiences and practical exposure, through spiritual trance exposition in the case of traditional healers, and through formal induction and training in the case of religious leaders (p. 7-8).

They apply indigenous forms of helping people who experience various problems (i.e. initiation at puberty, marriage, loss and grief). In order to interact with clients in a way that is culturally acceptable and to provide them with interventions that are appropriate for their needs, expectations, and aspirations, traditional counsellors use a variety of methods or approaches, which are referred to as different forms of traditional counselling. Marriage counselling, pastoral counselling, adherence counselling, initiation counselling, family counselling, community counselling, and grief counselling are some of the conventional counselling approaches or procedures that are frequently used (Chiboolah, 2019). Premarital and marriage counselling, specifically, are offered to couples intending to marry, or experiencing marital and other psychosocial problems and this is commonly done at a community level in most African countries. The do's and don'ts of married life, family responsibilities, and parenting are discussed in the premarital stage as more of an introduction process to improve competencies and skills in preparedness for marriage (Chiboola, 2019). For marriage counselling, specifically, the respect and the authority of parents, including the advice of uncles, aunts, and grandparents, is of the utmost importance, specifically in indigenous marriage counselling (Tlharhani & Olehile, 2021). In this context, counselling helps couples to learn to deal more effectively with their problems. This is important as most African countries value the institution of marriage (Chiboola, 2019). African counselling, furthermore, includes the spiritual, physical, mental, social, family unit with extended members amongst others (Tlharhani & Olehile, 2021). The spiritual/ spirituality, specifically, is strongly connected to the therapeutic process

(Tlharhani and Olehile, 2021) and “this process includes advising, guiding and condemning any behaviour that could anger ancestral spirits” (Mtshali, 2017, p. 23). This approach to counselling is viewed as a holistic approach (Madu et al., 1996) and from an African approach, this collectivist orientation or approach strengthens social and cultural ties, encourages more cohesion in approaches to problem solving, and fosters the modification of desired behaviour for the benefit of society as a whole (Chiboola, 2019). With this said, the usefulness of traditional counselling is expected to be greater than that of modern counselling in the majority of African countries generally, but mainly for Zambia (Chiboola, 2019).

While the Afrocentric/African approaches to counselling differ from the Western/Eurocentric approaches, each orientation is undertaken in order to help couples overcome the adversity they face in their relationship.

2.6.1. Marriage counselling

Marriage counselling services may be “found and used in community social agencies, the courts, educational facilities, and trained individuals engaging in private practice” (Harper, 1961, p. 75). “Marriage counselling emanates from the fields of psychiatry, social work, psychology, education, sociology and other related fields that are concerned with people and ways of helping them” (Harper, 1961, p. 74). This is a programme designed to assist people in forming and maintaining good connections with their partners in their relationships (Hart, 1999). Marriage counselling is viewed as a basis used by counsellors to assist couples. It is the sort of counselling that deals essentially with plans and problems associated with the couple’s relationship (Skidmore & Thackeray, 1982). According to Harper (1961), it is also mainly concerned with the communicational relationship of married couples who have trouble sustaining a successful union. Despite the fact that each person’s personality is unique and obstacles may develop due to this, the primary responsibility of the counsellor is to assist couples with their marriage (Harper, 1961).

Marriage and relationship counselling is also promoted and used as a way to end as well as maintain marriages and help people to deal with the challenges of withdrawing from strained and painful relationships. Walker and McCarthy (2001) believe that it may be more helpful to change relationship support thinking from concentrating exclusively on preserving the relationship to concentrating on enhancing the nature of the relationship regardless of whether the parties continue to live together or not. However, at the end of the day, the main aim of

marriage counselling is to bring insight into the marriage and the issues couples are struggling with and to save the marriage. Furthermore, marriage counselling and education attempt, therefore, to immunise couples against disappointment and despair, it also tries to prevent the development of problems that are costly to children and all of society (Mark, 2004). In the end, the meaningful shift from dating to marriage ultimately marks the negotiation of marriage standards (Chadiha, Veroff & Leber, 1998) and the development of a new, sometimes unanticipated world of marriage (Berger & Kellner, 1970; Wambolt, 1999) which can be hard for a couple to successfully navigate through, which makes marriage counselling so crucial in this respect. In this case, couples need to attend premarital counselling in order to understand and prepare for the changes that might or will arise when they decide to get married.

2.6.2. Premarital counselling

In the early days of counselling, premarital counselling was not “identified as a regular part of clinical practice by therapists” (Stahmann, 2000, p. 110). But as time progressed, the need for this approach was required in order to strengthen the marriage and family structure but also as an attempt to influence and mitigate the decision to divorce. For this reason, premarital counselling has received and still is receiving much attention worldwide (ibid). According to Stelzer (2010), marriage preparation training is a new method for avoiding and preventing marital dissatisfaction and the breakdown of the marriage. This is based on the assumption that couples can learn how to have a successful and stable marriage (Stelzer, 2010). Therefore, premarital counselling is an educational, therapeutic and preventive approach (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, Markman & Johnson, 2009) that most benefits those that pursue it willingly rather than being coerced into it (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997; Stanley et al., 1995). It is a therapeutic tool intended to help the couple strengthen their relationship (Jones & Stahmann, 1994; Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997) especially if participation is voluntary. Thus, according to Stahmann (2000):

the use of a comprehensive premarital assessment instrument is a valuable component of the premarital counselling process. It is important that counsellors are aware of a range of topics such as marriage quality and stability, family-of-origin influences, finance/budgeting, communication, decision-making, intimacy, parenting, sexuality, and use that information in the design and delivery of the counselling and education. It is most beneficial if obtained early on in the relationship and several months before the wedding (p. 112).

Having said that, premarital counselling will be discussed in more detail by exploring its historical antecedents and its goals, but without addressing the different counselling

programmes that are currently widely used and their effectiveness as these are discussed in chapter one.

2.6.3. Historical antecedents

The first recorded premarital intervention was in 1924 when Ernest Groves taught the first premarital course in preparation for family life at Boston University. The first mention of premarital counselling as a significant process or valuable service in building emotional and physical health was in a 1928 article in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). With the first programme developed at the Merrill-Palmer Institute in 1932, formal premarital counselling programmes were practised as early as the 1930s, with the first programme developed at the Merrill-Palmer Institute in 1932. “In 1941, the Philadelphia Marriage Council established a standardized programme with the stated purpose to help young married and premarital couples gain a better understanding of what companionship in married life involves and thus help them avoid some of the causes of marital difficulties” (Mudd, Freeman & Rose, 1941, p. 98). In spite of these early times, premarital counselling was still relatively uncommon until the 1970s. While the church has had a long history of meeting with couples before their wedding, it is only in the last thirty years that the focus of these meetings has changed from counselling about the nature and meaning of the marriage rite itself towards counselling aimed at preparing couples for marriage (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). Premarital counselling, as we understand it currently, was not always a “regular part of professional clinical practice” during that time (Carrol & Doherty, 2003, p. 106). But the interest of “clergy and other family professionals in preparing couples for marriage through formal counselling programmes” has grown from the 1970s to the present day (Carrol & Doherty, 2003, p. 106). With this said, it is equally important to note that marriage preparation was not only important in Western cultures but in other cultures as well. Therefore, even though the concept of premarital and marriage counselling is mostly underpinned by a Western view of premarital interventions’ origins as discussed above, it is not the only view of its inception. Many other cultures have practised different forms of premarital and marriage intervention strategies where couples would consult either the *sangomas*, elderly, family members as well as community and spiritual leaders or some or all of the above (Okpalaenwe, 2017). In this case, this form of practice has constituted an informal approach that did not really attract attention and publication until much later due to the exclusion and colonialization of indigenous counselling practices in the past. That being said, the main aim of this type of intervention strategy, regardless of Western or non-Western approaches, was and still is primarily to assist

and contribute to the success of the marital relationship. However, this research study focuses more on the Westernised premarital counselling approaches due to the Westernised culture practised by the population group (Coloured community in the Western Cape) selected for this study.

Premarital counselling, according to Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) is intended specifically for individuals or partners that are intending or preparing to tie the knot and looking to strengthen their relationship by seeking for material around assessing it. It is commonly referred to as a method aimed at improving and enriching premarital relationships leading to more satisfying and stable marriages with the intended results of preventing divorce. Premarital counselling is usually conducted with fairly stable and mentally healthy people, while severe issues are dealt with in longer-term counselling or therapy (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). Counsellors help their clients (who are prepared to marry) in their marital plans through this type of counselling. This counselling technique affords the potential couples the privilege of understanding the demands of marriage and marital life so that they can adequately prepare for such ahead of time (Stahmann, 2000). Studies show that 10-15% of couples who take part in premarital counselling end up delaying or terminating their wedding. This suggests that premarital counselling can help critically assess their decision to get married (Mark, 2004). Furthermore, the benefit of premarital counselling, according to Okolo (2002) is that:

the premarital type of counselling is advantageous and necessary for family life because it prepares the minds of the couples in readiness for the challenges that come with marital life. It as well helps them to know ahead of time and how to handle or cope with such challenges in case they occur. This thus makes it possible and easy for certain marital problems to be prevented or adequately tackled when they eventually occur, a situation which may not be possible if the couples were not adequately informed ahead of time, through premarital counselling (p. 54).

Typical goals of many marital preparation approaches, according to Stahmann and Salts (1993), include influencing and hopefully removing the transition from single to married life with increasing stability and satisfaction of couples over the short and long term; improving the couple's communication skills; increasing friendship and commitment to the relationship and each other; increasing the intimacy of couples and improving problem-solving and decision-making skills in areas such as marital roles and finances. All of these methods are put in place as an attempt to contribute to the success of marriage and a life-long commitment for couples.

Consequently, several premarital counselling and education programmes have been developed to try and strengthen marriages in which the most used premarital counselling programmes, their origin, utilisation and effectiveness were discussed in Chapter 1.

The premarital counselling and education programmes discussed in Chapter 1 indicated their attempt to predict the trajectory of relationship satisfaction for couples for marriage. All of them also seemed to have a high customer/client satisfaction rate amongst individuals and couples that undertake or participate in these programmes before or during marriage. However, Busby et al. (2001) ponder that it is challenging to capture the dynamics of couple relationships due to its vast nuances and because every relationship is different. However, the main aim of these counselling intervention programmes is to improve the quality of couples' relationships by assessing their effectiveness, strengths, weaknesses and usefulness amongst couples (Larson, Newell, Topham & Nichols, 2002) and then take the learnings and try and see how this is potentially applicable for a strategy for the South African context.

In South Africa, the evidence regarding the effectiveness of premarital counselling remains little. The only study found on the effectiveness of a premarital programme was a study conducted by Pretorius, van Wyk and Scheepers (1992) who assessed an Afrikaans premarital programme with 40 engaged couples recruited from a White South African community. In the study, a four-group Solomon design was used with 10 couples assigned to each group (20 experimental couples and 20 control couples). As measuring instruments, both behavioural rating and self-report questionnaires were used. Results of the investigation indicated that there were significantly better scores for the engaged couples who participated in the programme compared to those who did not participate. These differences were evident in all variables assessed, i.e., namely, relationship adjustment, empathic understanding, communication skills, positive reinforcement, problem-solving skills, and intimacy. It was found that the effects of the marital preparation programme remained constant at a follow-up evaluation six months after marriage. While the results were positive amongst this specific population group (White and Afrikaans), it would have been interesting to see whether there would have been similarities when conducted with different population groups. Even so, this study was conducted more than 20 years ago, therefore, it cannot be used in a contemporary context since society is always changing and evolving. It seems as if this study was the last one conducted on the effectiveness of premarital counselling and that no other type of South African counselling programme could be found since 1992. Also, other than this, we know from the discussion in Chapter 1, that

many institutions that deal with couple relationships make use of the international counselling programmes, and that there is currently no evidence readily available of any adaptation or publication of these programmes for the South African context which speaks to a gap in the South African body of knowledge. It is, therefore, apparent that due to all of these, there is a big need for the development of authentic South African marital and premarital counselling programmes that speak to the need of South African couples to improve relationship satisfaction and mitigate the decision to divorce. As a result, this research study intends to develop a strategy, from the literature found as well as empirical evidence that can be useful in enhancing counselling providers' helpfulness in marriage and premarital counselling. To assist in this goal, the social role theory is used as a lens and therefore is discussed next.

2.7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL ROLE THEORY

Social role theory is a theory of social psychology that relates to gender differences and social behaviour similarities. This theory was developed by Alice H. Eagly in 1987 and then later (in 1999) she worked on further developing the theory. In further developing the theory, she collaborated with a colleague, Wendy Wood. "The key principle of the Social Role theory is that differences and similarities stem primarily from the distribution of men and women into social roles within their society" (Eagly & Wood, 2016, p. 1). According to Eagly and Wood (2016), sex differences and similarities in behaviour reflect beliefs about gender roles that in turn represent people's perceptions of social roles of men and women in the society in which they live. Furthermore, the theory focuses on how the beliefs that people hold about sexes are contrived and based on observations of the role performances of men and women and thus reflect the sexual division of labour and gender hierarchy of society (Eagly, Wood & Diekmann, 2016). For instance, in post-industrial societies, men are more likely to be employed than women, particularly in places of authority, and women are more likely than men to fill care roles both at home and in workplace situations. Due to evolved physical male/female distinctions, in which men are faster, bigger, and have more upper-body strength, and women gestate and nurse children, both genders are divided differentially into societal positions (Eagly, 1987). "Given these physical differences, certain activities are more efficiently accomplished by one sex or the other, depending on society's circumstances and culture" (Eagly & Wood, 2012, p. 459). Males' increased participation in paid jobs of higher authority and position, as well as the unequal allocation of nurturing duties to women, have formed

stereotypes that connect agency with men and communion with women in Western culture (Eagly, 1987).

Additionally, men and women have different skills due to the gender division of labour. Traditional sex roles impact behaviour directly through the expectations individuals form of one another's behaviour when stereotypes are widespread in a task group or situation that is culturally associated with one gender. (Ridgeway, 2001). If group members adopt social roles that are more closely related to the environment than to gender, such as the office manager and/or employee, these similar roles govern their actions rather than gender stereotypes. Also, in cases where gender roles do not influence behaviour, men and women can still behave somewhat differently because of their gender differentiated skills (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). The social role theory has a broad range that seems to be applicable to all kinds of engagement and addresses assertive, authority-related behaviours, social and emotional behaviours (Eagly & Wood, 2012). The theory predicts that women are expected to behave more communally and less instrumentally than men and that these differences are most noticeable in settings where gender is prominent (ibid). However, in the end, individuals are happiest when they are comfortable with the roles they play, whether they are traditional, structured roles or changing roles based on interaction.

Individuals accumulate different roles at any given stage throughout their lives. They transfer into and out of different roles where they keep some and leave others behind and start new roles. These transitions through the various life stages can be either easy or difficult, depending on the timing and social context at that given stage (Rogers & White, 1993). In addition, the transition into one role can affect the transition into another, like for example a wedding. A wedding is, according to Kalmijn (2004), more than merely the expression of happiness that the newlyweds and their families experience. It also helps to socialise the couple into their respective new roles as married people. They are helped to define their new identities and are also given information on how to behave in the new role they now assume. The wedding, therefore, acts as a role reinforcer. This transition can then either be easy or difficult depending on whether the couple was actually ready for this step and transition. With this transition and life stage from being single to being engaged and then married, individuals are simultaneously holding many different roles, like being a wife, caregiver of the household and most of the time being an employee. This is called role cluster according to Lopata (1991). Role cluster speaks of the interconnection of roles that occur within the same social institution. Another example

of this is when a woman assumes different roles at the same time such as family/home responsibilities as mother and wife as well as roles within the workplace i.e. employee, colleague or business owner/manager.

Researchers find multiple roles to be associated with both negative and positive consequences (Goode, 1960; Honda, Abe, Date & Honda, 2015; Van der Horst, 2016). Negative consequences are related to two other concepts called role overload and role conflict. Much attention has been given to the problems linked to multiple roles. Role overload, on the one hand, refers to the experience of lack of resources, including time and energy required to meet the demand for all roles (Goode, 1960; Greary & Gordon, 2016). Role conflict, on the other hand, denotes a misalignment between one's role expectations and those of others (Honda et al., 2015). Role overload and conflict, as a result, often result in difficulties with meeting role expectations and is known as role strain (Goode, 1960; Pearson, 2008) which can have many negative physical and mental effects such as stress, burnout and distress (Black & William, 2009). At the same time, evidence suggests that multiple roles provide opportunities and advantages (Marks & MacDermid, 1996). Boyd's (2009) theory of role balance indicates that people who can engage completely in and perform a number of different roles not only experience less role strain but also lower levels of depression and greater levels of self-esteem and creativity. Verbrugge (1983) and Moen (1992) found that women occupying multiple roles (i.e. mother, wife and paid worker) are in better health compared to women holding none or just some of these described roles. Therefore, when roles are shared it reduces role strain, role overload and conflict.

Gender roles, according to Eagly and Wood (2012), are an important part of every society's cultural and social structure. Because gender roles are shared expectations that apply to individuals based on their socially influenced sex (Eagly et al., 2000), people believe that others are likely to react more approvingly to behaviour that is in line with these roles. People's concept of themselves appears to have gender-stereotypical content because people accept gender roles as personal gender identities (Bam, 1974; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Such gender roles or gender-specific views are created when people observed male and female behaviours and deduce that the sexes have the correct disposition (Eagly & Wood, 2012). For example, women are more likely to fill caretaking roles in industrialised societies and thus people make the correspondent conclusion that women are more communal and caring individuals. People carry out gender roles by performing different social roles such as being a mother or father, wife or husband and employer or employee etc. Socialisation facilitates the

performance of these gender-typical roles by allowing and enabling men and women to develop “appropriate” personality traits and skills (Eagly & Wood, 2012). These characteristics are evident in common beliefs or gender stereotypes. According to Eagly and Wood (ibid) people fulfil these gender roles in everyday life, as they fulfil similar social roles, such as being a parent, husband or wife. To prepare men and women for their family and work roles and gender-appropriate responsibilities, communities undergo comprehensive socialisation to encourage personality traits and skills that facilitate role performance. The concern that one is competent in performing a role applies to a marital setup. Therefore, if the gender role of the married individual is relatively prominent in their definition of self, their dedication to the successful performance of that role should be strong and being a good partner will matter to them. In addition to the basic motivation to perform competently (White, 1959), the desire to perform a gender role/roles well should also be a function of a couple’s cohesiveness. Married persons make part of a dyad in a marriage and therefore have a duty to act in accordance with prescriptions that define one’s role and position in the marriage, especially when this position is valued by the respective spouse (McCall & Simmons, 1966). For both married individuals, the successful enactment involves the mastery of a wide range of behaviours (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel & Gutman, 1985). However, even though gender roles are socialized and gender-specific roles are expected from specific genders whether generally or in marriage specifically to this research study, affirmative action programmes have facilitated women’s entry into non-traditional roles (Heilman & Haynes, 2005). Women entering into roles mainly dominated by males struggle with cultural incongruity among peoples’ beliefs about what it takes to succeed in those stereotypes about the traits of women (Eagly & Karau, 2002). However, “as women assume non-traditional roles, people may develop new beliefs about women’s attributes, given that these beliefs in part reflect role performance” (Eagly & Wood, 2012, p. 470). Regardless of the shift in women’s traditional roles, men still continue to dominate leadership roles (Helfat, Harris, & Wolfson, (2006) and women still continue to take responsibility for the majority of childcare and housework (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie 2006), even when both spouses are employed full time (US Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2008). Men’s contributions to childcare and domestic work have, however, modestly increased according to Bianchi et al., (2006) and will continue to shift to the extent that they enter into female-typical roles by carrying out family-care activities and assuming more communally demanding professions. However, the enactment of these social positions varies from household to household and therefore, from marriage to marriage.

Premarital counselling plays a big role in guiding the couple and informing them of how things will change as soon as they get married. Also, to gauge whether these individuals are ready for that transition and roles expected of them, particularly since marriage is seen as a process of reciprocal role perception, understanding, and performance on the part of specific marital partners (Stahmann, 2000). Patterns of behaviour or roles for men and women in modern society are not as fixed as they used to be. There has been a shift in role expectations between married couples in line with the changes taking place within various societies. This evolving nature of gender roles causes issues for couples as they decide to live together after marriage or cohabitate (Lui, 2013; Lundberg, Pollak & Stearns, 2016). Therefore, to change a person's behaviour, it is necessary to change or redefine his/her role since the roles that people occupy not only channel their behaviour but also shape their attitude, according to Grajales (2016). The social role theory, therefore, was chosen, as it offers a way to understand both the stability and change in gender roles and associated behavioural gender differences in society and how these play out within a marriage context.

2.8. CONCLUSION

Marriage has evolved over the years. Previously, marriage was a commitment a couple would make to stay together for a lifetime and now marriage as an institution is not as desirable as before. Cohabitation seems to be one of the biggest threats to marriage and is viewed as a substitute to marriage as can be seen in the decline of the marriage statistics. Marriage and family do not seem to take primary priority which is problematic since a strong and sound family constitute a strong society that is birthed from a strong and sound marriage. The divorce rates seem to increase especially amongst first time married couples, globally. There are several reasons for this such as dissatisfaction in the marriage, unrealistic expectations, marrying too young, religious beliefs and parents having gone through a divorce themselves. With the current state of marriage and divorce rates globally, it is critical to have premarital and marriage counselling programmes developed. The literature reviewed has laid bare the need for a contextually relevant programme and it is my hope that through this research, one will be developed. Only one study focusing on premarital counselling could be found which shows the need for more work to be done within this area. It is, therefore, apparent that there is a need and an opportunity, in this research study, to develop a strategy authentic to the South African context, which can be useful in enhancing counselling providers' helpfulness in premarital counselling for first-time marriage. I have highlighted how the social role theory is used as a lens in the study. The next chapter pays attention to the methodological processes adopted in

the study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The study followed a qualitative research method. The qualitative method uses non-numerical data to answer the research question/s (Christensen, 2004). Also, it “aims to address questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience the dimensions of humans’ lives and social world” (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002, p 717). Furthermore, according to Mouton and Marais (1989) “a qualitative approach is one in which the procedures are formalised and explicated in a not so strict manner, but in which the scope is less defined in nature in which the researcher does his or her investigation more philosophically “(p. 157). Thus, for good qualitative research, it is important to highlight the personal meaning, behaviour and social framework of the research participants as they believe them to be (Fossey et al., 2002).

Qualitative research considers the participants’ perspectives as a means to broaden what is already understood (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). It is also a way to fully grasp meaningful relationships by explaining social knowledge and experience (Kvale, 1996). For this reason, it is therefore expected that the researcher is good at listening, non-judgmental, polite, truthful and adaptable. I was working from the point of the research participants without trying to enforce any of my preconceived ideas or perceptions (Mouton & Marais, 1992) as I wanted to understand their general perceptions of marriage and premarital counselling and its usefulness. Especially because according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 2).

The advantages of qualitative research stated by Creswell (2016, as cited in Mebedzi, 2018, p. 148-149), motivated and prompted me to make use of this approach in this research study. It is outlined and states that “in qualitative research, the researcher reports the voices of participants”. This means that qualitative research is a research method that focuses on how people talk about their perceptions or lived experiences, and how they make meaning of these perceptions or experiences. When conducting my research, I tried to keep in mind that the participants do not stand as individuals alone but also as individuals in context. I also tried to understand the emotions experienced by respondents and that these emotions are not isolated

but influenced by the world/environment they find themselves in. This means that when they spoke about their general perceptions of marriage and premarital counselling and its usefulness, participants were quite weary and aware of how they might be perceived by others around them. This allowed me to either ask more questions, refrain from asking questions, depending on their emotional state or reformulate questions, to ensure that I was able to answer all the research questions and achieve all the objectives of the study.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research aim was to explore the perceptions of marriage and premarital counselling and its perceived usefulness among the participants. I draw from Burns and Grove (2001) who define exploratory research “as research conducted to gain new insights, discover new ideas, and for increasing knowledge of a phenomenon (p. 374). The purpose of an exploratory method, according to Bless and Higson-Smith (2000) is “to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or persons” (p. 41). Therefore, I used this method specifically to obtain new insights, to uncover new ideas and to increase my existing knowledge about the perceptions of marriage and premarital counselling and its perceived usefulness based on the subjective experiences of the participants (Fawcett & Pocket, 2015). I came into the field of research with curiosity and from having no preconceived ideas (Burns & Grove, 1998; Cresswell, 1994) making me a blank page to be written on by the participants and immersing me into their world, “lived experiences and participant-defined meanings” of the phenomenon under investigation (Willig, 2009, p. 9). The study adopted a phenomenological design.

3.2.1. Phenomenological design

The search for perceptions participants had about marriage and premarital counselling was critical for me to get an understanding of how they make meaning of the importance of and usefulness of premarital counselling. To this end, I followed a phenomenological approach. According to Holloway (2005, p. 47) “phenomenology aims to describe a person’s lived experiences (phenomena) in an attempt to enrich lived experience by drawing out its meaning”. Phenomenological research also explores the different experiences of specific persons in a specific situation and thus explores participants’ reality or lives experience (Burns & Grove, 1998). It further aims at searching through the layers of interpretation to reveal life experiences as they develop fairly innocently as people find themselves in a social context or position (Van

der Wal, 1999). I tried to gain an understanding of the perceptions and perspectives of participants about their views on the phenomena of marriage and premarital counselling.

3.3. POPULATION AND SAMPLING

3.3.1. Population

A population is a group of individuals with certain common characteristics, as classified by the study's sample criteria (Burns & Grove, 1998) "in which the researcher aims to understand or draw a conclusion from" (Jupp, 2006, p. 265). Counselling providers and married individuals formed the population of participants selected as a sample in this research study.

3.3.2. Sampling

"Qualitative sampling is concerned with information richness (Kuzel, 1992), for which two key considerations should guide the sampling methods: appropriateness and adequacy (Morse, p. 1005). In other words, qualitative sampling requires the identification of appropriate participants, being those who can best inform the study. It also requires adequate sampling of information sources (i.e. people, places, events, types of data) to address the research question and to develop a full description of the phenomenon being studied" (as cited in Fossey et al., 2002, p. 726). In sum, "a sample must be drawn from the population in such a way that it provides appropriate and adequate insight into people's experiences of the world" (Nicholls 2009, p. 639). The sample consisted of two groups of participants in this study, counselling providers and married individuals both found in urban areas. The counselling providers were located in the region of Boland and Heidelberg, therefore specifically in Stellenbosch and Somerset West in the Western Cape. These two areas were chosen not only because I know the area well, but also because that was where I found suitable research participants for the study. At first, I only wanted to select Stellenbosch but struggled to recruit the required number of participants for individual interviews in which case I additionally selected Somerset West as it is a neighbouring Stellenbosch area to gain the appropriate number of participants. The counselling providers also had at least five years' experience in counselling, including marriage counselling expertise. For the married individuals, the criteria were stricter. They had to reside in the Boland and Heidelberg area, being heterosexual, Coloured, married for the first time and had received premarital counselling. The initial idea was to locate all the participants in one area only, the Stellenbosch area which falls under the Boland area, but I ran into some obstacles and it was not feasible to locate participants in the planned area since very few people were willing to participate. Therefore, I expanded the recruitment to the Tygerberg sub-district

(including areas such as Parow, Goodwood, Elsiesriview, Delft and Bellville) which are predominantly Coloured areas. Furthermore, the majority of counselling providers had been identified in Somerset West, Heidelberg area, and only a few in Stellenbosch, Boland area.

3.3.3. Sampling method

“Sampling methods refer to designs for how researchers choose sources for their data” (Tracy, 2013, p. 134). The “most commonly used sampling in qualitative research is non-probability sampling” (Chambliss & Schutt, 2013, p. 97). Non-probability sampling, according to Neuman (2006) includes “convenience sampling, snowball sampling, purposive sampling, quota sampling and theoretical sampling” (p. 220). For this research study, I found the snowball sampling and purposive sampling methods to be most appropriate and suitable in addressing the research objectives. Snowball sampling is a gathering method because each person found recommends another person, so sampling is conducted until saturation occurs (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). This means that a participant recommends other participants that are suited for the research study at hand (Waller, Farquharson & Dempsey, 2016). This method was employed to gain access and recruit counselling providers. Especially because, according to Tracy (2013) this method assists in “reaching difficult-to-access or hidden populations” (p. 136) or “when the researcher does not have access to a population from which to draw a sample” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p.47). Purposive sampling, on the other hand, was used to access and recruit married individuals. This is because purposive sampling relies on my judgement when it comes to selecting the specific individuals based on their knowledge and experience about the topic under study (Thorne, 2016). The main aim in choosing these respective sampling methods was to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of the usefulness of marriage and premarital counselling and experiences of the provision of marriage and premarital counselling by counselling providers and the perceptions of counselling received by married individuals who have undergone marriage and premarital counselling and have first-hand experience of the phenomenon of interest. Furthermore, the researcher consciously selected the counselling providers and married individuals according to specific selection criteria.

3.3.4. Sampling criteria

The sampling criteria were determined based on the list of characteristics of the participants who formed part of the sample. This was determined as a result of the research problem and purpose. Access to the respondents was possible through knowing the areas targeted and their possible impediments. Since the married individuals lived in the Tygerberg sub-district, which

is quite a big area, I first tried to find married individuals on my own by talking to people I know that might know others that might be interested in participating in the study. I started contacting people via telephone, explaining what the research is about and how it will be used, but the married individuals were worried that the study might be too intrusive to their marriage and private life. I even assured them of anonymity and confidentiality and that the questions asked would not be intrusive and that they would only be providing their perceptions of the topic based on their experience and engagement with marriage or premarital counselling. However, this was to no avail. Therefore, the next step was to look to churches, and I found a pastor who was willing to help me and who asked married individuals in his church if they would be interested to take part in the study. Many of them were willing to participate and many of them referred people they knew, who were outside of their congregation, who were also willing to participate. Consequently, this is how I found my sample of married individuals. They were made aware of the inclusion criteria (discussed below) by which they had to adhere to. The counselling providers were selected based on the inclusion criteria (discussed below) as well. First, I googled ‘marriage counsellors in the Boland and Helderberg area’, and found names and numbers, then I started to contact and recruit them. The research study was explained to them and more information was provided based on why the research was conducted for them to make an informed decision “whether they wanted to voluntarily participate or not” (Jupp, 2006, p. 43). For both married individuals and counselling providers, anonymity and confidentiality were promised to put their minds at ease. Furthermore, an information sheet (Appendix A) and consent form (Appendix B) were sent to them to read through, make sure that they felt comfortable, ask questions if they had any, and then sign the consent form and send back to me.

3.3.5. Inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria, according to Salkind (2010) are a set of predefined characteristics used to identify subjects who will be included in a research study. As indicated, counselling providers and married individuals were chosen as the sample for the study. Their criteria for inclusion and exclusion differ from one another and are depicted separately. For my inclusion criteria, I was looking for professional counsellors with expertise in the field of premarital and marriage counseling, with a minimum of 5 years’ experience in providing premarital and marriage counselling. Participants had to be Afrikaans and/or English speaking and be from the Western Cape Province. Lay counsellors or clergy counsellors, as well as professional counsellors with less than 5 years’ experience in the field of premarital and marriage counselling were excluded

from the study. Additionally, the study also excluded professional counsellors that do not speak Afrikaans and/or English and who lived outside the Western Cape Province.

For married individuals, the criteria for inclusion comprised heterosexual Coloured married individuals between the ages of 29 to 50 who are married for the first time and are Afrikaans and/or English speaking. All married individuals who do not fit the aforementioned criteria were excluded.

A depiction of the participants' demographics is provided in the table below:

Table 3.1 Counselling providers' demographics

	Counselling providers
Number of counselling providers	7 Marriage counsellors
Race	White
Language	5 Afrikaans speaking, 1 English speaking and 1 bilingual
Regional area	Western Cape Province: Boland (Stellenbosch) → 3 participants recruited Heidelberg (Somerset West) → 4 participants recruited
Field of expertise	Marriage counselling Premarital counselling
Years of experience	The counselling providers experience of providing marriage and premarital counselling range between 6 to 25 years (it included 6 years, 8 years, x2 16 years, 18 years, 19 years and 25 years)

Table 3.2 Married individuals' demographics

	Married individuals
Number of participants	20 participants
Age	Between 29-50
Gender	10 Male 10 Female
Race	Coloured

Language	Afrikaans and English → majority of them transitioned between Afrikaans and English
Sexuality	Heterosexual
Duration of marriage	Range from 3 to 31 years (it included 7 years, 8 years, 16 years, 20 years, 31 years etc.). Duration of marriage was not restricted to a certain number of married years
Number of times married	Married for the first time

3.4. DATA COLLECTION

“Interviewing, focus groups, and participant observation are common modes of qualitative data gathering. Interviews are mostly used in most types of qualitative research and are typically the technique of choice in phenomenological research” (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 726-727). In this study, both individual interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. Semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were conducted with the counselling providers because this method of data collection for this specific group provided me with specific information needed from each participant (i.e. their experiences and perceptions of providing premarital and marriage counselling as well as the techniques used and their usefulness). Focus group discussions, on the other hand, were conducted with married individuals as I was interested in perceptions and diverse perspectives on the topic under investigation.

3.4.1. Individual interviews (semi-structured)

Interviews conducted as part of qualitative research are designed to evoke participants’ perspectives as they are lived and experienced, to get access to their feelings, experiences and social realities. Usually, these unstructured interviews are done in a regular conversational manner in which the participants lead the way in telling their stories instead of the researcher leading the interview (Fossey et al., 2002). “Semi-structured interviews are used to facilitate a more focused exploration of a specific topic, using an interview guide. Interview guides usually contain a list of questions and are promptly designed to guide the interview in a focused, yet flexible and conversational, manner” (refer to Appendix D, discussion guide for counselling providers, as an example) (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1990, as cited in Fossey et al., 2002, p. 727). Furthermore, the purpose of unstructured interviewing, according to

Denzin (1978) cited in De Vos (1998) is to access the participants' world and make an active attempt to understand their world based on their behaviour, language, attitudes and feelings. In order to achieve the latter, questions such as, what are your general perceptions of marriage counselling? Does marriage counselling have a place in South Africa? were asked (refer to Appendix D, discussion guide for counselling providers). Furthermore, the use of semi-structured, in-depth, face to face individual interviews was chosen as best suited and best served the research study in the context of obtaining information from counselling providers. These interviews were held in their offices and at a time that was convenient to them. The aim of the interviews was to get an understanding of their perceptions of the usefulness of marriage and premarital counselling and their subjective experience of providing premarital and marriage counselling to couples. The "purpose of the interviews was to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 348).

The interview time was scheduled for 90 minutes. I conducted seven interviews with seven counselling providers. Due to their thorough and straightforward responses to the questions, the interview time for some counselling providers was shorter. Whereas, a few counselling providers, on the other hand, could only grant me an hour of their time because of their busy schedules. Despite these issues, everyone responded to every question from the interview guide, so I still obtained all the information I required. The counselling providers also made themselves available to answer any additional questions I might have had. However, there were no follow-up questions posed as the information collected was sufficient in the end..

3.4.2. Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions are a way to gather qualitative data (McLafferty, 2004). A focus group according to Green and Thorogood (2009) is "a small group brought together to discuss a particular issue under the directions of the facilitator who has a list of topics to discuss" (p. 127). It is also frequently used in qualitative research "as a means to gain an in-depth understanding of social issues", according to Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick and Mukherjee (2017, p. 20). In this case, their perceptions of their shared experience of marriage and premarital counselling. In this research study, focus group discussions were conducted with married individuals. All the participants were provided with a central location for focus groups, especially because they lived in different areas of the Tyberberg sub-district. The time and date were quite important, as many of them had full-time jobs, which made it difficult to meet during

the week. Therefore, because of this reason, a Saturday was agreed upon, and although this was the only day they had to do all their chores and get most things done that were next to impossible to do during the week, they sacrificed their Saturday to take part in the study. They were made aware that they would be involved in one focus group and a gender combined workshop. A male-only and female-only group and then a mixed-gender group to conduct a workshop. The reason for dividing the focus groups by gender was to get gender-specific perspectives and viewpoints on the topic to see whether there is any disparity in how they perceive marriage and premarital counselling. Nonetheless, they were made aware that the day might be longer than expected. The duration for each group was scheduled for approximately 90 minutes. The male and female groups took place concurrently in separate rooms, and then the second group/workshop was both genders combined. The male group consisted of 10 males, which was facilitated by my research assistant, whom I trained in facilitating focus groups. The discussion for them took approximately 90 minutes, which was in line with the time predicted.

I facilitated the female group as well as the mixed-gender group/workshop discussion. Ten female participants took part in the discussion. Therefore, altogether, males and females, 20 individuals were recruited. According to Nyumba et al. (2017) when recruiting for focus groups, you can over recruit by 10. This is exactly what I did, especially taking attrition into consideration. However, all the recruited participants showed up which was good and at the same time unexpected, but according to Nyumba et al. (2017) “ten participants are large enough to gain a variety of perspectives” (p. 23).

The focus groups and workshop took place on a Saturday. The order of the day was that when participants arrived, in the morning at 8h00, they signed their consent forms, then made their way to the foyer for refreshments. After everyone arrived and had their refreshments, I explained to them that they would be divided into two groups, a male-only and female-only group and which facilitators were ascribed to their group. The first groups started promptly at 9h00. Each focus group discussion, as mentioned before, took about 90 minutes. After the respective focus group discussions were done, we had a 20-minute break. This break was especially important because “participants are likely to suffer from fatigue when discussions are long” (Nyumba et al., 2017, p. 23). The combined gender group, a workshop, was not as long as anticipated. It started at 11h00 and took about 20 minutes. The reasons for this combined gender group discussion was mostly to see if “new information” would emerge or whether

viewpoints or perspectives and/or topics would change now that they are all together (Nyumba et al. (2017, p. 23).

Ethical considerations were discussed with both married individuals and counselling providers. These were specifically outlined in the information sheet (Appendix A) as well as the consent form (Appendix B and C). This was mostly done not only because it is required for the research process but also because I wanted to build trust with the participants and make them feel at ease and protected in their decision to take part in the research study (Bronstein, Nelson, Livnat & Ben-Ari, 2012).

3.4.3. Data collection

The process for recruiting participants has to be executed in such a way that participants voluntarily decide to be involved in the study (Mbedzi, 2018). Therefore, for data collection or information gathering, permission was granted by both the married individuals and counselling providers participating in the study. As a result, the discussions (interviews and focus group discussions) were audio tape-recorded so that all the information obtained could be transcribed verbatim. This means transcribing the data in the subjective words of the participants (Fossey et al., 2002). Additional to this, I also made sure to have backup tape recorders and batteries in case something went wrong with the ones utilised at that specific moment. To make sure I covered all my bases, I also took notes (field notes) and observed non-verbal cues as well especially because non-verbal data provide “thicker” descriptions and interpretations compared to the sole use of verbal data (Fonteyn, Vettese, Lancaster & Bauer-Wu, 2008). Interview guides were used to acquire all of the data. The two separate interview guides used for the respective groups were administered in English and reviewed by my supervisor. Thereafter, I translated the English versions to Afrikaans. The Afrikaans versions of the interview guides were done thoroughly as Afrikaans is my mother tongue. Thereafter, I had a postdoctoral fellow from one of the institutions of higher learning in the Eastern Cape review and check the translated interview guides as well. All the data collected was mostly in Afrikaans and a few in English. All the Afrikaans data were transcribed and translated into English. This was done to commence with the analysis phase which followed the data collection and transcribing process. Also, to ensure that the translated transcripts were done correctly, the same postdoctoral fellow mentioned above, re-examined the translated transcripts to make sure it was done correctly and no faulty inferences were made. Furthermore, all the data collected (audio files, field notes etc.)

are stored on my computer and a backup hard drive. Both the computer and the backup drive data are password protected and only I have the password.

3.5. DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis is a method through which data are verified and evaluated, synthesized and interpreted to “describe and explain the phenomenon or social world being studied” (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 728). There are different methods and techniques for analysing data. For this research study, two types of data analyses were utilised. These are discussed separately to provide a clear description of what exactly were analysed and in what way, from the data collected from the counselling providers (in-depth individual interviews) and married individuals (focus group discussions). The interpretive phenomenological analysis was used to analyse the interviews and thematic content analysis for the focus groups.

3.5.1. Interpretive phenomenological analysis

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to make meaning of data that resulted from interviews conducted with counselling providers. According to Smith and Osborn (2015) interpretive phenomenological analysis is a qualitative approach which “aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experiences” (p. 41). Furthermore, IPA also acknowledges that “we are each influenced by the worlds in which we live in and in the experiences we encounter” (Peat, Rodriguez & Smith, 2019, p. 7). This approach, according to Tesch (1990), looks at themes and meaning thereof across data. Also, very important to take into account is that when the analysis is done by way of reviewing, identifying, coding themes and bringing themes together in order narrate the experiences of the topic investigated (marriage and premarital counselling), the researcher and their involvement also needs to be taken into consideration. According to Peat et al. (2018):

a process of rich engagement and interpretation involving both the researcher and researched is required. This engagement is commonly referred to as the double hermeneutic approach to analysis, whereby the researcher seeks to make sense of the participant(s) making sense of their world(s). To assist this meaning-making process, IPA calls on researchers to engage with what is known as the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle can be thought of as an iterative process involving a moving between the smaller units of meaning and the larger units of meaning, or between the parts and the whole of the investigated

phenomena or lived experience. How the researcher's prior conceptions interact with new experiential encounters is of significance to IPA (p. 7).

I needed to interpret the data provided by the counselling providers in such a way as to make sense and generate insights into the phenomenon at hand. I also had to try to bridge the gap between what I know and presume to know about the phenomenon being studied (marriage and premarital counselling) and the actual perceptions of the usefulness of the phenomenon and experience of counselling providers in providing marriage and premarital counselling by gaining knowledge from their perspective as they are viewed as the experts. The interviews conducted allowed the counsellors to share their own perceptions and experiences of providing counselling more generally, and premarital counselling in particular. I started the process of analysis and meaning-making by looking at how the participants told their own stories in their own words and in as much detail as they felt comfortable, as a way to provide me with an understanding of their thoughts, feelings, and experience and of most interest, their perceptions. The latter speaks directly to IPA assuming an inductive approach which means that it takes the "bottom-up" approach rather than the "top-down" approach, according to Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005, p. 20). This allowed me to determine the richness of experience and perceptions of counselling providers providing marriage and premarital counselling as well as how similar or different it was for each counselling provider. This gave me the opportunity to go beyond surface-level descriptions of findings as the "analysis interprets the transcripts individually and then compares each to the experiences of the other in the study" (Hefferon & Ollis, 2006, p. 144). By doing this, I got insightful interpretive accounts of the lived experiences of the participants (Peat et al. 2018). Next, thematic content analysis is discussed as a method of analysis for the focus groups.

3.5.2. Thematic content analysis

Thematic content analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data. This method of analysis was used as a data analysis method for the focus group discussions with the married individuals (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This technique seeks to classify the discussion material into an effective number of categories that represent similar meanings. Qualitative content analysis, according to Hsieh and Shannon (2005) can be defined as a "research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of the text data through the system of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p.1278). The goal of content analysis is "to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314). The validity of the inferences is ensured by complying with a systematic coding process, thus content analysis

allows the researcher to interpret subjective data in a scientific manner (Moretti et al., 2011). When analysing focus group discussions, researchers have the choice between two main options, the inductive content analysis (or conventional content analysis) or the deductive content analysis (or directed content analysis) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The specific type of content analysis approach chosen varies according to the purpose of the research and the problem studied (Moretti et al, 2011). For this part of focus group data analysis, the inductive content analysis or conventional content analysis was utilised. The reason is that I wanted to avoid imposing preconceived categories and themes and instead allow the categories and names for categories to flow from the data itself. Therefore, I wanted to immerse myself in the data to allow new insights to emerge (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). For this reason, I found it fitting to follow the analysis of the stages of thematic content analysis identified and developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The stages and the description of the stages include the following:

1. Familiarize yourself with the data: Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes: Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes: Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes: Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report: The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87)

For both methods of analysing the data, I identified an independent coder, the same person (post-doctoral fellow) who re-examined the translations of transcripts mentioned earlier in the chapter to check and re-check my analysis to ensure that the analysis was in line with the data collected.

3.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations were adhered to when I conducted the research. This included informed consent from participants but also voluntary participation and ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, non-maleficence to participants and ensuring that participants were fairly treated. These are discussed in detail below.

3.6.1. Confidentiality and anonymity

“Confidentiality and anonymity involve how the researcher will protect participants from any risks of their opinions, actions or attitudes being open to public scrutiny” (Carey, 2012, p. 102). Anonymity implies that all the identifying markers linked to the participants who took part in the study are removed and therefore there can be no link between the information provided and the participant (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Participants were promised confidentiality and anonymity, meaning that the information provided is kept private and nobody will have access to the data besides me, the independent coder and supervisor. Also, the participants' identities were not used as identifiers in transcripts but transcripts distinction was referred to as ‘participant 1 or 2’ for instance.

3.6.2. Beneficence

According to Robson (1995), the benefits of research must always be weighed against any harm that might be done to participants. Therefore, I clarified all aspects and processes of the research study and the reasons why it was important to conduct the study. The intention of the data collected and interpreted is that the findings of the study would benefit the counsellors as the strategy this study hopes to develop will be useful for counselling providers. The married individuals were made aware of the minimal research conducted on premarital counselling with a specific focus on the Coloured population. They were also aware that they would not benefit directly but their participation and views would enable a strategy to be developed to assist in benefiting counselling in the future.

3.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter focussed on the research methodology employed for this research study. The selection of an appropriate methodology was mainly based on the fact that the study was of an exploratory nature. For this reason, a qualitative research approach was deemed most fitting for this research study, based on the research questions and objectives. A phenomenological design

was instituted as a way to look into and understand the way in which the participants experience their world. For this study specifically, I wanted to understand their perceptions and views around marriage and premarital counselling and its usefulness. Therefore, for married individuals, snowball sampling was utilised in respect to purposive sampling for counselling providers. During this recruitment process, all ethical considerations were undertaken. Making sure that the participants were comfortable with their decision to voluntarily take part in the research study. The next chapter discusses the research findings.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS: COUNSELLING PROVIDERS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter detailed the qualitative research method of inquiry and research design. This chapter presents the findings of the research study as they are related to the data obtained from the participants. Two separate analysis methodologies were used to make sense of and analyse the collected data from the semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews conducted with the counselling providers as well as the focus groups conducted with married individuals. To this end, I decided to divide the results section into two chapters (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) so that I can give attention to the results of each participant group individually. This chapter focuses on counselling providers. The IPA (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis) was used to analyse the data.

The main themes and sub-themes are presented and discussed below. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a theme as a systematic reaction or meaning gathered from the data that informs the research question/s of the research study. This means the identification of characteristics of participants' narratives that characterise specific perceptions and/or experiences that the researcher considers to be important to the study in answering the research questions and reaching the research objectives.

The main aim of the research study was to reach the research objectives:

1. Explore married individuals' perceptions of the usefulness of premarital and marriage counselling;
2. Get an understanding of counselling providers' perceptions of the usefulness of premarital and marriage counselling; and
3. Develop a strategy that can be useful in enhancing counselling providers' helpfulness in premarital and marriage counselling.

4.2. COUNSELLING PROVIDERS

The transcripts generated from the audio recordings for the counselling providers were analysed by using the IPA process. This method of analysis, as also mentioned and described in Chapter 3, allowed me to work through the transcripts by applying every step of the analysis process to

“describe the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences” (Cresswell, 2012, p. 76) of providing marriage and premarital counselling. Consequently, reaching the level where findings were classified into main themes and sub-themes that are presented in Table 4.1 below. Six main themes and various sub-themes emerged from the interviews with the counselling providers (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Overview of main themes and sub-themes for counselling providers

MAIN THEMES	Sub-themes
1. Perceptions of premarital and marriage counselling	1.1 Premarital counselling as a torch that lights the way towards marriage 1.2 Marriage counselling: a catalyst for promoting successful marriages 1.3 A sceptical view of counselling offered by the church
2. Personal experience in providing premarital and marriage counselling	2.1 Premarital counselling is mainly a satisfying and enjoyable experience 2.2 Marriage counselling is a fulfilling experience but also challenging and exhausting 2.3 Creative self-care counselling strategies implemented as coping mechanism
3. Perceived effectiveness of premarital and marriage counselling	3.1 Commitment determines effectiveness of counselling 3.2 Is counselling effective or not? Pitfalls and challenges of couples counselling
4. Reasons for counselling: Finding a way forward	Reasons why couples attend marriage counselling: 4.1 Communication as the arch between partners 4.2 Infidelity a marriage deal-breaker: a search for trust 4.3 Additional challenges couples grapple with Reasons why couples attend premarital counselling 4.4 Building and sustaining a meaningful relationship/marriage 4.5 Confront the hard issues

5. Unique techniques for unique solutions	
6. Reimagining premarital and marriage counselling: some improvement possibilities	<p>For premarital counselling:</p> <p>6.1 Try out my counselling technique: a useful approach</p> <p>6.2 Advocating for premarital counselling to become a prerequisite for marriage</p> <p>6.3 Counselling and basic interpersonal skills as part of school curriculum</p> <p>6.4 Create a space and awareness of premarital counselling</p> <p>For both premarital counselling and marriage counselling:</p> <p>6.5 Eradicating stigma by promoting normalcy of professional counselling</p>

4.2.1. Theme 1: Perception of premarital and marriage counselling

From the interviews conducted with the counselling providers based on their perceptions of premarital and marriage counselling, premarital counselling, more than marriage counselling, seemed to have a greater association with the church. This is evident from quite a few interviews conducted with counselling providers. This finding seems to be in line with what the literature states. Earlier research conducted by Olson (1983), Summers and Cunningham (1989) and Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) shows that clergy performed the greatest amount of formal and informal marriage preparation. Buikema's work in 2001 shares the same findings, reporting that clergy is viewed as the primary or predominant providers of premarital counselling. Furthermore, Gichinga (2003) and Murray (2006) echo the same sentiment from their research and go further to say that not only is clergy considered the primary providers of premarital counselling but also not all members within clergy have been professionally trained as counsellors. This is also consistent with the findings of this research study conducted with counselling providers and outlined in another section of this chapter.

4.2.1.1. Premarital counselling as a torch that lights the way towards marriage

Counselling providers perceived premarital counselling to be beneficial in many ways and for that reason perceived it to be positive. Several different reasons were mentioned that made premarital counselling useful to couples according to counselling providers. Some of the comments that reflect the positive perceptions are reflected in the following excerpts:

Participant 1: *“Premarital counselling contributes to long-lasting relationships”* ... and also *“makes life easier.”*

Participant 2: *“To be better prepared”*

Participant 3: *“The people are actually prepared for what they’re committing themselves to”*

Participant 6: *“We often get couples who are not married yet and want to come beforehand and see how premarital counselling can prepare and benefit themselves”* and *“couples want to feel equipped”* and *“want to make a success of their marriage”*.

The above benefits and usefulness of premarital counselling are consistent with the general objectives or goals of premarital counselling programmes outlined in literature by Kepler (2015), Kariuki (2018), Williamson, Hammett, Ross, Karney and Bradbury (2018), and Udofia, Bonsi, Agbakpe and Udofia (2021), as well as other benefits not specifically mentioned in this section. The participants perceive premarital counselling as a benefit as it offers couples the opportune space to have conversations about what they are entering into and to freely discuss issues that may hamper or contribute towards a successful marriage.

While many of the participants focused on the positive side of premarital counselling, there was one participant who highlighted some shortcomings of premarital counselling and what it does not give attention to. According to participant 5:

“It doesn’t focus on the right things... it doesn’t focus on the realities of being married. Definitely not. And it’s hard to do it I want to add... like I said earlier... because as a therapist to say it doesn’t feel like it now and it doesn’t look like it now but you are going to... the chances are 90% that one day you will be so angry with each other that you’re going to think why did I marry you? It was a mistake. I don’t want to be married to you. That you will feel so strongly about it. It happens. And because people aren’t prepared for that and know that it’s normal and OK... now you have to start saying ok this is what I feel, what are my needs I’m not getting

to... what are my emotions I'm not expressing uhm... but that doesn't happen. That is not what gets talked about in premarital counselling. So when it happens it's like oh flip...".

This participant is showcasing two things by making this statement. Firstly, premarital counselling does not provide a realistic view of what marriage entails, but more specifically, premarital counselling providers fall short in providing conflict skills training to couples planning to marry, as marriage entails its own set of challenges that must be worked through and overcome. According to Baldrige (2000), similar studies have found that premarital counselling that incorporates conflict skills training has been shown to successfully decrease the divorce rate. That is not to suggest that this is not provided by counselling providers but could or should be a greater focus during a premarital counselling session with couples in order to provide couples with the skills they need to properly navigate potential challenges in marriage. The second point is indicated by the latter.

4.2.1.2. Marriage counselling: a catalyst for promoting successful marriages

When the question in the interview was posed "What are your general perceptions of marriage counselling?", some counsellors answered this question by delving right into their experiences instead of what they thought of marriage counselling in general. Therefore, only some of the counselling providers offered their generic thoughts about marriage counselling, which were mainly positive. The following extracts illustrate this point:

Participant 2: "Marriage counselling prepares you for projection of marriage, so there's a lot of projection in marriage. For example, if I didn't get this from home, I want it in my partner...my mother didn't love me enough now he doesn't love me enough now I get into an affair with someone who loves me enough then I get out of the marriage because nobody loves me enough. But in the end, I have to do love me first."

Participant 4: "Marriage counselling makes a huge difference in someone's life and their view of a relationship. Its use gives someone a whole mind shift. Someone said that they didn't know it works like that". Also, that "it provides more insight in yourself. You get to know yourself and understand why you react in a certain way and also why your partner reacts in a certain way because opposites attract. In other words, no two people are the same and you have to learn how to cope with differences. Where you have shortcomings, your partner can fill in."

Participant 6: *“Marriage counselling is unbelievably important. My practice is so busy with couples that are looking for answers. It’s crucial...couples come for marriage counselling because they want a successful marriage. Everyone wants a successful marriage. You don’t walk into a marriage with the eye on it failing”.*

What these quotes demonstrate is that counselling providers perceive marriage counselling to be a meaningful, helpful and important tool in assisting in various aspects of a couples’ married life by offering ways of self-awareness and insight into who one is, one’s paradigm and ways of operation, meaning “your values, beliefs and practices” as stated by Brown (2017, p.1) as a means to hopefully secure a successful marriage. This is evidenced by Szegedi’s (2014) assertion that marriage counselling is an umbrella term for a variety of things. Furthermore, counselling providers recognise their role as facilitators of knowledge and skills transfer. As a way of supporting couples, counsellors often focus on the process of assisting couples in improving their relationships through internal work. This is usually done during counselling sessions and is left up to the couples to use because they are the “primary recipients and agents of change” (Brown, 2017, p.4).

4.2.1.3. A sceptical view of counselling offered by the church

According to the participants, clergy offer couples premarital and marriage counselling which is also corroborated by Marbaniang (2016) who states that “premarital and marital counselling occupies a very important space in the ministry of the church in the present age” (p. 3). Many couples that form part of a church attend counselling at the church and do not really think of considering professional counselling. For this reason, the majority of counselling providers had strong views around the church and its role in offering marriage and premarital counselling. Their negative views seemed to be more skewed towards the provision of premarital counselling than marriage counselling. The reason for these negative views, especially towards premarital counselling might be because some counselling providers not only had subjective experiences of this by being either a pastor or being involved in pastoral care duties previously (refer to theme two covering experiences) and therefore have seen that couples mostly prefer to attend counselling at church but also because they subjectively and or objectively have a sense of the quality of counselling offered by the church by which the competency of the church in this respect is brought into question. This is supported by a study conducted by Nyandoro (2010) who assessed the competency of the clergy in providing counselling and found that not only do they feel incompetent in providing counselling as they expressed the lack of counselling

skills to deal with problems brought to them, but that there is a desire for clergy to enrich and equip themselves with the necessary skills as their desire is to be of help. In the same way, Wango (2010) states that “many leaders of religion are willing to take on a psychological counselling role. However, the majority of them are not as adequately equipped to deal with the diverse issues brought by their clients in the counselling session. This is because leaders lack professional training and competencies” (p. 1). With this said, the following quotes based on competency of the clergy as perceived by counselling providers in this study is reflected next:

Participant 1: *“Premarital counselling is mostly offered at the church. If people want to go to a pastor then he normally gives them some advice and guidance. Some probably do a better job than others. I can’t tell you what the quality is thereof because I’m not present there. But the other question is whether those people are really trained for it.”* Additionally, he added that *“Pastoral care preferred for premarital counselling due to religious background in SA. Many people still have ties to the church. They want a Christian background.”*

Participant 2: *“I think they often go to the minister and I think some of them do really good work but they are not trained to see uhm really pathological patterns or structures so they often give very generic advice. They would say you have to know each other and listen to each other and sometimes they would perhaps say how to do that but many of them are not trained...It's acceptable to go to a pre-marital course at a church and I'm all for that if it's a good course. But if the church enhances the view that the woman has to be the "onderdaan (submissive one), uhm the man has to be the boss in the house then of course I have problems with that. Or if it just uses kind of Biblical things... you have to do this and the Bible says this, they don't really give skills and if the Bible is used as a couples counselling book I think that's disastrous.”*

Participant 3: *“I am sceptical about pre-marital counselling, recipe offered by church (things are put in boxes and things are labelled). I’m very scared now that these are the recipes again, because churches do that. I don’t I don’t I, maybe it is just for, I must not reject everything (laughs), but it is useful to find out your personality types and your styles and your things, but you can hear I’m very sceptical about those things.”*

Participant 5: *“Church only focused on bible and its verses, love and roles vs therapy talks about self-care etc – I think with the church it’s Bible verses and roles and what does the Bible say about it... try finding Bible verses to say things... and the feeling that the Bible is all you*

need, you know... if you put God first, all will be fine. That's great but how does it look in practice? Whereas what I try to teach is self-care... to start here... to love yourself means that my emotions are important and I need to start understanding it's my responsibility to understand it so I can communicate it. I am important and therefore my needs are important. Therefore I am allowed to ask what I need instead of if you love me, you'll know what I need and give it to me. Again that definition of love. And I feel it's all things that come from a Christian or church or religious mindset... uhm...and it doesn't really help people."

Participant 6: *"There is a lack of structural approach to premarital counselling in the church and therefore not feeling that it is effective. Often the couples come in... it's more a "churchy/pastorally" thing... not that I'm judging but it would be nice if they could present a much more structured thing for people... so I think there are good programs but I don't hear a lot of couples going wow that was amazing and we got so much help and wow it was fantastic! So I don't get that feeling thereof...and yes it's much shallower... And I think it's got the religious part which is fantastic but I think the focus is to get them spiritual and it would be good to get them a bit deeper in the psychology as well"*.

The biggest issue that participants appear to have is a lack of training among the clergy. The clergy, according to the participants, should seek out training in order to properly prepare themselves. This seems to be a common theme across the literature as seen above. This means that those who do not attend formal training, especially in counselling, lack the expertise and know-how to handle challenges faced by their parishioners, especially because pastoral care or pastoral counselling is taught in class in order to prepare clergy to deal with many issues as it has "evolved from religious counselling to pastoral psychotherapy which integrates theology and faith tradition knowledge, resources of faith communities, the behaviour science and in recent years, systematic theory" (American Association of Pastoral Counsellors, 2012, as cited in Streets, 2014, p. 2). Even with this evolution of pastoral care or counselling, there still exists a need for more extensive professional training via the use of professional approaches as some issues may be beyond the pastoral training guide (Wango, 2010).

Furthermore, according to Marbaniang (2016), pastoral care or pastoral counselling differs from the term "counsellor." In his views, clergy should not use the title "counsellor" as it reflects and refers to a professional person that has training in psychological practices. He describes a pastoral "counsellor" as someone who uses the Bible to assist someone to understand a

circumstance and determine for themselves the biblical remedy to that issue. This explains the limitations to their counselling skills and the gap that exists in the need for professional counselling skills training. However, if a pastor or priest do decide not to further train, they need to refer clients when their competence is overwhelmed by counselling challenges (Nyadoro, 2010).

Apart from the fact that clergy lack professional expertise, participants believe that clergy only present a one-sided, biblical perspective. This is in line with Wango's (2010) statement that "preaching and religious teaching will contain the faith and doctrines of a religion and the counselling offered has faith inclinations" (p. 26). This is not viewed as realistic as people, including those that receive counselling, cannot be put in a box. Counselling, according to Janetzki (1998) is about the skills and approaches that the counsellor has and uses to assist the client to work through the issue or problem that they are facing. It is not about the counsellor imposing their own worldviews or beliefs upon the clients. For this reason, it is suggested that clergy seek professional training to be better-rounded in their approach but also more effective especially because so many couples seek counselling at church. This is what participants suggested:

Participant 4: "I don't know if it gets done on such a large scale. I know they do it in churches but not by trained therapists. It's normally the pastors that do it. Their training doesn't really cover just that. They don't do therapy and they don't go into why certain things happen. It's wider than that. So you don't solve problems with that, you give them an idea. Look there's nothing wrong with your pastoral counselling way of doing things but it's just the technique that differs."

Participant 5: "Sex and sexuality are massive gaps...especially I mean within the church setup...it's not really spoken about...and how to talk about it is difficult. People want to know about it and talk about it but they don't know how... to tell this very conservative Christian couple that you need to ask what you want for sexually and what you like...and how to get it... teach couples that gradually during your engagement period or whatever to grow also in your sexuality and sex...instead of this of sin, sin, sin, very bad, big punishment... So I think sexuality is a big gap to talk about. And sex...and how to prepare couples for it...especially couples with a spiritual background...uhm...how do you communicate, how do you ask for what you need,

...before it I was a pastor. So I also did that part and also realized some gaps there...the things you can say from the pulpit to a big group of people and things you must discuss in your office.”

Participant 6: *“And then often the churches and pastors, they do it and they also need training...in my perspective, the pastor must understand how a relationship works... and I think many of these theological perspectives come from a communication perspective or from an idea of how it must be... you know, if you follow these rules, you can do it. So from a psychological perspective I see it in an inside out kind of way... and I think maybe, I think they come with ideas and rules and this is what you have to do...you have to be able to change and restructure inside.”*

Counselling offered by the church, according to participants, needs more structure as well as practical and professional approaches in order to speak on subjects that might be uncomfortable to couples as well as the pastor but also on general issues that might arise in love relationships and marriage.

Even though the majority of counselling providers shared the same sentiments around their perceptions of clergy offering counselling, Participant 3 also shared this view but also had an interesting and slightly opposite view of this. This participant felt that:

“pre-marital counselling by clergy is good for well-suited couples. I think a lot of pre-marital work happens with clergy and I think they do good work. I don’t think they do bad work and I think a lot of that labelling and giving information I don’t think giving information is bad. I mean I really don’t think so, but I think if there’s really a big problem, then giving weight watcher diet is not going to address the problem effectively. For people who are well suited, who are well-adjusted people, who love one another, who don’t have a lot of baggage, whose lives are fairly uncomplicated, they I’m sure they benefit greatly from the pre-marital counselling that’s provided by a clergy.”

This quote exposes that when couples are very spiritual and prefer to live their life that way, counselling offered by the church might be suitable and beneficial for them. These couples are usually not very open to the more secular viewpoint of marriage. This relates to Wango (2010) stating that these types of couples or individuals are deeply convinced of the role of pastoral counselling and value their counsel, quickly seek the counsel of a pastor in the conviction that it will guide them and that they view pastoral counselling as a more suitable avenue of therapy

rather than the more formal practices. Hence, well-suited for couples for premarital counselling offered by the church.

Furthermore, some counselling providers are also of the notion that the reason why couples prefer counselling at church is that it is free of charge compared to paying for the service with a professional. This is what Participant 1 had to say about it:

“With a pastor, it won’t cost you anything...if people have money issues, they can’t afford therapy and then they don’t come to me. They usually don’t have a medical aid, so they go see a pastor. And then the question is if he can help them”

Participant 4 shared similar sentiments: *“the pastor is free and the therapist you have to pay for. I also don’t think they’re aware of the fact that psychologists do pre-marital counselling.”*

Participant 5 also shares the same view *“I don’t know if you know it... uhm... they’ll be curious and want to know what does it entail, how much does it cost, how long does it take and so on... then usually they say oh no their budget doesn’t allow it or no their time doesn’t allow it...uhm...or something like that but my suspicion is normally... it does cost a lot of money.”*

The preceding issues raised by many of the participants regarding premarital counselling offered by the clergy highlight that even though there is some merit and usefulness to what the church offers, there are also some critical limitations that require attention. Another critical point raised was that of communication. This can be seen from participant 5’s excerpt below:

“the type of communication is often an issue in marriage -church teaches to love but not to communicate. It differs a lot... if I look... tonight a couple is coming to me that’s having their first session...they’re married, who contacted me before, but time was a factor then... uhm... and now is following up. So I often get those types of later...or people who’ve been married for a long time and then I ask but what did they do and so on? Sometimes I get the impression that there has been talked about the right things in the right way but I guess 90% of it is what does the Bible say a man should be and what does it say a woman should be, just love each other, pray, read your Bible and everything will be great. And so within about 3 years for couples under 30 it’s like what is going on, why we are fighting so much... both of us are really trying and we’re doing all these things that we’re supposed to do in terms of gender roles taught to us...but it’s not working. So yes my big focus is about that type of communication and to try and address that... I find that that is the gap... it’s not a magic thing that if you really really

love each other and really really love the Lord, that it works...everything doesn't just click into place... it's a lot of work. And it's normally quite an eye-opener for a lot of people...the effort that needs to go into it."

While counselling providers perceive spirituality to be important to couples, the effectiveness of counselling tools and structures utilised by clergy is brought under question due to their perceived one-sided approach to counselling and lack of proper professional training. The latter is of great concern to counselling providers and therefore they suggested clergy seek out professional approaches and more structured counselling methodologies in order to be better trained and offer greater value to couples. Additionally, participants also raised the issue of finance and that many couples cannot afford professional counselling services even if they are in desperate need of it. Le, Zmulda, Perry and Munoz (2010) and Miranda, Bernal, Lau, Kohn, Hwang and LaFromboise (2005) (as cited in Kim & Cardemil, 2012) found that "individuals from the low-income background are less likely to search out professional help. But when they do seek out services, low-income individuals and racial/ethnic minorities are less likely to receive evidence-based interventions compared to those who do not belong to underrepresented and underprivileged groups" (p. 2). This statement showcases the gap in quality services based on class and economic status. This means that based on one's social-economic status, the quality of services is determined. Therefore, it can be assumed that without medical aid or immediate funds available, access to professional psychological services cannot be at one's disposal. This makes these services only accessible to those who can afford them, with higher economic/financial status and better access to all services (WHO, 2013). As a result, individuals with financial restraints who require professional counselling services may have no choice but to go to the clergy because of the free counselling choices available, as opposed to those who have the freedom to choose between clergy and professional counselling services.

4.2.2. Theme 2: Personal experience in providing premarital and marriage counselling

The counselling providers I interviewed had many years of counselling experience. Their years of experience ranged from six to twenty-five years (indicated in the participant demographics table in Chapter 3). For this reason, they were viewed and selected as the best selection of participants to talk about their experience of providing marriage and premarital counselling. Counselling providers reported that they find their work enjoyable even though it can be "difficult" (Participants 3 and 7) and "exhausting" (Participant 2) at times. The data shows that

the majority of counselling providers find marriage counselling more challenging than premarital counselling but not “*less satisfying*” (Participant 5) or “*fulfilling*”(Participant 1). Premarital counselling on the other hand is experienced to be more enjoyable and easier as per Participant 2’s statement that:

“pre-marital counselling is ‘nicer’ than marriage counselling (less problems) except when marriage is not going to work. Well on the one hand it's nicer because the couple is still in love and they really want to make each other happy and they are happy uhm... and they're open to any suggestions to make things better or to keep them the way they are. They're mostly younger so they're a bit more flexible. They haven't had 20 years of abuse or 20 years of he never listens to me... so they are much more willing to engage. So there's no history of uhm... feeling mistreated by the other and in that sense it's much more fun and it's easy. Because you can give some advice.”

Though many enjoy premarital counselling (see 4.2.2.1), a few participants also pointed out that they find the process to be as participant 6 put it “*not stimulating*” due to the content of discussion being “*lighter*” compared to the content of marriage counselling discussions.

4.2.2.1. Premarital counselling is mainly a satisfying and enjoyable experience

Participants conveyed that, compared with married counselling, some of them did not provide as many premarital counselling services to couples as clergy continue to be the primary providers of marriage preparation (Buikema, 2001). Participant 3, for example, indicated that he “*has dealt with 3 cases*” throughout the span of his professional career in counselling. But regardless of the number of premarital counselling offered by participants, their experience of providing premarital counselling remains more positive than negative. Participants’ positive experiences were articulated by the following excerpts:

Participant 1: *“If I’ve had 3, 4, 5 sessions with a couple and they tell me thank you very much and they walk away smiling, that is a great experience. It gives me great fulfilment and I’m grateful that I could mean something to people”* additionally “*Normally with a success rate of 90% I phone the people to find out how they are doing or I send them an email asking. Then they normally thank me for getting them to a better place and say there is peace in the house again.”*

Participant 3: *“I love this work. I love this work. I love it and I have real fun. I mean I am very (inaudible) with people who come and see me but I have really I have fun. I meet fantastic people and the strange thing is most of the time I really like both people.”*

Participant 5: *“Pre-marital counselling is satisfying, couple learns a lot, gives homework - I really enjoy it. It’s a very satisfying part of what I do. When a couple decides to do it, they’re generally surprised to discover how many things they can learn about each other and how much better they can understand each other. And because they communicate better, the more they open up towards each other and the more understanding they have of and for each other so it’s very nice to know and be part of equipment they have to communicate better because if they build that into their foundation, it’s so much easier later when it’s game time...to step up and play the game with each other and know we are in the same team. So that’s very nice.”*

Participant 7: *“My experience of premarital counselling is that it is an interesting facet of psychology because... it's actually exciting... it's like working in a maternity ward... there is an excitement and expectation and... there is a completely different energy. The energy in a marriage is completely different than to that of pre-marital counselling... so it can either be a heavy energy of all of a sudden doubting whether or not to go ahead with the marriage... is it the right person, we are going somewhere else and going to live there... what am I going to do? Or I must go to a farm... so there are many activators there... or... the relationship is actually going well, they just want to make sure they are communicating correctly as they put it or they want to make sure about small things that are bothering them in the relationship but it's not big things they want to talk about. But the overall feeling of pre-marital counselling is that it brings a bit of a different energy.”*

While there were many positive experiences shared by participants about pre-marital counselling, participant 6 highlighted how premarital counselling is not as stimulating as the other kinds of counselling work. This can be seen in the excerpt below:

“pre-marital counselling is nice to do but not stimulating. Maybe it’s because I’m used to working with the more hectic stuff that I almost find that it’s not that stimulating to me. I think it’s the exposure to the hectic conflict and trauma but it’s also nice to do it but it’s not the same weight”

Based on the above-mentioned responses, it can be deduced that most participants enjoy providing premarital counselling, especially because it brings a different dynamic to the session that is typically more optimistic and exciting compared to marriage counselling which can be very exhausting for them. Having fun, being excited and experiencing satisfaction when

providing premarital counselling to couples shows that participants' commitment to their work goes beyond the actual job and the financial benefits. They are genuinely interested in getting to know couples and helping them in order to effectively contribute to their relationship's current and future success. This is similar to work published by Joseph and Subhashini (2012). However, the authors also indicate that "getting married is easy, but staying married is very difficult" (p. 5).

4.2.2.2. Marriage counselling is a fulfilling experience but also challenging and exhausting

Counselling providers' experience of marriage counselling is bilateral. On the one side it is 'satisfying', 'fulfilling' and 'really enjoyable' and on the other side, 'difficult', 'exhausting' and 'challenging' according to the counselling providers that partook in this study. These are verbatim words expressed by participants with the full excerpts provided for the positives first followed by the negatives:

Participant 1: *"It's a fulfilling process" and "it is less stress on me. They [the couple] have to come up with a plan by themselves. I can't tell them what to do. I don't know their circumstances, they must tell me what they're going to do. That is what it boils down to, yes. When you want to solve a problem, you have to figure out what the problem is, what are your goals you want to reach and what are the options. You have to look at your resources. What things can you get right, what people can help you. Then you put the plan into action and you monitor it and see if you're reaching your goals. That's the only way to solve a problem. And that is also what I do with marriage counselling."*

Participant 4: *"It does feel like I'm contributing but I can't change the situation but I can help them cope. I can't do the work for them, I can only facilitate the process. If they don't want to do it themselves and do the work and buy into the process, then it won't work...The process of counselling makes people feel safe. Often they tell me they didn't know it worked like this because it's not a threatening process and you don't give each other the blame. It makes them feel safer but it depends on your personality type. If someone has a certain perception and he/she doesn't want to change it, it's difficult. But if he/she can buy into it, it can work."*

Participant 6: *"I love it. If I could only do that, I would. It is absolutely lovely. It is fantastic meeting a couple where they're going through a tough time and are stuck in a cycle and then gradually just forming a connection with them individually in a together-setup and walk the road with them... it takes a lot of grit but it's very satisfying to do".* Also, the participant added,

“to provide the insight is satisfying in marriage counselling. You know, just to see how they open up. Because there’s already this need to sort the things out. But now they sit in this chaos... and they’ve got no clue how to make sense of the chaos. And then to just calmly and slowly explain what’s happening and there’s no bad guys and... yes... to give them the ability to see more clearly is satisfying to me.”

With all the positive experiences expressed by counselling providers, several issues make counselling challenging according to the participants in this study. Negative experiences are the result of these difficult problems encountered by participants and are reflected in the following quotes below:

Participant 1: *“It is difficult work because one has to get the corporation and motivation of both parties. I’ve had cases where one of the parties wasn’t really committed to the process and then of course nothing happened. You need the co-operation of both of them and that is one of the first questions that I do ask them is where do you want to go with this process, what are your goals, do you want a soft landing for each of you to separate or do you want to heal the marriage. It is important to know what these people want from the process and then we can work on that direction”*. Another experience that this participant had with a couple was about a divorce agreement. This is expressed in the next quote, *“A peaceful separation with the least amount of pain for both parties. I’ve had cases of that sort where they asked me to help them with a separation agreement, with a parenting plan when there are minor children and things like that. And it is not easy to get them to agree to all those things that have to be included in the parenting plan for instance. It’s very difficult sometimes.”*

Participant 2: *“I feel it’s very exhausting. So, I find mostly when couples come for therapy it’s often too late. So, I’m often ambivalent about doing marriage counselling because it’s so exhausting. Because you have 2 people to take care of. So, it’s easy in one-to-one therapy to be empathic and warm to one person but if they hate each other you have to be very careful about how much empathy you show and that the balance is right and that you really stay neutral and that you don’t create perceptions around favouring one over the other, even if you actually do. So it’s really for me, especially if you really, when you actually know this is gone... beyond repair... but one partner is not willing or ready to know that it’s the end... uhm.. and actually, both want confirmation that the other one is wrong. So, in that sense I find it exhausting. Of course, it’s very rewarding if it works. And you have to accommodate each person, you have to accommodate the relationship, you have to accommodate yourself in the relationship with each*

individually and with yourself with the couple, so it takes much more than individual therapy.”

This participant also felt that *“usually if they start fighting, I find it difficult. I think the worst is when a couple fights in my office, and I have to stop them. Or if they really put each other down and there is a lot of really destructive energy...I can have empathy for the difficulties but if they override me because they are fighting and they are shouting at each other... or I know that one has an affair and the other one doesn't know that I sit with an ethical dilemma where I feel I have to disclose but I can't disclose... uhm... so it just so much more complicated. So, it's not easy going... I find it exhausting. It is definitely not my most favourite therapy.”*

Participant 3: *“I think it's very difficult. My experience is that it is one of the most difficult uhm kinds of counselling that you can do, because people normally leave it very late to bring their relationships for counselling. They are normally in a quite a desperate, passionately desperate place when they seek counselling. So it's work filled with stress, the stress of conflict and drama. The stakes are high, because always there are, normally there are many other people involved in a couple, marital couples relationship, like for instance children, but also family members on both sides.”*

The participant does not only experience the stress and conflict involved in marriage counselling but also how couples try and lure in the counselling provider to become the judge which adds to the challenge: *“so normally couples would invite you also as a therapist into either the role of the judge to say who is right, who has the best case, so they set up the one case against the other to try and prove that they have the moral high ground and the other one is wrong, or they set up as a kind of a moral judge, you know it is, don't you, I'm sure at least you agree that so much drinking is far too much. Or a man shouldn't look at a woman in that way. I'm quite right in feeling jealous or whatever, or they would like you to to uhm... so it's the moral judge. Oh, and the other one is to wanting you to pathologize their partner, so they build up a thing about how depressed he is or he's really in a mid-life crisis. They come and tell you already what they've read and what they've researched and they would like you to join, both parties normally want you to join them against the other one. Now that's obviously not a useful position for a therapist to be in. But it's very difficult to actually uhm decline and step out of, out of that role. That makes the work tense and the tension in the room very high, makes the work very difficult.”*

Participant 7: *“It is some of the most difficult therapy that there is because the one-to-one therapy... I use a therapy with the individuals where you work with old history that is buried away in the memory of the body... so everything the person does or says is a projection of that unhappiness or hurt... the history... almost like the year-rings of a tree, where you can see the history of the person... so the metaphor is a year-ring is something I say or something you do that is a reflection of what is going on in your body. So, if you have one person, and that is a complicated process... you can think of what happens when people are in a marriage and those 2 trees come together and it's 2 different trees and you tell them you have to merge... and what will be our next step? What will we be? How will we be? So, it's a very difficult type of therapy... so for me it's difficult, complex therapy...”*

From the aforementioned quotes, it is clear that dealing with couples that experience complex challenges in their marriage makes it a difficult and exhausting experience for counselling providers. Habeeb Abdulrauf and Gholami (2018) state that when couples do not experience a happy marriage, the discord in the marriage can cause distress and strain on partners, causing couples to disagree and fight with one another. Couples, according to Busari (2011) sometimes disengage completely from one another without any consideration for their children, if there are children involved. Therefore, if couples that are going through a difficult period in their marriage and decide to seek out help, marriage counsellors are trained and equipped to assist in directing and navigating these challenges in a way that will be most helpful and useful to couples, which they do not always find to be an easy task, especially because all couples are different and experience different levels of conflict and disagreements “as all marriages are not alike” (Habeeb Abdulrauf & Gholami, 2018, p. 137). With this said, in order for counselling providers to deal effectively with married couples’ challenges, they have to stay neutral, objective and fair, regardless of the biases they might have due to personal trauma history and more (Deville, Wright & Varker, 2009). Staying neutral is not always easy for counselling providers and for that reason, they feel that they have to take care of themselves in some way or the other to obtain neutrality and perspective and stay present during counselling sessions. This is discussed in more detail in the following sub-theme.

4.2.2.3. Creative counselling self-care strategies implemented as coping mechanism

Self-care is recognised as a critical component for those working in the helping profession (Meany-Walen, Telling, Cobie-Nuss, Eittrein, Wilson & Xander, 2018). It is defined as a method by which practitioners encourage personal and professional well-being in all parts of

one's self, including social, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being (Moore, Perry, Bledsoe & Robinson, 2011). Lacking self-care may lead to stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion, reduced ability to empathise with others, inability to separate personal and professional life, feelings or thoughts of helplessness and decreased satisfaction with work amongst others (Baker & Gabriel, 2021; Figley, 2002; Elwood, Mott, Lohr & Galovski, 2011). The interview discussions with some of the participants spontaneously culminated in the topic of self-preservation of counselling providers. In order to be able to be impartial and rational when providing counselling in a challenging and stressful environment, they protect themselves emotionally by finding another therapist to talk to about these difficult cases as well as distracting themselves with hobbies they enjoy. Extracts associated with the above are as follows:

Participant 4: Something you can also bring in is the protection of the therapist. You have to have some sort of outlet because you work with serious issues. On one hand you have to find ways to protect yourself and on the other hand it gets recommended that you go see a psychologist yourself. So that's an option. I have dealt with issues where you go sit with that person in a hole and you can't do that as therapist. You can't help them if you're in the hole with them. I have realized that I don't cut myself off completely, so I don't go as deep. I make sure I don't go under the emotion because I don't want to deal with things like rape and drug abuse. That's how I protect myself and you also don't want to traumatize the client. But you try and protect yourself. So, you shouldn't get so involved that you can't help the person. You have to look from the outside a bit...You must also get rid of your own issues. You must have something that is an outlet and bring balance. You can't just do therapy. You must relax as well. You must also talk to another therapist. I have a friend who is a therapist and then we go for breakfast and let of some steam and then you feel better."

Participant 6: "I have to look after myself. I have to be properly prepared; I have to read well, I have to connect with my colleagues...I have to get supervision often, which I get from a Dr at University... so if I don't have those things and I don't have these anchors, it would be tough... uhm, but... I enjoy it. It's just nice to help people."

Counselling providers highlight the importance of having and implementing self-care strategies in order to find ways to mentally strengthen and prepare themselves to deal with day to day serious and complex issues that married couples face. They find various ways to let go of the

heaviness that counselling brings in order to create and achieve mental and physical balance and maintain job satisfaction.

4.2.3. Theme 3: Perceived effectiveness of premarital and marriage counselling

Counselling providers had a varied view of the effectiveness of premarital and marriage counselling in South Africa. For this reason, two sub-themes emerged. The first sub-theme indicated that for some counselling providers the effectiveness is three-fold. Firstly, the effectiveness of counselling is based on the full participation of the couple in the process as well as each other, secondly, on the feedback, the counselling providers receive from couples and thirdly, the competency of the counselling provider. In other words, how well the counselling provider was trained to provide proper counselling. Furthermore, a few counselling providers were unsure of the effectiveness of premarital and marriage counselling as this for them was hard to measure. The second sub-themes suggest that a few others perceived it to be ineffective for reasons that are outlined below.

4.2.3.1. Commitment determines effectiveness of counselling

According to counselling providers, the effectiveness of premarital and marriage counselling is based on firstly, couples' commitment to the process and towards each other as per the following quotes:

Participant 1: *“Couples that come to me still have time to get things right. They realise they need help and then they find my name on Google and I look like a good therapist or whatever and then they make an appointment and I take them through the process.”*

Participant 2: *“If I look at my clients, I don't even know who is still together or who could separate in peace because many people just stop the therapy. I think when it gets too rough or when they have to look at the real issues, many people stop coming. Or when they realise they now have to make a decision. So, the ones who go through it, I think benefit greatly from it. But it has a very high fall-out rate.”*

Participant 4: *“I don't feel like I'm contributing but I can't change the situation, but I can help them to cope. I can't do the work for them; I can only facilitate the process. If they don't want to do it themselves and do the work and buy into the process, then it won't work”* the participant goes further by saying that *“often they tell me they didn't know it worked like this because it's not a threatening process and you don't give each other the blame. It makes them feel safer,*

but it depends on your personality type. If someone has a certain perception and he doesn't want to change it, it's difficult. But if he/she can buy into it, it can work. It will also depend on whether they make the information that they get their own."

Participant 5: *"Couples come with the problem that has surfaced and when they choose to go see someone and both of them agree, they're usually prepared to put in the effort... usually. Sometimes the one person will make the appointment and then at no.99 let me know sorry my husband or my wife doesn't want to come now... but when both pitch and are prepared to do it, it's normally effective."*

Participant 6: *"It's complex and it depends on the unique case and what is the therapeutic background, what is the mental history... but often times I find that even if couples got divorced, there still might be... I have client now... she's divorced but she wants to fix it with her husband. I think what it's about is the commitment but often they're so overwhelmed with the chaos that they can't make contact with the commitment anymore... they've lost hope. And then it's important to see it like that and create an environment where they can connect again."*

Participant 7: *"The one person is tired of the marriage and is fed up with the problem that just keeps going and going in the marriage. So, in the marriage there is the one person, the other person and the marriage, so it's almost 3 entities that you work with. So, if only the one person comes, then you can work with that person and his perception of the marriage but you don't have the other person's perception of the marriage so you can't really go on with the marriage counselling. So, if they come together for the first session I also ask if both want to be there... so it's important to me because maybe they decided together that something in the marriage needs to change or there is something they can work on... and also an important point for me... something makes them uncomfortable. So, it doesn't have to be framed negatively. We try to reframe it so it's a positive growth opportunity... you're here... there's something you want to work on... it's actually a good thing and then you ask them what is it that you want to work on?"*

As per the quotes, the participants show how for people who are committed, the process works. They pointed to how lack of commitment to the counselling process or giving time to confront their issues leads to them being unable to resolve their marital challenges. Furthermore, couples wait until they have exhausted all their options before they opt for or consider professional counselling. Most couples wait much too long to seek help in rebuilding their marriage,

accumulating an extensive period of anger before beginning the crucial process of learning to address differences in productive ways (Shanmugavelu & Arumugam. 2020). The reflections from the participants are in line with Walker and McCarthy (2001) who highlight that couples who decide to take part in counselling and complete a counselling course indicate that it helped them to come to terms with their circumstances, whether to remain married or whether to separate. Therefore, couples' commitment to each other and the counselling process equals the effectiveness of counselling as they try to "increase their self-understanding and gain a better understanding of their relationship' (Walker & McCarthy, 2001, p. 346). Counselling will only benefit the couples if they put in the effort and energy needed to overcome their issues in order to get to a happy place in their marriage.

Secondly, counselling providers perceive counselling to be effective when and if they receive feedback that the counselling worked for the couple. This is what a few counselling providers had to say.

Participant 4: *"I don't have figures and I don't get constant feedback but I saw someone in the café and he said, 'listen, it helped me a lot. I also often get SMS's that say thank you it helped. The other day I saw someone that told me that they're still together. I don't think you can measure success in this job but I do get feedback of... at least I got a bunch of flowers so that tells you it works."*

Participant 5: *"I often get a WhatsApp or email from a couple that says we had a big issue and we could actually use the stuff we learnt. Thank you. We would not have done it without it."*

Participants' experiences point to varied ways in which counselling is received and found to be meaningful by their clients. It is clear that counselling does not provide solutions, but an avenue for people to explore options, looks at possible ways in which to approach the challenges they are experiencing in their marriage, etc. This can only be achieved if the counselling programme/ education is effective and the training and attitude of the facilitator or counsellor are rooted in their field of expertise (Ooms & Wilson 2004; Carrol & Dorothy, 2003). However, even with the presence of a trained facilitator or counsellor, the effectiveness is difficult to measure, but as the participants highlighted, there are some practical ways that they received feedback that help them determine if the sessions were fruitful or not.

Thirdly, counselling providers based the effectiveness of premarital and marriage counselling on how well counsellors are trained for this profession and how competent they are in offering advice as per the next excerpts:

Participant 2: *“I think therapists should be trained. In my therapy training we did very little couples counselling. And when I was a lecturer, I realised the students don’t get it at all, so it’s something you learn on the job. There are a few very good post-qualification courses but many people don’t do that. So, I think there’s not enough time spent in training for anybody...psychologists or ministers or...So I think the training should be much more rigorous because if I speak to colleagues, I sometimes think that perhaps they have the magic thing and I realise they don’t.”*

Participant 5: *“I don’t know what other therapists do in their practices...I don’t know. It’s difficult to say right through what I think. Sometimes you get couples that end up here and really like the Imago approach where previously they may have seen 2 or 3 other therapists or psychologists and felt there wasn’t practical instructions that they could do and practice...it was just as I explained...listen, analyse...but they didn’t talk to each other. They spoke with the therapist. And it doesn’t sound like it’s very effective. That the impression I get.”*

Participant 6: *“I think too few people are trained properly... I think the universities... the universities are problematic... they don’t necessarily have the infrastructure or the know-how in many of these... my personal opinion... the lecturers don’t have a clue what goes on in practice... it’s not their fault but it would be so nice to almost have an institute... you know an educational institute for... marriage counselling... I know Family and Marriage Society of South Africa (FAMSA) is of course a strong one, therefore... but I think the universities are too busy and there’s too much going on and their resources are too little but I think the training of marriage counsellors is very important and then you also have to be in a relationship so you can understand the dynamics. But the effectiveness is difficult to say but I don’t think it’s great. If I listen to what my colleagues are saying... they’re struggling... you have to know what you’re doing and that influences the effectiveness.”*

Participant 7: *“I think it depends on the material that comes to you...the quality of the relationship...the quality of the spiritual health of the person...the quality of the therapist...how well is the therapist trained, which technique is used...so I think each of those things can actually improve...therapists can be trained better.”*

It is apparent from the quotes that many counselling providers identified a lack of training for premarital and marriage counselling at university level. This was not just their overall perceptions but also based on their subjective experience. Universities, according to them, are too focussed on the theory of things instead of theory put into practice. Due to the lack of practice/training, many counselling providers start off making mistakes and have to learn from them. Therefore, the need for specific and realistic education that adequately prepares people for the world of practice is identified by participants as well as the need for relevant tools or therapeutic methods that are pertinent and speak to the context in which counsellors/therapists function. The participants brought up an important point that needs further attention, that is, it is usually assumed that when one completes university with the qualification to be a counsellor, one is automatically categorised as an expert in the field of psychology. The assumption is that counsellors are trained to treat relationship issues because they have a collection of therapeutic techniques to choose from, as they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to deliver effective training and education to couples and can provide the necessary interventions if needs be (Schumm, Walker, Nazarinia, West, Atwell, Bartko & Kriley, 2000; APA, 2002). However, what is not taken into consideration is how well these counsellors have the training and practice of theory in real-life situations.

Some participants highlighted the difficulty of measuring the effectiveness of premarital and marriage counselling. This is what they had to say about it:

Participant 1: *“How successful it is, I can’t say. I am going to lie if I tell you what the effectiveness of counselling is. I just know that it is needed and that it works well in many cases. So, I believe but I can’t give statistics.”*

Participant 2: *“I don’t know how effective it is.”*

Participant 4: *“It’s very difficult to say because I don’t have an idea of what other people are doing.”*

The next section pays attention to the perceived effectiveness of counselling.

4.2.3.2. Is counselling effective or not? Pitfalls and challenges of couples counselling

Counselling providers had views on the effectiveness of formal counselling versus informal counselling. For formal counselling, the ineffectiveness of counselling is based on the divorce

statistics and the lack of proper training of counselling providers for participants. They had the following to say:

Participant 1: *“Look, statistics show that about half of all marriages in this country end in divorce. Many of those people are people going through a second or third divorce. In other words, there is a huge need to help people save their marriages if you look at those statistics.”*

Participant 2: *“We have one of the highest divorce rates... we have one of the highest domestic violence statistics I think ... I'm not... I don't know enough but I think we have problems in relationships. From what I see I don't think counselling is very effective. Because again, every third couple gets divorced... or every second.”*

Participant 3: *“Couples are desperate. We get a lot of referrals from couples because couples, there aren't that many people who do the work and people are not very effective when they do the work. I think it is poor. I think it is actually very bad if you want to ask. I think people get help by talking to another person. I just think we can be far more effective than what we are in being more skilled in staying in a neutral position, to really listen to people, to work on the relationship as an entity rather than a Wimbledon kind of conversation.”*

Participant 5: *“In general I don't think it's very effective but I think it's getting better... as therapists take different approaches.”*

Participant 7: *“I think at the moment, probably not that effective... it feels to me uhm... if we look at the statistics, the marriages don't look too healthy or good... not long... uhm... so it's actually a bit worrying that marriages look the way they do. And there's a lot of violence and unhappiness in marriages. A lot of couples sit here and they are extremely unhappy. And they come, some of the older one, at a stage where they are actually sick... they are physically sick, but they don't understand that it's the relationship that has become toxic. They try then through counselling to save something that is long gone... and the ideal in such a situation would be that each person addresses their own hurt and trauma before coming to the marriage.”*

From the excerpts above, counselling providers based their perceptions of the effectiveness of counselling on the divorce statistics (refer to Chapter 2) and the violence and unhappiness that couples experience in their marriages. However, they are hopeful that counselling can be made more effective if certain things are put in place such as proper training for counselling providers.

The perception of the effectiveness of informal counselling by counselling providers was that it is ineffective because of the lack of training obtained by clergy, particularly for premarital counselling. While one participant felt that while marriage counselling is still perceived to be ineffective, it is becoming better as clergy become more aware of structured approaches to counselling. This is what participants had to say about the former and the latter:

Participant 4: *“I know they offer counselling in churches but not by trained therapists. It’s normally the pastors that do it. Their training doesn’t really cover just that. They don’t do therapy and they don’t go into why certain things happen. It’s wider than that. So you don’t solve problems with that, you give them an idea. Look there’s nothing wrong with your pastoral counselling way of doing things but it’s just the technique that differs. Imago gives structure and don’t know what the church offers.”*

Participant 5: *“In general I don’t think it’s very effective but I think it’s getting better... as therapists take different approaches... and more pastors also become aware of something like Imago... pastors have asked me, if I just want to give a couple a basic idea of communication... what do I do. And that’s positive to me. Rather just learn something small about that communication method than nothing... I don’t think it’s very effective because I think it focuses on the wrong things...”*

Participant 6: *“Often the couples come in... it’s more a “churchy/pastory” thing... not that I’m judging but it would be nice if they could present a much more structured thing for people... so I think there are good programmes, but I don’t hear a lot of couples going wow that was amazing and we got so much help and wow it was fantastic! So, I don’t get that feeling thereof”*

According to the participants’ responses, it is clear that they identify that even though clergy do not offer professional counselling, they are trying to better themselves by tapping into professional training practices in order to be more effective in what they do. They recognise that pastors are becoming more aware of more structured and professional approaches to counselling which could make counselling in this space more effective. According to Wango (2010) “training programmes in theology have a more formal design with emphasis on philosophy/ psychiatry and theological foundations” but would be even more effective if these programmes included “psychotherapeutic approaches (counselling theories), counselling skills and techniques as well as professional ethics” (p. v). Particularly because the public at large

looks to pastors to provide marriage preparation (Jones & Stahmann, 1994) and many couples opt for counselling at a church (Horváth-Szabó, Petik, Herczeg-Kézdy & Elekes, 2015).

It is apparent that the different perceptions on the effectiveness of counselling emerged from the participants' data. Regardless of whether it is seen as effective, unknown or ineffective, it remains an important vehicle in the formation of strong and healthy marriages and families. The following section discusses the reasons why couples attend counselling as perceived by counselling providers.

4.2.4. Theme 4: Reasons for counselling: finding a way forward

Several reasons were provided as to why couples seek marriage and premarital counselling. These are discussed respectively, starting with why couples seek marriage counselling and then moving on to the reasons why couples attend premarital counselling. So firstly, the reason why couples seek marriage counselling is that "*the bomb exploded*" (Participant 4), they are "*desperate*" (Participant 3) and in the middle of a marital crisis and the "*know how to is unknown to them*" (Participant 5) which means that they do not know how to fix whatever is 'broken' in the relationship. According to Participant 2, "*they often come when nothing else has worked*". Making it evident that marriage counselling is viewed as the last resort in the attempt to fix their marriage as Cheston (2014) postulates in his work that fewer than one in four couples try to save their marriage with professional counselling when they hit a rough patch. And only about one-fourth of divorcing couples report seeking professional help of any kind to improve their relationship (Johnson, Stanley, Glenn, Amato, Nock & Markman, 2001).

Furthermore, counselling providers have to deal with an array of issues when couples are in search of help. Simpson and Christensen (2004) conducted a study to determine why couples sought marriage counselling and found several reasons such as emotional affection, communication, divorce or separation concerns, sex and affection, finances, concerns about children, arguments/anger, infidelity, trust issues amongst others. However, the two main issues that participants mentioned that couples struggle with is lack of communication and infidelity. Other issues were also mentioned that were not that common but form part of the reasons couples seek therapy. These are discussed next and then followed by the second point, discussing the reasons why couples attend premarital counselling.

4.2.4.1. Reasons why couples attend marriage counselling

Communication as the arch between partners

Lack of communication is one of the common issues couples struggle with within their marriage. Schaap, Buunk and Kerstra (1988) state that communication problems are one of the sources of highest conflict in couples, making it the most commonly reported problem by couples seeking help. Cheston (2014) concurs that the lack of communication was the biggest driver of marital breakdown. According to participants, it seems to be the overarching issue that encompasses other issues as “communication is a term to describe a host of relationship problems” (Simpson & Christensen, 2004, p. 612). It is either because they do not know how to communicate their feelings or because something else has happened within the marriage that causes communication to break down. Either way, the following excerpts highlight what counselling providers said:

Participant 2: *“Well communication is the over-arching thing but if we take that apart... I think people don't know how to express needs. They don't know how to talk without criticizing, they find it difficult to see the world from the other person's perspective. They can't distinguish between their opinion and what's right and wrong... uhm... they negate each other... I think there is a big difference in how men and women are raised or how boys and girls are raised so the expectations of what a woman should do or what a man is supposed to be... there are huge expectations and huge discrepancies between what people want and how they actually can express it“. Furthermore, “men often feel that they are right and that they can prescribe how the woman should dress, how she should cook, what she should do...uhm.. so it's very much... uhm... it's not on equal terms... and I see that in all cultural groups, all economic groups, all racial groups... in general... my experience is it's a very patriarchal system. Where feelings... where men really struggle to communicate feelings. Where they don't understand feelings. Where they don't know what to do with feelings and where I see that women are very submissive. Often very passive-aggressive in that and often also very dominating but at least on the surface very submissive.”*

Participant 3: *“Most people say they struggle with communication, but that could mean absolutely anything. They would then say one never talks and the other one talks a lot. And often, I also often question then that the ideal picture of what communication should look like that often women read about in women's magazines is attainable with the partner that they've got, and then we've got to look at what kind of communication is there and he would say: ‘but*

I experience my love by running her a bath and by mowing the lawn and by being a good provider, etcetera.”

Participant 4: *“What you have to put in place is how to communicate. It’s not just about the phases they’ll reach. It is about learning to communicate and keeping that way of communicating through everything. So it means I’m always going to talk about my emotions and I’m always going to be open and honest. So if you have that base, you will be able to address all the other things.”*

Participant 5: *“I think the reason was the wife never came with so they could never learn to communicate. I think when they come together and discover these things are actually normal”*
Also, the same participant indicated that, *“normally it’s about a form of conflict avoidance or being clumsy with conflict and that links to I don’t know how to express my emotions ... so the one is quiet and the other one gives over to emotions but nobody knows what you’re really feeling... to ask what I need... the assumption that if you really love me, you’ll know what I need because if you love someone you do...instead of saying I need you to do this in such a way because it makes me feel loved. But people think it’s difficult to ask. So conflict avoidance, expressing emotion, ask for what you need... So disconnection is massive... I would almost put that as the heading of all marriage problems... it’s uncomfortable to express your emotions, handle conflict, asking for what you need...it’s not an easy thing to do.”*

Participant 7: *“The other problem is if they both come together is communication... how do I communicate?”*

Many couples, according to counselling providers, do not know how to communicate. For participants, the lack of communication is because of a variety of reasons, including but not limited to those listed next. Firstly, couples struggle to communicate their needs because they lack the skills and knowledge to do so, find it difficult to express or articulate their feelings, or just want to avoid any kind of conflict. Secondly, the communication barrier could be contributed to how they were socialised in a gender-specific way within a possible patriarchal dominant environment, which could affect the expectation that couples have of one another. Furthermore, communication appears to be a challenge regardless of a person’s social, ethnic, cultural or economic background. Regardless of the obstacles that suffocate communication, the lack of it has a significant impact on the temperament of the relationship.

Infidelity a marriage deal-breaker: a search for trust

Infidelity is also one of the most common issues couples struggle with within their marriage. This is confirmed by Atkins, Baucom and Jacobson (2001) and that it is also one of the most cited reasons for divorce in most cultures. According to some of the participants, men more than women are the culprits of unfaithfulness in the marriage. This is what participants had to say about this problem:

Participant 1: *“Number one is cheating. The biggest problems people come to me with is usually either the man that had an affair and the woman catches him some way or another, and I have warned these men, don’t ever do it again. Women have a great talent. It’s called intuition and you will be caught out. But to regain trust if one or both had an affair... then there is huge mistrust. The other one will always wonder when it’s going to happen again. It’s not so easy regaining that trust. And I always tell them it’s a process that will take months. The one who cheated will have to show with his behaviour there is no reason to not trust. They’ll have to prove themselves.”*

Participant 3: *“Infidelity is also a reason why couples come for counselling.”*

Participant 4: *“They normally come when there is a crisis. So, something happened. Often it’s an affair. I’ve had parents in law interfering that they don’t know how to handle. Then there are times where they just live past each other or just talk past each other. Or certain needs aren’t being met. But affairs are normally the biggest problem and unfortunately, it’s mostly the men. It’s starting to get more even now but it’s still mostly men.”*

Participant 7: *“For marriage problems that I have dealt with a lot is there is an affair or another person and the one comes and reports it and they don't know what to do with it”.*

Infidelity is one of the issues couples find as a deal-breaker because as cited by Drigotas and Barta (2001) it “represents a partner’s violation of norms regulating the level of emotional or physical intimacy with people outside of the relationship (p.177) and therefore, infidelity may be a potent marker of risk as it is typically associated with negative relationship outcomes such as marital distress, conflict and ultimately, divorce (Allen, Rhoades, Stanley, Loew & Markman, 2012). For these reasons, many couples seek out counselling when one of the spouses has strayed. Finding trust and security within the marriage after trust has been broken is

extremely difficult for couples according to counselling providers, and the unfaithful spouse has to work very hard to gain the favour of their partner again.

Additional challenges couples grapple with

Besides lack of communication and infidelity faced by couples, counselling providers mentioned an array of other challenges that couples encounter that sends them to look for counselling. These include finances, parenting especially with blended families, and challenges with the in-laws. The quotes on what participants had to say about each of these issues are outlined below.

Finances

One of the most common types of marital conflict is financial disagreements (Grable, Britt & Cantrell, 2007; Oggins, 2003). Economic stress, according to Dew (2007) is associated with generalised marital conflict and expose hidden issues that exist in the marriage. According to a few participants, having financial issues can have an effect on the marriage. It can cause a power dynamic between husband and wife where the one with the money has the power and makes all the decisions. People with financial problems usually try to keep it a secret as they may feel ashamed about their financial status and would prefer others not to know about it. This is what participants had to say:

Participant 2: *“If they have a difficult relationship, they will have issues about money. Sometimes I want to get people to get a divorce and then get married again out of community of property so that the money issues are sorted. I think a lot of problems start by financial pre-nuptial contracts which are not good. Many times... the husband pays for all the things that you can see...the bond, the car, the electricity, the water, lights... the woman pays for the maid, the food, sports equipment... and in the end she can't show that she contributed... and when it gets to a divorce, the husband says but I paid everything... so that kind of thing, so often the problem starts with a pre-nuptial agreement that was not well thought through...or comes from the assumption that the non-working partner doesn't contribute financially but the non-working partner looks after the kids and after 20 years of looking after the kids, the woman doesn't have anything to show for it whereas the man has developed in his work and when she wants to go back to work after a divorce and wants to earn her own money, she's 20 years behind work development but she never earned a salary and the husband said well I can't provide for you anymore because you can now work but what he doesn't take into account is she lost out on the*

work experience and promotions that he had while she looked after his kids. So those things that contribute later need to be addressed before these problems can start.”

Participant 5: *““Finances... uhm... people are ashamed/shy about it...”*

From the perspectives of the participants, it is clear that divorce has financial ramifications. According to researchers (Addo & Lichter, 2013; Smock, 1993; Smock, 1994; Tach & Eads, 2015) divorce leads to steep declines in economic resources and is a common cause of large losses in economic resources due to i.e. splitting assets, losing spousal earnings, purchasing new houses etc. (Addo & Lichter, 2013). The economic standing, especially for women and their children declines sharply in the wake of divorce (Tach & Eads, 2015). This could be because many women, if employed, leave the workforce after marriage to become homemakers, i.e., doing household chores and raising children, while men take on the role of financial provider to support and maintain the household, resulting in both parties performing traditional gender roles within the home. The challenge or disadvantage that women who have not worked for a long time face after a divorce are that they must "catch up" by entering or re-entering the labour force or increasing their work hours in order to replace their spouse's earnings and keep their households financially afloat (Tach & Eads, 2015). Whereas, males, do not face this specific challenge.

Parenting especially with blended families

Counselling providers found that parents struggle with raising kids especially when the family is blended and there are kids from both partners. Being part of a blended family requires adjustment from both parties (i.e. stepmother, stepfather and children). Although many stepparents enter into their marriage with strong commitments to care for the children, they also fear not fitting in and being rejected by the children (Sweet, 2001). Blended families, according to Dunn (2002) lack clear strategies that would guide their daily decision about how to be loyal to all the individuals involved, how much to engage, whether to stay distant or try to be close and how to deal with jealousy. With this said, this is what they had to say:

Participant 2: *“If couples have real problems, they will have problems in the way they raise their kids.”*

Participant 7: *“There's a big problem with kids if it's a 2nd marriage and there are kids from a previous marriage.”*

Participant 3: *“The other one is problems with children, especially in blended families, when there are children from previous relationships. Those are, those are really difficult relationships. Really really difficult relationships”.*

Issues with the in-laws

Dealing with in-laws is one of the most stressful aspects of marriage and a major source of tension (Silverstein, 1990). According to participants, many couples struggle to adapt to their new family as in-laws are not blood relatives (Bryant, Conger & Meehan, 2001) and might lead to resentment and frustration between couples who have strong emotional and psychological attachments towards their own families (Horsley, 1997). Due to this, having in-laws comes with a range of challenges and couples usually need some guidance and advice to handle these challenges correctly. Quotes based on this are as follows:

Participant 2: *“Usually if there's a problem with the in-laws, they will have marital problems... because if they can't protect each other from their families, then they will have problems... so if the mother-in-law can intrude and the mother is not able to keep his/her mother out then it will impact on other things in the relationship.”*

Participant 7: *“The parents in law, how do you handle them? Some families are like a dynasty and this person marries into this and then it's difficult for them to find their place and where they fit in and do they get accepted into the family?”*

4.2.4.2. Reasons why couples attend premarital counselling

Counselling providers listed many reasons why couples plan to take part in premarital counselling. These reasons are divided into lighter versus serious. On the lighter side, many couples attend premarital counselling in order to better prepare for marriage and to be well equipped. Literature shows that premarital counselling can be defined as a technique or a learning package that seeks to prepare couples with facts on how they could improve their bond once they are legally married (Lapang & Bakadzimoeti, 2018). Additionally, premarital counselling generally “refers to a process designed to enhance and enrich premarital relationships leading to more satisfactory and stable marriages with the intended consequence being to prevent divorce” (Stahmann, 2000, p. 105). Additionally, premarital counselling assists couples in navigating the relationship, resolving conflicts and establishing a pleasant and secure relationship via joint efforts (Horváth-Szabó et al., 2015).

Building and sustaining a meaningful relationship/marriage

As the primary goal is to have a healthy and successful marriage, couples want to make sure they are ready for such a big commitment. This is what participants had to say based on their experience:

Participant 1: *“One of the couples I provided premarital counselling to were both academics. The girl was busy with her PhD and the guy whom she was engaged to he already had an honour degree and wanted to go on with a master’s degree in his field of study. They just wanted to make sure that everything is ok before they got married. Well I couldn’t see any real problem with them but I saw them for 3 sessions and I hope I gave them good advice on how to get their marriage going. But I don’t think they would have ever had any problems”. Additionally, “the other two cases, they just wanted to make sure things will be ok.”*

Participant 2: *“Couple feel they have a great relationship and wants to keep it that way.”*

Participant 6: *“They believe they have the right person... I think it’s about just feeling safer in this journey that lies ahead... to feel equipped... that need to say I want to do it right uhm... why do they come for counselling... I think it depends on the personality as well... you get more motivated people than others... people who want to live a more conscious life. But I think they want to make a success of their marriage.”*

Participant 7: *“The main reason why they come before marriage is normally that they want to build on a positive relationship together...Couples normally say they want a meaningful relationship.”*

Confront the hard issues

While most couples experience the lighter side of premarital counselling in preparation for marriage, participants have found that some of them are so focused on the excitement of preparing for marriage and the wedding day as well as being infatuated with each other that during counselling sessions, they refrain from talking about the difficult issues. This is what Participant 5 had to say:

“I find the closer it gets to their wedding day, the harder it is for them to talk about the hard things... because they’re now in a different state... they’re excited, it’s romantic, it’s their big day... so if people contact me I want to start that process as soon as possible before they’re in

that space... and it's normally very busy then. Some busier than others, depending on how involve they are in the process. That's one thing... they say (inaudible) another or again, a romantic type of phase where everything is just nice and we're not fighting... no we never argue... you know, that type of stuff... or if they don't know each other long enough yet... meaning not too short to get married but too short to really have serious conflict... I find the same, they don't want to talk about the difficult things."

The above touches on the more serious side of why couples attend premarital counselling. According to counselling providers, these serious reasons include unplanned parenthood, cultural differences, domestic violence/ abuse, circumventing divorce due to divorced parents, and referrals from concerned/ worried parents. These factors play a big role in their decision making in whether the relationship and the marriage can continue in which premarital counselling can assist couples in making an informed and rational decision (Kariuki, 2018) as it is not just information transfer but educational in nature (Senediak, 1990). The following is what participants had to say:

Participant 2: *"They want to get married because there is a baby on the way and that's the next logical step."*

Participant 1: *"I have had some mixed-race couples coming to me and due to the cultural differences between them, things didn't work very well always. I get quite a lot of black people coming to me as well. Then the woman is Venda and the man is Xhosa or the woman is a Zulu and the man is a Shangaan or something like that and due to these cultural differences, they pick up quite a lot of problems. They fight about how the children should be brought up and things like that. Then I have to teach them how to be tolerant towards each other. Be forgiving. That is not always so easy if you feel you've been wronged."*

Participant 3: *"Lots of people come and talk to me about should we get married? If we get married, how will it be different? Or say I, you know what? I didn't speak about domestic violence as a problem. It's also a huge problem... and often people have experiences of parents who were divorced, and they don't want to go uhm the same route or they've had uhm failed relationships themselves and they don't want to repeat that... I think it's when people see the red lights, other people have concern for their relationship, yeah, people will phone and say I'm extremely worried about my daughter. Her partner is extremely possessive and jealous and if this continues it's going to be a very difficult relationship... Previous experience with divorced*

parents reason for pre-marital counselling. Often people have experiences of parents who were divorced and they don't want to go the same route or they've had uhm failed relationships themselves and they don't want to repeat that."

Participant 7: The pre-marital couples normally say they want a meaningful relationship, they don't want to get divorced like their parents... So the hurt from previous experiences... they might want to do things differently...so there are many reasons why they come but the main reason why they come before marriage is normally we have to build on a positive relationship together... we have to form unity and we have to look at how we are going to make this unity work... we don't want to get divorced, we want to stay together."

4.2.5. Theme 5: Unique techniques for unique situations

The data collected shows that a variety of counselling techniques are used by counselling providers. Especially because counselling operates from a variety of theoretical orientations (Bruun, 2010). All of them make use of the same techniques for both premarital and marriage counselling per participant. Here are some excerpts that support this: *"I use the same approach for both marriage counselling and premarital counselling"* (Participant 5) additionally *"the approach used works for marriage counselling and premarital counselling"* (Participant 6) and *"the same technique used for marriage and premarital counselling"* (Participant 7). While marriage counselling is viewed as more complex and nuanced compared to premarital counselling, as described before, the majority of counselling providers adapt and frequent their technique as they see fit based on the specific case they encounter. The type of techniques and tools mentioned are discussed next in conjunction with their effectiveness as perceived by counselling providers.

A number of different techniques and tools used by counselling providers were mentioned. Data revealed that some of the participants used the same techniques as the Imago Relationship Therapy (Participants 4, 5, 6). They make use of the latter in addition to other counselling approaches. All participants make use of more than one technique in their practice. Overall, counselling providers find their techniques useful and helpful to couples, however, a few felt that they would change their approach if they found other counselling approaches that work better. Table 4.2 below lists all the techniques mentioned and used by participants as well as their perceived effectiveness.

Table 4.2 Outline of techniques and their effectiveness

Techniques	Used for	Effectiveness
Questionnaire called Discovering my needs	Figures out where the bad spots are in the relationship Handles 42 items Focusses on physical, social, emotional needs etc.	It's a very good instrument <i>"With these 42 items you can figure out exactly where the problems lie and where the issues are and where their needs aren't met"</i> (Participant 1)
Brain Working Recursive Therapy (BWRT)	Two phased: Phase 1, focus on normal issues and phase 2, psychological issues Approach facilitates mutual respect, love, trust and forgiveness	Effective <i>"It's a very successful technique. It is my best method"</i> (Participant 1)
Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT)	"Used for trauma, fears, anger management, marriage problems and where ugly feelings play a role" (Participant 1)	Effective <i>"It is a very good method"</i> (Participant 1)
Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing	"Used for trauma, fears, anger management, marriage problems and where ugly feelings play a role" (Participant 1)	Effective especially <i>"for trauma cases"</i> (Participant 1)
Systematic approach	Focus on basic communication skills, teach listening skills "Look at the impact people have on each other and me" (Participant 2)	Unsure about effectiveness: There is no follow-up and therefore unsure about the effectiveness of the technique <i>"I don't know because I don't know what happens afterwards"</i> (Participant 2) Always trying to change technique <i>"I am trying to change my</i>

		<i>technique all the time</i> ” (Participant 2)
Narrative approach	Looks at shared values rather than differences in personality About creating togetherness and familiarity	Effective <i>“This technique is always brilliant. It’s my life’s work. I teach it. I mean I am highly invested in it...I would not change anything about it”</i> (Participant 3)
Imago Relationship therapy	Facilitating the dialogue in a non-judgemental way Gives structure on what to do Used for relationship cycle Teaches basic principles of communication	Participant 4: Find it to be effective only if applied by couples Participant 6: One participant felt that the technique focusses too much on communication but works well overall and provides a map on how to work It’s been worked out and researched
Emotional-Centered Couples Therapy (ECCT)	Goes deeper than Imago Therapist more involved in the process of therapy – focusses on neighbourhoods of emotions	No mention on effectiveness but Participant 5 is always reading up on other approaches
Shame work	Identifies shame triggers	Participant 5 did not mention the effectiveness of the approach but is always reading up on other approaches that might be helpful to couples
Emotional Focussed Therapy Approach	Look at conflict cycles i.e. Phase 1. Reflecting, validation, evocative responding, evocative questions then phase 2, restructuring then consolidation	Effective Overall it works well. It’s been worked out and researched <i>“Nice to work with latest/effective theories”</i> (Participant 6)
Spontaneous Healing	Work with couples post-trauma	It is effective and <i>“works well and is almost full proof”</i> , but would

Intrasystematic Process (SHIP)	Look at repeated patterns and coping styles	improve on the listening skills of the counsellor
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It is evident that a combination of counselling approaches are used to solve a myriad of issues not only marriage and premarital problems, as these participants struggle with an array of issues from ‘simple’ problems to more serious problems such as depression, trauma etc. The utilisation of different approaches that counsellors make use of is to provide couples and/or married individuals with professional and tactical advice or suggestions on how to enhance their relationships in order for the couple to grow (Shanmugavelu & Arumugam, 2020). It is also apparent from the table that the effectiveness of techniques used varied. Some felt that their approach is effective and “*would not change anything*” versus others not so much based on the aforementioned factors. Nevertheless, participants modified their techniques based on the case or couple’s situation or evidence available.

Participant 1: *“I adjust it from case to case. No two cases are the same. If there is a case where the one spouse has an extra psychological problem like anger management or fears then I also give attention to that. It’s a bit of a deviation in the process but it helps anyway”*

Participant 4: *“You adjust your technique based on what client you get...the more you use the technique, the more you move things around as it suits you.”*

Participant 5: *“I am constantly reading up about new things. Heard about the Seagull’s breaking habits.”*

Participants who felt the need to adjust or even change their approach based on its effectiveness will do to as their only goal as counselling providers is to “help individuals and couples grow and heal” (Shanmugavelu & Arumugam, 2020, p. 164).

4.2.6. Theme 6: Reimagining premarital and marriage counselling: some improvement possibilities

Participants were asked a question about their ideas on how premarital and marriage counselling could be enhanced/improved. They had several ideas which resulted in several suggestions. However, more recommendations were provided by participants to improve premarital counselling than marriage counselling. The reason for this might be because they recognise the

value that premarital counselling contributes to a couple's married life and the benefits it adds to the quality of their relationship, allowing the pair to work on improving their relationship and achieving a happy marriage (Teal, 2018). According to studies by Stanley, Amato, Johnson and Markman (2006) and Teal (2018), premarital education is linked to greater levels of marital happiness and commitment, as well as lower levels of conflict and a decreased risk of divorce. Having stated that the following sub-themes emerged from the data and are outlined as follows:

For premarital counselling

4.2.6.1. Try out my counselling technique: a useful approach

Two participants suggested the techniques they make use of in their practice. They find it to be quite effective and useful to couples. This includes the questionnaire Participant 2 uses and the narrative approach used by Participant 3. Here are the reasons they would implore other counsellors to employ these tools:

Participant 1: *“I would say the questionnaire I use touches on everything. It's just about a complete list of needs that need to be met in a relationship. If your needs aren't being met, then the marriage won't work. You, therefore, look at those things. I believe it's a very good method to figure out where the issues in the relationship are as well as the strong points. I also usually tell them after filling in the questionnaire, let's first look at the positive points. We're not going to concentrate on the negative things. We also see what are the good things we can focus on and make stronger. And if those things get stronger, the problem areas also become smaller. But you obviously also have to address the issues and problem areas. How are you going to keep your partner happy if they're unhappy about a certain thing? If the one says they don't get enough kisses, then the other one needs to make a point of giving more kisses...They can continue working on it after getting married. The questionnaire becomes their property. I go through it with them but then I give it to them. Then they have a record of how they felt the first time they came to me. Then they can discuss it further in the future and improve on things. And I assume they do actually do it. They told me it's a good idea that they keep talking about it and see where things pop up that needs to get attention... Yes, it's very useful. You can use it before and after the wedding.”*

Participant 3: *“I think the narrative practices is an effective way of working but it's a philosophy. You come with a specific stance from a specific belief where you believe that people have resources. We don't have to colonise people's minds with our psychological and Fairlady*

stories. We can trust people to find their own ways if we join them in finding what they value in life. People say, counsellor, I value commitment in life. Now, what does commitment look like? Where did you experience commitment yourself for the first time? No, that time when my mom left us and my grandma took care of us. And I see my grandma is struggling but she doesn't leave us. Then I decided I will never leave the people I love, so commitment is very important to me. Now, where does the partner stand on commitment? No, that's also important to me. OK, so tell me. Do you have a story about it? Yes... also this thing... ok so if commitment is your thing... what is missing here. Ok, but they don't have joy. There's only commitment. Who just wants to work hard all the time and just stay and be committed? We also want to laugh or he says he also wants to feel he is appreciated... ok, how can we get joy and appreciation with this commitment? It's positive conversations that honour the context of people's lives We work with the core values of people. We try to touch their hearts."

These counselling providers would gladly suggest their technique to be utilised by other counsellors as they find them to work quite well in addressing important issues in preparation for marriage.

4.2.6.2. Advocating for premarital counselling to become a prerequisite for marriage

It is apparent from the data that premarital counselling is quite important for the preparation of marriage and many couples marry without attending premarital counselling. Whether due to their lack of awareness or just being oblivious about it, premarital counselling was suggested to be a prerequisite for marriage. As literature outlined above, clergy seem to provide the majority of premarital counselling (Stahmann, 2000) and therefore, the church should make a formal premarital programme a requirement for marriage because it will have a greater influence on marital happiness and reduce divorce rates, especially among first-time married couples, according to Vail (2012). However, this is not only limited to the church but also includes the professional counselling context. With this said, several participants indicated the importance of making premarital counselling a prerequisite for marriage as exemplified in Participant 2' excerpt below:

Participant 2: *"I think it should be a prerequisite for anyone who wants to get married or move in together. Well we have to have a TV license, we have to have a driver's license but we don't have a license when we are with other people so I think... there is not enough focus in our education system on how people can communicate. SO we assume that everybody knows how*

to communicate but most people don't. In an ideal world, when people make an appointment to get married, they either go to the minister or they go to a magistrate... they should say unless you have 6 or 10 sessions of marriage counselling behind your name by a reputable counsellor, I'm not willing to marry you. That is what I think. It won't happen, but I think that should happen. It should be compulsory. We all have to do a driver's license. We have to have a learner and then a driver's license. It doesn't say that anybody who has a driver's license should drive, but everybody should know the rules and go through tests and when we allow people who have no idea how to communicate and have no idea how to be together, raise kids, we have a disaster and we have a disaster in this country.”

With this said, making premarital counselling compulsory could rule out many marital issues that could be faced by couples in the future.

4.2.6.3. *Counselling and basic interpersonal skills as part of the school curriculum*

Some participants suggested premarital counselling be taught at the school level. This was mostly because they felt that people, including married individuals, do not know how to communicate and if this could be taught in schools, it could possibly prevent communication issues in future, in this case in a love relationship and/or marriage. According to participants, this can be made part of the life-orientation curriculum.

Participant 2: *“We should start in grade 1, in nursery school. Teach people how to communicate. What is ok, what is not ok. If you're angry, what can you do and what can't you do? Mothers and fathers who are pregnant, how do you teach your girls and how do you teach your boys and why is there a difference and why is it ok for boys to hit each other and why... that kind of gender bias as well. We still live in a very patriarchal society. Women are seen as the property of men... I would go back even to school and say life orientation... have a whole year... grade 8 or 10 about marriage... what does the contract entail... what does the pre-nuptial contract... so that it becomes part of general knowledge. And that if they are in a relationship that they can start thinking about these terms... sex education at schools... how does sex works? What happens? What can you expect? How can you say no? How can you say yes? What is your belief system? What happens when you differ from your parents? How can you protect yourself? How can you make sure that you're safe? That should happen before anyone has any relationship. Financial advice should happen before anyone has any relationship. So I think it should start before marriage counselling... So marriage is part of life-orientations. Why get*

married anyway. What is the difference between marriage and cohabitation? So that people can have... make choices so that they can say I want to get married for this reason or I don't for that reason."

Participant 5: *"We don't get taught communication skills or conflict handling at school. I think if children learn serious conflict management at school already. Like when there is conflict, to let the parties talk to each other instead"*.

Participant 7: *"To me, it's so important that you actually at school already, especially high school, with life orientation, bring premarital counselling into the curriculum. There should be a whole division about it and children should be exposed to what does a relationship mean? Because most of us will at some point in time be in a relationship. Then they can go through the levels... like for example, how does a healthy relationship with my friend look? Then you also go and look at how does your relationship with your family look? Where do you come from? And why is your relationship with your friend complex, because how does your relationship with your sister look? Do you get along with girls for example? The next step will be a more intimate relationship...we are now dating, what does such a relationship mean? Why do I want to be in a steady relationship at high school already? What is my need? And how does a relationship like that look? And everyone has to practice... you should make couples and say let's pretend we're in a relationship... Then what is a marriage? Why is there that bond and also explain the legal aspects and why you can't just get married... What does marriage mean and legal aspects should be discussed in matric, how now? Do we keep going in this relationship or do we break up because this was now a school relationship? And then how do you break up? That's a part we never ever learned about... we learned about friendships but we never received education about how you end a relationship. It doesn't have to be this dramatic door slamming, cry hysterically thing...so I think at high school there is a lot of space for that"*.

Including premarital as well as marriage counselling as part of the school curriculum, according to participants, can be beneficial to children. They learn what a relationship is and how it is supposed to look like. Also, specific skills such as communication skills and problem resolution can assist in deterring future problems in love relationships and eventually in marriages. Seen as a family is the heart of a strong society (as cited in Chapter 2), it appears an important point of focus.

4.2.6.4. Create a space and awareness of premarital counselling

According to some of the counselling providers, premarital counselling is not that well known amongst people like marriage counselling is. Therefore, awareness of such a service needs to be created. Couples need to know that there is help out there if needs be. That this is not only offered by the church but also by a professional *“I don’t think they are aware of the fact that psychologists do premarital counselling”*. This is what participants had to say:

Participant 4: *“It happens that you’re in love and then everything is wonderful, and you don’t need things like that. You don’t see anything that’s wrong. They say it can last 2 weeks or 2 years then those hormones go away and then you sit and look at the person you married and think but this isn’t the person I married. They look different now. So, there is space for premarital counselling but to get it across... it’s probably more about marketing and you have to create an awareness. I don’t know if it’s the therapists’ job or the churches that have to let people know how essential it is. I don’t like marketing, so I don’t want to do it. I’ll pass it on to someone else. So, if someone else can do it better and I can fall in, then it suits me better. But we have to create an awareness that’s not there yet.”*

Participant 6: *“I think we do too little of this in our country...because it’s about preventative work...and the consciousness of the importance of relationships in our communities... more than people show...it would be great to just say you know, relationships are the most important investment in a bigger community...your work is really important and I know it’s tough... you struggle to get people to do it and so but don’t stop...I think there must be a bigger awareness of relationships...And this thing we’re going to do in the black community...it needs to be talked about, it needs to be spread so people can be aware there is something like it and so people can become eager to do it because we all already have the need for it.”*

Participant 7: *“I think couples must be made aware of the fact that there is something earlier... that it’s ok to go and that it’s recommended to go... I think the person that confirms the marriage should suggest that they go to pre-marital counselling. I think it’s important.”*

Participants showed their passion for building awareness of premarital counselling as this can and will benefit many more people if only they were aware of the service. A study conducted by Hawkins, Higginbotham and Hatch (2016) on whether Healthy Marriages Initiative (UTHMI) and its website will increase awareness of and participation in premarital education

via media campaign, found that a well-designed media campaign may help raise awareness of premarital education programmes as may increase participation in premarital education at least for the more at-risk population (lower education, lower-income).

For both premarital counselling and marriage counselling

4.2.6.5. *Eradicating stigma by promoting normalcy of professional counselling*

The stigmatisation of counselling causes couples to procrastinate or avoid seeking help. The reason is mostly that being married is seen as *'the ideal'* (Participant 3). The latter is not necessarily untrue, however, the perception around attending counselling, according to participants, needs to shift; from this negative perception to a more normalised view of counselling. This is what participants had to say:

Participant 2: *"Well I think the one thing is if you make it compulsory, then people can moan about it but then everyone has to do it and it would take some of the stigma away. If parents are divorcing, they have to have mediation... that's part of the law, before they can get divorced. And if that becomes the law, before you get married, you have to go to a good marriage counsellor, I think the stigma can go away."*

Participant 3: *"The stigmatisation of therapy is terrible as we know. There's a huge stigma, and I think for couples it is worse for the reasons that I first mentioned about how it gets idealized. You know it's almost like hooo so now we've got to admit that we don't have this perfect love."*

Participant 4: *"If you work with this stuff then it is quite natural, you know, but to other people who don't know it, there is a stigma."*

Participant 6: *"I think the stigma is starting to get less...gradually. I think people are looking for something then they don't really worry...you know it depends on the intensity of the need so it has a much bigger focus around wholeness and healthy living. Of course, there are always people who are always gonna think it's...you know...depends on how you grew up and what you're open for and what your conditioning is...but I think there's more of an openness."*

According to Kepler (2015), it is reasonable to assume that the stigma stems from embarrassment, fear of being evaluated by other couples, or even fear of being labelled. Eradicating the stigmas attached to counselling, according to participants, can be facilitated by creating normalcy around counselling by making it a compulsory activity before marriage and

by facilitating openness to that service. This will begin to change the thinking and perceptions of counselling in general.

4.3. CONCLUSION

In summary, the findings presented above based on counselling providers' data revealed that they perceived premarital and marriage counselling to be helpful and useful. It is especially helpful when the right tools and techniques are utilised and also adapted to suit the couples' needs. The effectiveness of counselling varied for counselling providers, but they felt that if both individuals participated fully and the counsellor provides "good" counselling and they are well trained, it should be effective. Counselling providers want to mean something to the couples they provide counselling to and therefore, a few counsellors who are clergy attended professional training to be more impactful in what they do. Receiving training was one big recommendation, amongst others, as too many counselling providers (clergy and professionals) lack 'good' training.

CHAPTER 5:

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS: MARRIED INDIVIDUALS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4 of this research report, the findings that emerged from the process of data collection and analysis with the counselling providers were presented and discussed. In this chapter, I present and discuss the research findings that emerged from the data collected and analysed for married individuals. When the discussion of the findings generated are looked at, it is important to keep in mind that even though the participants are of a Christian faith, their perceptions and experiences of premarital and marriage counselling were not only limited to their religious point of view.

5.2. MARRIED INDIVIDUALS

Data from married individuals was collected through conducting focus group discussions and analysing them using thematic content analysis to generate main themes and sub-themes. As mentioned in Chapter Three, focus group discussions, also referred to as focus groups are used as a means to gain an in-depth understanding of a social issue (Nyuma, Wilson, Derrick & Mukherjee, 2017) by asking participants about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes regarding a particular phenomenon (Morgan, 1997) in order to generate a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs (Morgan, 1998, as cited in Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). This is done to gain a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions on premarital and marriage counselling. Two focus groups, one with male married individuals and one with female married individuals were conducted as well as a workshop involving both male and female married individuals. The focus groups concentrated on the perceptions that married individuals have on premarital and marriage counselling. The workshop, "which offers a way for the researchers to guide and inform the participants of the current tasks" (Nortvig, Sorensen, Misfeldt, Orngreen, Allsopp, Henningsen & Hautopp, 2016, p. 273), focussed mostly on the married individuals' perceived ideas of what they thought should be topics of discussion in premarital and marriage counselling. This was conducted as a written exercise and as a way to see whether new information would emerge apart from what had been highlighted as topics of discussion for premarital and marriage counselling in the respective focus groups. The workshop also contributed to the third objective "to develop a strategy that can be useful in enhancing counselling providers' helpfulness in premarital and marriage counselling" (refer to

Chapter Six). With this said, the findings from the focus groups are discussed first and thereafter, the findings from the workshop are presented.

5.3. FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

From participants' information drawn from the male and female focus groups, four main themes emerged, and several sub-themes were generated. An overview of this is shown in Table 5.1 and discussed in this specific order.

Table 5.1 An overview of main themes and sub-themes for married individuals

MAIN THEMES	Sub-themes
1. Perceptions of premarital and marriage counselling	1.1 <i>“Premarital counselling provides a blueprint of where you need to go”</i> 1.2 <i>“It did not meet my expectations”</i> 1.3 <i>“You can only benefit from marriage counselling”</i>
2 Informal counselling as a means of education and guide	2.1 A firm foundation of biblical principles, criteria and characteristics for marriage 2.2 Knowledge transfer: family advice given based on own experiences 2.3 The lack of premarital counselling leads to self-teaching
3 Counselling guide: don't miss the mark	
4 Improve premarital and marriage counselling: <i>“I didn't learn it from a book”</i>	

5.3.1. Theme 1: Perceptions of premarital and marriage counselling

Premarital and marriage counselling were positively perceived across the board. All participants felt that both premarital and marriage counselling offered help to couples and that couples can benefit greatly from such a service. Stahmann (2000) and Schofield, Mumford, Jurkovic, Jurkovic and Bickerdike (2012) evaluated the literature on counselling, specifically premarital counselling, and found that the majority of studies found marriage counselling to be

beneficial. Moreover, participants identified more advantages than disadvantages to receiving both premarital well as marriage counselling. In conjunction with speaking freely about their perceptions, many participants spontaneously spoke about their experience of receiving premarital and or marriage counselling. They highlighted how they have experience of both clergy as well professional counselling. With this said, several sub-themes emerged from the main theme and are discussed next.

5.3.1.1. “Premarital counselling provides a blueprint of where you need to go”

Premarital counselling, according to Stahmann and Hiebert (1997a, as cited in Stahmann, 2000) is viewed as educational but also remedial and preventative. Premarital counselling offers several advantages according to married individuals. One of the most prominent advantages is that it prepares one well for marriage especially because making such a decision, one ties oneself to “*a lifetime commitment*” (Participant 6, male group) and it is viewed as a “*big step*” (Participant 6, male group) taken by couples. With this being said, preparation of marriage for these participants covers different facets of marriage life such as preparing one for possible challenges (i.e. raising kids, finances etc.) that one might face, provides participants with a clear perspective of what marriage entails, prepares one for what one is getting oneself into. The following quotes showcase the perceptions that participants have on the benefits that premarital counselling offers:

Participant 9 (Female group): “*And I believe if you go for premarital counselling you could be well prepared for things like this. How to conduct yourself and all that stuff. How to behave with your husband.*”

Participant 1 (Male group): “*You will at least have an idea of what marriage will be like for the first 5 years.*”

Participant 2 (Male group): “*Uhm, pre-marital counselling is very important because it prepares you for the way you’re going to go and where you’re putting yourself into... uhm, it’s also where you can decide well I can still change my mind here because it’s a very big step that you’re going to take for life and how can I say... if you can’t take the step there, then you got to take the step and say listen, this is for life uhm... yeah... and for me it’s very important like everyone said it prepares you for the way forward and we need to ... say also and see where there are shortfalls in one another and we know where to work on and go forward in life.*”

Participant 3 (Male group): *“When you build a house, the foundation first has to be laid... all the rocks and rubble... so that’s how the foundation gets built with pre-marital counselling so the foundation has to be built before you can build the house.”*

Participant 4 (Male group): *“You get well prepared. You don’t go into marriage with your eyes closed. So when you go into the marriage you know exactly what to expect so I think it’s extremely important.”*

Participant 5 (Male group): *“Premarital counselling provides a blueprint of where you need to go.”*

Participant 6 (Male group): *“I think it’s important to have pre-marital counselling because of the commitment people are going to make... and I think some people don’t have clear perspective of what marriage entails and people are going into marriage for the wrong reasons and I also think because of previous relationship that people had, there is obviously baggage attached to it so it means that if during those sessions it will also help you to offload that baggage you have because where you’re going is a total new chapter of your life that you’re gonna start. And also to give you clear perspective and understanding of what to expect in marriage and in terms of the challenges that will arise in marriage so I think it’s important going into marriage, you’re going inexperienced and you didn’t look at things from a broader perspective in terms of what you can expect of marriage. So it’s important that you can think before making such a big step in your life because it’s a total change in your life. It’s a place where you no longer can turn back. It’s a lifetime commitment so... I think a lot of young people go into marriage for the wrong reasons and that’s where they fall short in some point or deficiencies creep in because of the big responsibility that is upon you in marriage and that to me is important because different aspect of marriage will be covered or discussed in order for you to make that transition. Because it’s a transition that you have to make. You know stepping out of your mother’s house, going to stay with your partner or wife for the rest of your life is not an easy thing to do but at the end of the day you must have a clear perspective or guidelines in terms of what to expect in marriage.”*

Participant 9 (Male group): *“Pre-marital counselling gives you the principles regardless of what the circumstances are, the principles stay the same so it allows you to build according to that foundation” and “Premarital counselling gives you directive to show you how to build,*

what to do, where to go... uhm, obviously there's a big difference between theory and practical. So what you learn there in the pre-marital... your practicals going to be much harder than what you learn from someone's mouth or experience because your own experience is going to tell a different story but the theory has prepared you for the practical... ”

Participant 10 (Male group): *“I think pre-marital counselling can give a very... paint a nice picture and you can make an informed decision...”*

Participants highlighted various reasons why they think attending premarital counselling is important before deciding to marry and the benefits that premarital counselling offers. Counselling providers shared the same sentiments and views of the benefits of premarital counselling (see sub-theme 4.2.1.1). However, married individuals seemed to express a bigger scope of benefits that they identified and outlined compared to counselling providers. This could indicate their expectations of what premarital counselling offers which can be a good guide for counselling providers as further discussed in Chapter Six. However, regardless of this, both married individuals and counselling providers agreed that the biggest benefit of premarital counselling is that it prepares one (this encompasses all educational information) for marriage and married life. Married individuals are also aware that going from being single to married is a big transition, as confirmed by Stahmann and Salts' (1993, as cited in Stahmann, 2000) work, and participants felt that premarital counselling can and will prepare you well in assisting with “easing the transition” (p.105).

One of the participants shared their positive experiences of attending premarital counselling and how impactful it was.

Participant 10 (Male group): *“I still remember mine. Uhm, I think it was probably the most important step in our marriage. It prepared us for many challenges we had to face (...) I think it's very important. It helped shape the marriage and it helps you understand that before you enter into it, it helps with the vision of where the marriage is going and it gives one an idea of what is a healthy marriage and what is not a successful marriage. So I think for me it was probably one of the most fundamental things uhm... I think I would have probably been at the place of counselling had I not had pre-marital counselling.”*

The participant acknowledged the importance of premarital counselling. He confirmed being prepared for potential marital challenges that could circumvent detrimental unforeseen issues

within marriage through the information, education and guidance of premarital counselling services. As a result, effective counselling services provide the building blocks and direction to couples, to help shape what looks like a healthy and successful marriage. This is because “premarital counselling provides the individual with the knowledge about the realities of marital life and imparts the skills” that the couples might need to succeed in their marital life (Joseph & Subhashini, 2012, p. 6). The experience of this particular participant is a good example of how effective and impactful premarital counselling could be if couples are committed to the process (as outlined in Chapter 4 under theme 4.2.3.1). However, a few participants also expressed the disadvantages of premarital counselling. This is discussed in more detail next.

5.3.1.2. “Premarital counselling did not meet my expectations”

Some married individuals had negative perceptions on premarital counselling. This was mostly due to their experience of receiving premarital counselling services. They found that the information received was not meaningful and useful and felt mundane and their expectations were not met. Their experiences are showcased below:

Participant 3 (Female group): *“To be honest, I can’t remember (laughing) what was discussed. We did go for premarital counselling. I remember very little from that because the person who did the premarital counselling, I didn’t really know him that well and he was maybe not the best person to do the premarital counselling. I didn’t find it very useful to be honest. I think if it was more meaningful, I would have remembered.”*

Participant 3 (Female group): *“My husband and I don’t come from Christian homes and we got saved, I was already in my twenties so I knew that there was a different way that family is supposed to work and I wanted someone to explain that to us. So that was my expectation. But ja, like I said, it didn’t meet my expectation.”*

Participant 3 (Male group): *“I uhm... can’t remember much of my pre-marital counselling. I met my wife in the UK and uhm, all I remember is after meeting her and proposing to her, I was excited to get pre-marital counselling uhm... but in my experience the person who gave the counselling... it was very mundane and boring ... in my honest opinion... this guy, when he spoke, it was like his mouth was dry... and the picture... all I couldn’t get out of my mind was that his wife looked twice his age. And uhm, it was scary... this was like in the charismatic*

part... But I didn't get much out of my pre-marital counselling... (...)... my pre-marital counselling wasn't of much quality."

From the participants' experiences of receiving or attending premarital counselling, they found it to be disappointing for several reasons. Firstly, the premarital counselling that they received did not match their expectations, secondly, it was not useful and thirdly, they did not find it meaningful. This means that the premarital counselling they received was not that good and was most likely provided by a counsellor who lacked the necessary skills to provide this service (Seldon, 2013). Another issue was that they were unfamiliar with the counselling provider. Whether this would have made a difference in terms of impact or efficacy of premarital counselling or not is unclear from the extract. It, therefore, could be assumed that, based on the aforementioned, the counselling providers fell short of providing the married individuals with the necessary education and skills training to assist them in making an informed decision about getting married, and, therefore premarital counselling became counterproductive in its purpose as it promises to help couples prepare for marriage or seriously consider marriage, according to Clyde, Hawkins and Willoughby (2020).

Premarital counselling, as experienced by married individuals, was examined from both a positive and negative perspective. Now, in the following sub-theme, we look at marriage counselling and its benefits.

5.3.1.3. "You can only benefit from marriage counselling"

As with premarital counselling, marriage counselling is perceived to afford countless benefits. It is viewed as important and as a means to resolve issues in a marriage that cannot otherwise be navigated:

Participant 6 (Male group): *"I think marriage counselling is very important due to the challenges that a lot of marriages are facing and I think it's needful to have a clear perspective or realistic view from someone else specifically specialising in marriages and things like that uhm, because we have blind spots that you can't see and it's good for someone else to give his perspective in terms of the things that you are challenged within your marriage."*

Participant 10 (Male group): *"Marriage counselling is important... especially if there are challenges or some differences uhm... I think it's not healthy to try and resolve it on your own"*

but to try come under covering or leadership that has solved that similar type of symptoms and you can only benefit from marriage counselling”

It is clear from the extracts that marriage counselling is viewed as very important as it offers “help for married couples who have problems in their relationship” (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, n.d.) by assisting them in identifying underlying conflicts in order to enhance the relationship (Shanmugavelu & Arumugam, 2020). Furthermore, many participants mentioned a wide range of factors that makes marriage counselling relevant and helpful. These factors range from marriage counselling dealing with issues such as forgiveness and reconciliation to teaching communication and figuring out the vision for the marriage (i.e. raising kids, finances, repentance, forgiveness, agreement, jealousy, complacency, etc.). These are engaged in detail below:

Male group:

Participant 2: *“Teaches agreement...”*

Participant 3: *“Because a marriage takes a lot of work constantly to keep it sharp and I think sometimes you can come to a place of complacency uhm... and so the counselling must bring it to a place where it brings you to a willingness to work on your marriage.”*

Participant 4: *“Teaches Repentance... the person that’s wrong must repent...”*

Participant 5: *“Jealousy... it’s a big obstacle... in any relationship basically... So I think if there’s jealousy in the marriage it’s a terrible thing. That’s where the trust issues come in, that’s where the un-forgiveness comes in, the one cannot... you say you’re going to watch the game with your friends but in the back of her mind, she can’t see that you’re there and I think it’s more a... marriage counselling can help a lot of people in that aspect of jealousy”* and *“I also personally think it can help overcome lack of communication. One of the things, the importance of counselling in our setup is that people are not used to talking and sometimes that’s part of the problem. They never deal with the problem...3 months later, 6 months later... then that thing is still there. So I think counselling helps to overcome the barriers of lack of communication”* and *“another thing I thought about is your ambition for the marriage itself... both partners’ ambition for the marriage... what is our vision. One thing I picked up is with children... the one’s view of the child is this and the other one’s idea is that and then there always comes clashes around that because I want the child must be a doctor and you want the*

child to be that... but we don't think about the child itself. And I think marriage counselling can help a lot with that that we can work on our vision for our marriage. And the same with finance... that we have a vision... what do we do with our wages when we put it together? We need a vision... we are building on one thing... one dream... and that speaks to the one-ness."

Participant 7: *"Counselling will also bring back the love..."*

Participant 8: *"I always realise with marriages people don't know how to solve problems. So counselling can help with that" and "the honesty... is the decision making about financial situations in the house... because often it can bring challenges and it can bring pressure in your marriage... and honesty you must always have and be open... and often you don't see your blindside..."*

Participant 9: *"I say forgiveness in... for the very fact I think you might... by the time you come for counselling you would've had a problem to forgive your spouse so... one important thing... one of the benefits must be it must produce forgiveness uhm... because I think without it you can't move forward..." and "teaches reconciliation" as well as "teaches accountability"*

The above excerpts are "a list of reasons for seeking therapy" (Doss, Simpson & Christensen, 2004, p. 608). It posits that marriage counselling, according to the perception of married individuals and mostly skewed towards the male group, can improve and enhance the relationship between a couple by offering suggestions and solutions to marital difficulties as well as skills to improve the marriage overall.

5.3.2. Theme 2: Informal counselling as a means of education and guide

The majority of participants received counselling through the church. This is because the church offers counselling "founded on the biblical principles and shaped by theological views" (Waruta & Kinoti, 1994, p. 5-6, as cited in Bawa, 2017). The reason why they opt for pastoral counselling is not that they are against formal counselling, but mostly because they are religious, God-fearing, church-going people and believe that the church can offer a blueprint of what marriage is and how to navigate marriage with all its intricacies as indicated by one participant: *"God is the author of the word and he is the created or initiated marriage and who better to go to than the one who initiated marriage"* (Participant 6, male group). This is in keeping with Bawa's (2017) research, which postulates that God created and institutionalized

the concept of marriage, and so it is God who understands how best couples should relate, and thus they must include Him in their marriage preparation and marriage in order to have a stable household. Furthermore, a few participants pointed out that they only received premarital advice from family. Whereas, a few other participants had not received counselling at all and this impacted their marriage. This is discussed in more detail next.

5.3.2.1. A firm foundation of biblical principles, criteria and characteristics for marriage

The benefits of receiving premarital counselling from the church are based on participants' experiences. This involves all the topics that the counselling provider covered and emphasised on what they perceived to be discussed and focussed on during counselling sessions. The quotations are found below:

Female group:

Participant 1: *"When we decided we were going to get married, we weren't in pastor church yet, and at my old church they also offered like a premarital counselling service before you get married and we were going to do that. But I am glad we did do it, cause if I, not to compare, but if I had to look at people who just get married and don't have counselling or whatever, there are certain things that I feel that you do need to know before you enter into that covenant with each other. There is things like, even practical things that pastor shared with us like, finances is going to be a big thing in your marriage, which it is. But who is the spender and who is the saver and who is logical and who is rational when it comes to things like that. So we know then, ok, when this challenge does come we, we gonna give it to you and you gonna sort it out and I will just follow and stand beside you and support you or whatever... Like we were kind of taught like when challenges come you need to stand together and face it together."*

Participant 5: *"Our pastor gave us our premarital counselling like from a biblical aspect, how a marriage works basically and like other general things like 'do you guys have children?' and this is how it works when you have children. So like family life". Additionally, "we were asked, between the two of us, who is the spender and who is more careful with money or whatever, because in figuring that out from the beginning we both know, ok, we have to be more careful because you the spender or whatever. And also, don't let that responsibility fall on that person because it is just setting it up for disaster. And then, uhm, luckily my husband and I are both quite careful with money so, I just out of my own decided that he can have that responsibility. It's so much easier like if you just say, please take this responsibility, you just make sure that*

whatever need to be paid is paid and our savings plan are sorted and whatever and I just do what I need to do to make that happen.”

Participant 6: *“The roles of a husband and a wife.”*

Participant 7: *“Our pastor emphasized premarital counselling and how important it is to base your marriage on the word and according to Godly principles and how the husband should operate as a provider, sustainer and protector. As well as the role of a wife, to be submissive. So before that, I never knew about premarital counselling and when I met him he showed me all the elements and the importance of premarital counselling. And I think that was the firm foundation and the structures and the biblical principles and criteria and characteristics on how you should build your marriage.”*

Male group:

Participant 9: *“One thing that pastor mentioned and he said this is what he teaches when he does pre-marital counselling... and it stood out for me is one of the things he said is if you’re not prepared to love your wife or forgive your wife for anything that she will do in the future... whatever it is, if you’re not prepared to forgive him or her then you’re not ready for marriage... then this thing is not for you because you must already now decide that whatever is going to happen in the marriage, whatever it is, you must be prepared to love her and forgive her and do anything for her despite what she has done, despite what you have done. So, I think it’s really important pre-marital... just to give you directive, to show you how to build, what to do, where to go... uhm, obviously there’s a big difference between theory and practical. So what you learn there in the pre-marital... your practical is going to be much harder than what you learn from someone’s mouth or experience because your own experience is going to tell a different story but the theory has prepared you for the practical...”*

It is apparent that the female group, compared to the male group, had better recollection of their experiences of receiving premarital counselling from the church. Even so, based on participants’ experiences, premarital counselling offered by the church focuses on several aspects of what can be expected of a marriage such as gender roles, family dynamics and how to navigate other possible challenges within marriage (i.e. raising kids, finances etc.). When it comes to marriage, gender roles are a controversial topic. Many professional counsellors involved in this research study expressed concern about this matter, thus I believe it warrants a

little more attention than other issues highlighted and explored in pastoral counselling. According to Taylor (1994), clear gender roles within marriage was widely accepted in the past, but with the women's liberation movement (encouraging social and financial independence) this previously held status quo was challenged causing marital instability. He not only viewed this movement as disruptive but also as a blessing, especially for females. Consequently, altering marriage from "a male subjugated bond to an equal cooperation between two autonomous people" (1961, p. 92, as cited in Bawa, 2017, p. 70). However, with this said, the problem with changing roles can lead to confusion in marriage, according to Collin (2007) therefore having a clear delineation of responsibility in the marriage is important to avoid gender role confusion and conflict (Mack, 2013). With premarital counselling, couples can explore these roles and decide on areas of duty (Bawa, 2017) by clearly stating their respective expectation within the marriage. Having stated this, focussing on topics that might assist couples to make an informed decision about getting married is very important as many marriages fail because people get married without understanding the implication of their new partnerships (Taylor, 1994) and therefore marriage preparation or premarital counselling seeks to help couples form strong bonds that will withstand future issues in their relationships (Collin, 1992).

5.3.2.2. Knowledge transfer: family advice given based on own experience

The few participants who mentioned that they received premarital advice from family, said that this advice was mostly general and this usually took place in an informal, relaxed environment. Female group:

Participant 2: *"We were mostly counselled by our family, so it was more general and they talked more general with us. At their house, in a restaurant and then they gave us tips. But the most important thing they taught us in our marriage was that we should respect each other. When someone makes a decision I need to know about it and when I make a decision he needs to know about it. What made our marriage work for 11 years is that I always knew what he was doing and he always knew what I was doing. So that made our marriage strong. And what he taught us and what was the most important thing was that we should each of our parents be treated equally. If I do not give my parent a present on her birthday and it's your parent's birthday and it's your parent's birthday next month, your parent should not get it either. So he taught us that we should respect each other's parents and if one gets the other should get one too because that can also bring great conflict into the marriage."*

Participant 10: *“I did not go for premarital counselling now because my husband and I should have gotten married because I was 7 months pregnant we got married. And we did not get married in a church, we got married in front of the magistrates' office. So I did not have counselling. But what I can say is that my mother-in-law took me in with open arms. And she, my mother-in-law, not my husband, taught me the values. She told me that my husband should respect me and she also talked to him and told him how to treat me with love because he came to take me out of my mother's house. She taught me how to be gentle and how to, because I was a little hard baked. Then she taught me we should never, as we will argue because a marriage is never just the good and not the bath, and then he said we should just never go to bed angry at each other and that we should make peace before we go to bed. And I did not grow up in a church. My parents were not with the Lord and they did not go to church either. But my husband they were new apostles and my mother-in-law was very valuable. She believed that there are certain morals and values you have to live by when you are married and also how to conduct yourself as a married woman.”*

Male group:

Participant 5: *“This year November I will be married for 21 years and I never had marriage counselling... not before or during our marriage. We have never really had major problems in our marriage that we needed counselling but my idea that I had of marriage life... I grew up with my grandparents and all the years I had that model of how my grandpa loved my grandma and that was my perception of marriage and I had nobody else as a role model. I didn't know my father really. My parents were married for a time but then they got divorced but my grandpa and grandma... they were married over 50 years and that to me was the major model. How humble my grandpa was regardless of how my grandma was sometimes and he was always just humble and loved her and that's something I practice. Since day one in my marriage... I just love my wife and if there is a problem, we talk it through. If something bothers me, she's free to talk to me about it and if something bothers me, I am free to talk to her about it and that's how we have worked through everything over the years so that's why I say we never really had major major arguments or problems because as soon as something comes up, we talk immediately about it.”*

Participant 4: *“My father-in-law always have these moments with me where we're either driving somewhere or he gets a chance to give me some advice. One day he said to me if you want a*

successful marriage, all you must do is just say yes wife... yes love, you're right. And I thought about this and thought to myself this guy is actually clever because he knows what he's saying"

As indicated by both male and female participants, the general advice provided was to love one another and about mutual respect for one another's respective families. This advice, for many of them, carried them through their marriage as some of them have been married for a very long time. The topics of love, mutual respect and consideration for each other's families (in-laws), are engrained in what premarital and marriage counselling teaches in counselling sessions (Street, 2014; Marbaniang, 2016; Bawa, 2017). Therefore, even though these participants did not receive formal counselling in any shape or form, they received sufficient advice from friends and family that catapulted them to build their marriage in the right direction.

5.3.2.3. *The lack of premarital counselling leads to self-teaching*

The participants (male and female) who had not received any form of counselling said that they had to figure things out themselves. This made their journey more difficult as some of them reflect on how different their marriage journey would have been had they received premarital counselling or in fact any type of counselling (i.e. professional, clergy, advice from family). This is in line with Collins' (1982) opinion that one of the key causes for Christian marriage instability is a lack of premarital counselling, and that when couples prepare properly before marriage, they have a better chance of succeeding (Musa, 2010). Despite the lack of premarital counselling, participants mainly relied on the word of God to guide them as they built their marriage. The older participants in the focus groups accounted for the majority of these:

Participant 6 (Female group): *"I never went for premarital counselling. We were at churches but none of the churches offered it. And we weren't really keen on going outside. So we basically decided to get married and we both were saved so we knew that God had to be in the relationship. And uhm, I think from the word go, from the day we got married, it was that we had to trust God in terms of...we made the decision that we are not going to build our relationship on how our mothers reared us or on the traditions and in terms of how our parents and their household were run. This is now our marriage and we and we need to do what works for us. Like little things, like what to eat. But in that, we had to come to a point where we now had to respect one another and that is also, where you said finances. And from the word go, I think I said I do and the next day it was like, he said, not my money, but our money. From the start. If I say something, he would say, we. And he constantly rectified me from that time in*

terms of how our finances work. How things are running. First, it was...I am headstrong because, don't tell me, I work (laughing). This can go for that then he would say, no our money comes home and we'll decide what we are going to do. That's not your money. And I think that he constantly repeated it and it became irritating. But like you say, you adapt to it and then you realise, no this is the pattern. And then biblically, you read the word and it says the man is the head of the house and so on and so on. I submit in certain areas but not in all areas. So for me, one day the Lord actually...I had to go on my knee at the couch and say I submit to him (husband) because I submitted in certain areas but in others I was more dominant like you say, because is still wanted to what I wanted to do. So for me it was like I didn't go to marriage counselling but I maybe had to learn a different way for adapting in marriage. He was strong, he is very, I say it and don't debate about it, that is what the word of the Lord says en klaar, get over it. So that was him. And I had to come to that point. So I didn't have marriage counselling but I had a strong husband that installed that principles so that we can move on and I am married 9 years and its successful 9 years. The lord has carried us."

Male group:

Participant 9: *"I'm a person that loves to learn and observe and I've never had counselling in the 6 years... marriage counselling... Once a guy asked me who taught me to play guitar and I told him I taught myself and he told me well you can't actually teach yourself, you must learn from someone else... maybe you've watched someone play and adapted from that. We can all say maybe we haven't received marriage counselling but we can definitely say that the environment and the people we surround ourselves with... I love to learn, I like to look at people's lifestyles and learn from them... as much as I didn't have a formal marriage counselling sessions... I have every Sunday or every time we come together as brothers and sisters... as we come together, I can see the lifestyles... I can learn from them."*

Participant 10: *"Yeah, marriage as they say is the only place you can compromise... you don't compromise any other way but you and your wife is the only partner you can compromise with... seeing that both of us come from different backgrounds and each has his own personality, we need to uhm... bear with one another that we're not the same and it's not easy at times and you need to respect your partner and where they come from and their personality as well and they say it's... sometimes you have to be the least... inaudible... that's why I said you need to compromise when it comes to that. To go sleep angry that's not an option... you need to solve the thing before you go lay down... it's very important uhm that you need to pass that on to the*

next generation and they need to see that and know this is the way forward uhm... they say we didn't fall in love when we met. That is a thing that we learn in the process as the years progress we have learned to love one another more and more and uhm... ja uhm.. marriage is a wonderful thing. Especially if you have God in the marriage as a foundation... any wind or trouble can come. If you have God as the rock of your marriage, then you're solid."

Both gender groups recognise that they had to work things out on their own as they progressed through their marriage. They also acknowledged that the church and God's word directed, guided and taught them about marriage and what it should be. This is in accord with what Powlison (2015) states that counselling is the church and therefore attending church gatherings constitute counselling sessions or teaching and learning opportunities. Furthermore, participants also reported that as being part of a church community, they observed and examined the lives of other married couples as a means of education and emulated the ones they thought were exceptional and exemplary. With this said, these participants displayed a commitment and desire to make their marriages work and up to this point have been resilient in their attempt to do so and they acknowledge that it was only possible because "*the Lord has carried us*" (Participant 6, female group) through everything.

5.3.3. Theme 3: Counselling guide: don't miss the mark

Married individuals mentioned a number of topics that they felt would be important points of discussion in counselling as a way to prepare for marriage or to overcome challenges in a marriage or offer as a guide. These topics emerged from the separate focus groups, male and female groups. Some of the topics they mentioned and suggested for premarital and marriage counselling overlapped. Topics indicated first were mentioned the most compared with others that were mentioned without explanation and discussed with quotes extracted from the focus groups. These topics are presented in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2 Topics to be included for premarital counselling and marriage counselling

	Suggested topics for discussion in counselling
Premarital counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finances • Parenting • Leadership roles • Trust and transparency • Sex and intimacy • Realistic expectations • Intimacy • Communication • Forgiveness <p style="text-align: right;">} Topics mentioned most</p>
Marriage counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage maintenance • Parenting • Trust and transparency • Communication • Gender roles • Problem resolution • Values of marriage (i.e. humility, trust, wisdom, peace and forgiveness) • Practical advice • Godly advice – skewed towards having received counselling from the church <p style="text-align: right;">} Topics mentioned most</p>

It is clear from Table 5.2 that there are similar issues that participants felt should be included in premarital and marriage counselling. However, it is also clear that there are specific topics that are specific to each counselling service respectively. Additionally, this table influenced the strategy that I developed as a means of helpfulness to counselling providers (refer to Chapter 6).

Table 5.2 shows the topics participants mentioned should be covered during premarital and marriage counselling. The ones that were referenced the most are discussed in further depth below:

For both premarital and marriage counselling:

Parenting

Participant 2 (Female group): *“I mean, I am young still, but before there was no children and now there are kids and now you come before a whole host of challenges. So how and what are we doing to support one another. Because sometimes it can become difficult, cause is the husband supportive. Must the wife do everything? So we need to come to a point of, you know, compromise. When it comes to discipline, who is the disciplinarian. Where do we draw the lines? Parenting and planning thereof and time management. Who are going to perform specific roles when it comes to certain things? So I think parenting is also one big thing in the marriage to discuss and to give focus on”.*

Participant 5 (Female group) added *“I don’t have kids yet but when me and my husband talk about kids, we already disagree on disciplining cause we have lots of nieces and nephews. And we already disagreeing now on the way the two of us handle and discipline other people’s children. So how much worse is it going to be when we going to have our own children. Also, I think it is a good thing before you go into it, to know what to expect.”*

Participant 5 (Male group): *“It can help with raising children because you both have perceptions of how you want to raise your children and how you were raised so I think the premarital counselling can give you info about that and this is the way forward...this is how you deal with this and that, different obstacles you’re going to get. I think that is the info I would have liked to get... that would’ve helped me a lot because it was big learning curve for me... to learn all those things... when the child comes... when there are no children it’s still ok. It’s like you’re still dating but when the children come the responsibilities become big and the financial problems come up because it’s extra expenses so I think pre-marital counselling would have helped a lot...”*

Participant 8 (Female group): *“And also the children's discipline if there are children or if there are no yet children, how many children we are going to have. Who is going to be in advance of when a child needs it and who is going to discipline the children? Because sometimes it is referred to the mother and the mother has to discipline the children. But in my opinion, both parents should discipline the children.”*

Raising children does not come with a manual, and many participants believe that receiving premarital counselling on a range of topics, such as how to discipline them, who should be the disciplinarian, and the additional financial burden that comes with having children, can and may help as a guide to overcome unanticipated challenges and serve as a manual in order to raise children properly. According to Pinquart and Teubert (2010), the birth of a child signals a major transition in the lives of parents. Therefore, receiving premarital and marriage counselling on parenting is very important. It facilitates a discussion for partners to come to an agreement and plan on how to raise their children, who is responsible for what and so on. As a result, receiving parental skills and coping with stressors through counselling can benefit parents in the long run.

Trust and transparency

Participant 1 (Male group): *“I would like marriage counselling to focus more on the trust in the relationship. Uhm... trust is very important because it gives one another that freedom in the sense of understanding how in the marriage...”*

Participant 7 (male group) added, *“For me around trust, if we look at marriages... the one partner must be able to trust the other. Trust is very important because when the one goes somewhere, there mustn't be a question of where were you... you must be free to go. That's how a marriage is... because if there comes questions of what did you do there...”*

Participant 7 (Female group): *“It is important to let your husband know exactly what you are doing. At the end of the day he is not scared when he gets to the bank and there is zero rand zero cents (all laughing). Now, for example, I bought my mother a big present and when his mother came I said 'no we can do it. If the baseline is established in terms of what responsibilities we have, what are we going to do and what can we not do. So I think transparency from his side, the husband's side and the wife's side is vitally important. Even with the discipline of children. In every aspect there must be transparency even with finance. Because I do not want a dodgy husband and having to wonder 'ooh he has the bank card, what is he going to do again?'. Or he arrives with lavish gifts at home for me but there are other core responsibilities that needs attention, so I want to know exactly where he is and what he does. Not that I want to put a radar system on him but that transparency is always there.”*

Trust and transparency seem to be in unison for participants. You cannot have trust if you do not have transparency and vice versa. Trust is to rely on the truthfulness or accuracy of or to place confidence in someone, whereas, transparency can be defined as the property of being able to see through something or someone's actions, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.). These definitions outline exactly what is expected of husband and wife within all aspects of their marriage. Having transparency assists in ruling out many issues and challenges faced by couples and enforces trust. As a result, the participants recognise the importance and application of these concepts. They highlight the importance of being trustworthy and transparent within the relationship as this will help with various aspects of the relationship where there are not any 'surprises' to deal with along the way. Also, trust and transparency are viewed by participants as crucial because they allow the couple to see that they are on the same page, and if not, how they could tackle whatever it is they are not seeing eye to eye on.

For premarital counselling

Finances

Participant 8 (Female group): *"I would say the first thing that should be on the agenda is to focus on finances. Especially in the case when the husband or wife has lost their job or they quit their job for whatever reason. Because finances are what many families can crack and many families can go through it, but then again there are certain ones like the donor and the one who knows how to work with the money. Sometimes the husband is too gentle for his wife and out of respect for his wife he does not go for his wife's look here but you have now gone over the boundaries'. So that thing should be like first on the agenda."*

Participant 5 (Male group): *"The financial part of the marriage. That is one thing I experienced in the beginning... it was a tough thing... we both work and we're both used to work with our money in our own way and now we come together and these 2 different minds must do one thing going forward and I think that is one of the major things premarital counselling can help."*

Before they get married, many couples have their own jobs and handle their own finances. Finances and financial management, therefore, becomes an important aspect to take into consideration when two become one and therefore equal. As mentioned by participants, financial management in terms of spending and saving or the lack of funds can break a marriage. According to Pahl (1995), Vogler (1998), Vogler, Carolyn, Brockmann, Michaela, Wiggins and Richard (2006), as cited in Coelho and Ferreira-Valente (2016), when it comes to finances

“gender inequality tends to be less pronounced in couples jointly managing pooled money and particularly pronounced when the man assumes full control of it” (p.23). To circumvent the latter, discussing finances, according to Bawa (2017), can develop a sense of trust and transparency between the couple.

Leadership roles

Participant 6 (Female group): *“I would say uhm I would expect uhm the focus on the leadership role in the house. Sometimes you have two parties that is both domineering, both strong characteristics and sometimes you think, like you say finances (referring to one of the participants), ‘I earn more than you’ make the under leading role as the woman maybe in the family that you take the leading role. But I would say that its that where you set the boundaries is that the man stays the head of the house, irrespective of what the financial status is or what the status is. That is your leading role and that is the boundary level for that leadership. Because if you have a strong leadership in your house then everything will fall into place. That is my understanding. And all the other things like your finances and stuff will fall into place because you will be able to iron it out because you know that that is the leadership in the house. That is the head and I know how to submit and I know how to...because I respect him as the leader. And in society, currently, we have a lot of where female, and I speak of myself as well, I also come out of a working industry and you earn and you are being mentored as being individualistic and you are your own person so ‘a man won’t tell me what to do’ that type of attitude is being displayed in society today. Which means that you are not going to respect your husband as the head (participants agreeing with what she is saying) so I think for me that is the core thing that must come out of premarital and marriage counselling is your leadership role within the marriage.”*

Given the above, it is apparent that the leadership role within a marital structure must be clarified. It is highlighted that men are often seen as the head of the household and that if this is true, respect should be provided to them regardless of their financial situation or rank. Furthermore, when the leadership role is assigned, it is respected, and it is assumed that everything will fall into place within the household. With this said, it is evident that the position of the leader provides protection and safety to the wife and ultimately the family as a whole, regardless of the presence or absence of financial stability.

Sex and intimacy

Participant 7 (Female group): *“If there is no intimacy, it can become only sex. Like for example, he wants to come to you if he does not feel so good or wants to talk to you when you and him are going through something. Therefore, transparency and intimacy goes hand in hand. Because if there is no intimacy, sometimes he does not seek sex, he just wants to sit and talk or talk to you like 'look here, this is bothering me. What do you think we are going to do and so on. And if there is no intimacy, he is not going to look for sex out there but for intimacy look outside“.* Additionally,

Participant 9 (Female group): *“It is important, to have sex as a discussion point in premarital counselling. Especially because a woman must be prepared for these things. Sometimes a woman is not always available or you do not feel in the mood at that particular moment. Your mood just is not there. And getting premarital counselling for that I think is very good.”*

Sex, according to participants, is dependent on intimacy and intimacy and transparency go hand in hand. Therefore, having intimacy coupled with transparency in the marriage fosters sex which is viewed as the outpouring of closeness. Making this clear and teaching on this in premarital counselling is an important point of discussion for participants as not many couples are aware of this. According to Bawa (2017) “discussions about sex with the intending couple must also relate to how they should relate to each other sexually after marriage, especially where there will be a need for adjustment due to individual differences between the husband and the wife in terms of sexual urges, to minimize conflict in the marital relationship” (p. 59).

Realistic expectation

Participant 5 (Female group): *“Expectation of each other and also once we married, what would our expectation be. I think we can have an unfair expectation of our relationship. If we had to say 5 years from now, where are we going to be and we look at other couples that have been married 5 years and where they are, we can't have that unfair expectation of our marriage and the pressure from outside and bring it in and have that pressure on our marriage.”*

Discussing realistic expectations is very important in order to rule out any type of previously flawed preconceived ideas and beliefs of gender roles, for participants. This should be a topic of discussion in premarital counselling sessions to avoid any misunderstandings and to give couples clarity and direction in communicating realistic expectations and possible expectations

that could harm the relationship and possibly the marriage. Therefore, having realistic relationship expectations is viewed as a strong predictor of marital success and therefore should be a focus in premarital education and counselling, according to Larsen and Olson (1989).

For marriage counselling:

Marriage maintenance

Participant 5 (Female group): *“I think, maybe if we had to go for marriage counselling now, it wouldn’t be, we don’t have any big problems or something, but maybe just like maintenance like a refresher - Maybe just reiterating like what you heard in your premarital counselling or how is things going now. We spoke 5 years last, where would you guys want to be in 5 years. Things like that. Things like goals.”*

Participants realise that marriage counselling is not only to “fix” a broken relationship but is also there to assist in maintaining a healthy one. Not many people understand marriage counselling to be useful for the latter due to preconceived ideas of what marriage counselling is and what it offers.

5.3.4. Theme 4: Improve premarital and marriage counselling: “I didn’t learn it from a book”

Participants had a few suggestions on how premarital and marriage counselling can be improved. One of the main suggestions was that counselling providers need to provide practical, real-life examples of specific scenarios that are “relevant and relatable”. Sometimes couples feel that they are going through challenges alone and that there aren’t other couples that deal with the exact same issue and hence the relevant and relatable examples. One of the participants in the female group said, *“I think they need to build true-life examples and for the people’s, like scenarios, they need to create and say, ok, so say you’re coming into such a scenario now, what do you think’s going to be the solution. Such type of stuff. So people can see the examples and see what solution will arise”* (Participant 5). In addition, as mentioned above, the topics to be included in premarital and marriage counselling form part of this theme.

Another significant expectation that participants felt could be helpful in premarital and marriage counselling was that it would help if counsellors had first-hand experience of marriage. As indicated by Participant 5 below:

Participant 5 (Male group): *“I think the person must at least have some experience of marriage themselves... to be able to give me an idea... because marriage isn’t written in a book. It’s life... it’s something you need to live out... so in the first place, that person must help us to live it out and not just sit with a book. So that would be my perception if I went... this person must at least be able to tell em this is how the marriage works and why do you say so, because I went through it... I didn’t learn it from a book...”*



Having the experience of marriage was seen to offer an added legitimacy to what a counsellor could bring to the counselling relationship. It is believed by the participants that it would show that counsellors do not only rely on theory (what they learnt from a book) but that they have an understanding of what it is like to be married. This is a complex assertion that might limit who can and cannot be a counsellor if such a pre-requisite should be put in place. However, it is critical to note what participants expect and hope for in counselling relationships.

5.4. WORKSHOP FINDINGS

The workshop which consisted of the combined genders, males and females were conducted in order to see whether new information on the research topic would emerge. The workshop was originally planned to be a discussion, but after doing the respective focus groups and seeing how tired the participants were, I felt that the activity would be more appropriate for married individuals. The activity was primarily focused on topic suggestions and recommendations that participants felt would be impactful and helpful for premarital and marriage counselling, which speaks directly to and informs the research study’s final objective, as stated above.

Participants classified certain topics of discussion that they thought were best suited for premarital versus marriage counselling, according to the findings. The latter was mostly focused on what the participants would find most useful in retrospect and in general. An overview is highlighted in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 An overview of premarital and marriage counselling topics

	Suggested topics for discussion in counselling
Premarital counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realistic expectation (i.e. gender roles) • Finances • <i>Values of marriage</i> (i.e. forgiveness, trust, transparency, respect, compromise, honesty, commitment, patience, commitment, accountability) • Parenting • <i>Challenges of joining two backgrounds (i.e. oneness) (Some)</i> • <i>Practical and real-life examples/scenarios (“make it relevant and relatable”) (Some)</i> • Intimacy (Few) <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 10px;">  <p>Majority mentioned across the board</p> </div>
Marriage counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Intimacy • <i>Values of marriage</i> (i.e. transparency, loyalty, compromise, respect, consideration, patience, adaptability) • Parenting (Some) • <i>Finances (Some)</i> • <i>Practical and real-life examples/scenarios (Few)</i> • <i>In-laws resolutions (Limited (Ltd) mention)</i> • <i>Marriage maintenance (Ltd mention)</i> • <i>Planning the future (Ltd mention)</i> • <i>Coping with life stressors (Ltd mention)</i> • <i>Restoring trust (Ltd mention)</i> • <i>Meaning of covenant (Ltd mention)</i> <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 10px;">  <p>Majority mentioned across the board</p> </div>

Many of the findings from the focus groups were echoed in the workshop findings, as seen in Table 5.3. The topics that were not mentioned in the focus groups but were stated in the workshop were identified as supplementary information that would not have been acquired otherwise. They are highlighted in italics in the Table 5.3.

As a result, having insight into the expectations of premarital and marriage counselling from married individuals may be beneficial to counselling providers in aiding couples in the best way possible.

5.5. CONCLUSION

From the findings presented above, the married individuals perceived premarital and marriage counselling to be mainly positive. Positive in the sense that it is helpful and can be effective when provided and utilised correctly. Overall, participant data also suggest that for premarital counselling, preparing for marriage is the main aim and for marriage counselling, navigating difficult and complex issues is the main focus. The majority of married individuals received premarital and marriage counselling from the church which they find beneficial and useful. However, they made some suggestions to improve counselling by making it more relatable and relevant. Furthermore, many suggestions were provided on how to improve premarital and marriage counselling, which was given more attention when the strategy that can be useful in enhancing counselling providers' helpfulness in premarital counselling was developed (refer to Chapter Six). In the next chapter, the considerations of the theoretical framework that informed the research study are discussed in relation to the findings as well as the literature concurring with or contradicting these findings.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study was to explore and understand counselling providers and married individuals' perceptions of marriage and premarital counselling and its usefulness and to develop a strategy that could be helpful to counselling providers. This was done by making use of a qualitative approach, methodology and design (see Chapter Three). The study findings derived by analysing the research data were described and discussed in the prior chapters; Chapters Four and Five. In consideration of these chapters, this discussion chapter is where I elucidate the meaning, significance, and applicability of the findings. Additionally, I discuss what I discovered in the data analysis, demonstrating how it pertains to the literature review and research objectives, and building a case for the ultimate conclusion (McCombes, 2020). Kretchmer (n.d.) concurs with McCombes (2020) but explains it a little differently by saying that "the purpose of the discussion chapter is to interpret and describe the significance of your findings in light of what was already known about the research problem being investigated, and to explain any new understanding or fresh insights about the problem after you've taken the findings into consideration" (Introduction section, para. 1). Even though neither of these authors emphasises the importance of the theoretical framework, it is an important part of the discussion chapter as it is utilised as a guide/lens for the research study and is examined in relation to the research findings and literature review. The chapter, therefore, discusses the results in an integrated manner in order to derive a possible strategy that could be put in place to enhance counselling providers' helpfulness in premarital and marriage counselling. With this said, the following overarching themes were derived in order to guide the discussion.

6.2. POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF PREMARITAL AND MARRIAGE COUNSELLING: "A LIGHT, BLUEPRINT AND CATALYST"

The study found that both counselling providers and married individuals' perceptions of premarital and marriage counselling were mainly positive. They perceived it to be helpful, beneficial and effective, especially if both parties are committed to the process and/or counselling programme. For marriage counsellors, premarital counselling is a torch that lights the way towards marriage. Whereas for married individuals, premarital counselling is described as providing a blueprint for where one (the couple) needs to go. The latter could be due to the

Christian orientation of the married individual, as they see the bible as providing a blueprint for marriage. Both themes, however, speak to the purpose and function of premarital counselling. This shows that premarital counselling functions as and can be viewed as a marriage preparation education or training approach, according to Stelzer (2010) as well as an educational, therapeutic and preventative approach (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, Markman & Johnson, 2009) that is intended specifically for individuals or couples that are intending or preparing to marry (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997a). Premarital counselling offers the potential couples the privilege of understanding the demands of marriage and marital life so that they can prepare for such ahead of time (Stahmann, 2000). Okolo (2002) states that:

the premarital type of counselling is advantageous and necessary for family life because it prepares the minds of the couples in readiness for the challenges that come with marital life. It as well helps them to know ahead of time and how to handle or cope with such challenges in case they occur. This, thus makes it possible and easy for certain marital problems to be prevented or adequately tackled when they eventually occur, a situation which may not be possible if the couples were not adequately informed ahead of time, through premarital counselling (p. 54).

The literature seems to be consistent with the counselling providers' and married individuals' perceptions of what premarital counselling is and what it offers. Counselling providers said that "*couples want to feel equipped and want to make a success of their marriage*" (Participant 6) and that premarital counselling "*prepares you for the expectations of marriage*" (Participant 2 and 3). This quote concurs with quotes from the married individuals stating that "*you will get well prepared...*" (Participant 4, male group) and that "*premarital counselling gives you directive to show you how to build, what to do, where to go...*" (Participant 9, male group). As a result, both counselling providers and married individuals view premarital counselling as the best way to prepare for marriage, especially because getting married is a big decision and transition from "single" life to married life. Therefore, offering couples the necessary skills to navigate possible current and future relationship adversities and to attain a happy and fulfilling relationship and marriage in order to avoid or circumvent possible decisions to divorce, premarital education or training is needed. As a result, premarital counselling provides not only light to the couple's current relationship situation as well as a light on future relationship situations that would otherwise be dark or unconsidered by couples but also a blueprint to what needs to be done and learned during the process. Premarital counselling can, therefore, then be

viewed as a somewhat trajectory prediction tool of relationship satisfaction for couples for marriage.

The perceptions of marriage counselling, for both counselling providers and married individuals, are also similar. Both groups perceive marriage counselling to be meaningful, helpful and an important tool for couples. Counselling providers describe marriage counselling as a catalyst for promoting successful marriages, while married individuals explain it as only beneficial to couples. Both themes speak to the benefits of marriage counselling. In line with the findings, the literature highlights that marriage counselling, according to Hart (1999) is an activity intended to help people establish and sustain positive relationships with their partners. It is the sort of counselling that deals essentially with plans and problems associated with the couple's relationship (Skidmore & Thackeray, 1982). Likewise, marriage counselling attempts to immunise couples against disappointment and despair and tries to prevent the development of problems that are costly to children and all of society (Mark, 2004). It is apparent that marriage counselling plays a big role in facilitating a happy and satisfying marriage by making sure that the partners have the skills to deal with the problems within the marriage in order to create an environment that is conducive for bringing up physically, socially, emotionally and mentally healthy children. This can only be done if the two parties within the marriage are committed to one another, their marriage and their children. Literature reveals that a healthy marriage or family structure is an important part of society as family affects the way society is formed, organised and functions, according to Belsey (2005). It is through the family that each generation is replaced with the next one, making the marriage/family structure crucial to the contribution to a healthy society. This demonstrates how far the impact and benefits of marriage counselling may extend, demonstrating that it is more than merely a counselling session with a married couple, but also a tool for assisting the marriage to be healthy and happy, as well as ultimately resulting in a healthy society as a whole. As a result, marriage counselling is perceived as a catalyst for promoting successful marriages and offering many benefits is a very important tool to have on offer to couples due to its far-reaching implications.

Both counselling providers and married individuals appear to hold similar views on premarital and marriage counselling, finding both forms of counselling to be useful, beneficial, and a terrific tool for couples to employ. The findings appear to be consistent with what has been published in literature. With this said, couples seek counselling in order to find a resolve for challenges they face. This is discussed in further depth in the following section.

6.3. COUNSELLING AS A RESOLVE

The study's findings show that the reason couples seek counselling is different for premarital and marriage counselling respectively. However, regardless of the respective reasons, the common reason for both is in order to find resolve for possible challenges that they are faced with and get to a happy place in their relationship. According to literature, counselling seeks to help people gain understanding and insight into the nature of the problems and the causes and factors that cause them (Harper, 1961). This is in line with why couples attend counselling. The findings demonstrate that many couples face a myriad of challenges in their relationships, and many need to know and understand the reasons for these challenges and how to overcome them. For counselling providers, couples seek marriage counselling to overcome and find solutions to their issues in order to get to a happy place in their relationship while, for premarital counselling, their need is two-fold. Firstly, they want to understand and learn how to create and maintain a meaningful relationship, and secondly, they want to find solutions to the problems they are faced with in their relationship before entering into marriage. With this said, counselling is therefore mainly about working through problems in relationships, providing couples with the necessary training and problem-solving skills to effectively deal with and overcome current and future issues as also highlighted by Sekudu (2015). As a result, counselling could be considered as an avenue or platform for resolve.

Based on the findings, it is apparent that counselling is pertinent and can contribute towards sustaining relationships and marriages. It is, therefore, crucial to zoom in on the type of counselling that is provided and seek ways to ensure that the counselling provided is relevant, addresses the couples' needs, and takes seriously the contexts wherein couples are from. Many existing counselling programmes put emphasis on the need to educate couples on communication skills, as evidenced by the study findings. To this end, it is critical to ensure that communication is highlighted as the core of couples' counselling and in addition, practical ways could be sought to find various ways in which communication skills could be taught/centred within counselling sessions.

6.4. THE USEFULNESS OF COUNSELLING: FORMAL VERSUS INFORMAL

Counselling is generally perceived to be useful by all the participants, as per the above. Both premarital and marriage counselling has their respective purpose, function and benefits, with a common goal to assist couples in building and maintaining a happy and rewarding relationship.

The study discovered that the participants' views on the usefulness of counselling differed depending on the type of counselling offered, formal and informal. Formal counselling is provided by a professional counsellor/therapist whereas informal counselling is provided by informal or non-professional sources/help such as clergy, family and friends. Findings indicate that counselling providers found formal counselling more useful than informal counselling due to its tertiary origin. While married individuals do not dispute the usefulness of formal counselling, they also did not deny the helpfulness of informal counselling. In fact, according to the findings, they prefer informal counselling, particularly from clergy, to formal counselling. The married individuals' preference of informal counselling could stem from their religious orientation and maybe the fact that it is free. Nonetheless, they believe that formal counselling would be more effective for mental health issues, however, not limited to this, than premarital and marriage counselling.

The findings highlight the fact that counselling providers were very clear about having a sceptical view of counselling offered by the church, particularly premarital counselling rather than marriage counselling. They are of the view that couples are more inclined to attend premarital counselling at church instead of attending formal counselling with a professional counsellor. A quote from Participant 1 states that "*premarital counselling is mostly offered at the church...pastoral care preferred for premarital counselling due to religious background in South Africa*". The reason for this might be because the literature shows that premarital counselling more than marriage counselling was mostly performed by the church in the early years. While the church has had a long history of meeting with couples before their wedding, it is only in the last thirty years that the focus of these meetings has changed from counselling about the nature and meaning of the marriage rite itself towards counselling aimed at preparing couples for marriage (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). This trend means that even before premarital counselling had its term allocated to it, the church already identified the need for marriage preparation, even if the nature of the marriage preparation was different to what it is now, as formal counselling programmes have grown from the 1970s to present day (Carol, 2003). It could then be that over generations, that without verbally communicating that premarital counselling was attended through the church, it was an observation and action that took place and therefore, to this day, people still, without even knowing why they prefer premarital counselling through the church, still opt to receive this service from the church or by clergy.

Despite the fact that premarital counselling originated in the church, counselling providers find their counselling approach one-sided and mainly biblically orientated and consequently, problematic. Since a few counselling providers started off as preachers providing counselling, their subjective view is that this type of counselling is limited and does not necessarily consider the person within a relationship or marriage as a complex being with nuanced approaches to problem-solving, but that clergy offer a set-in stone blueprint from which couples should operate, making it inflexible. Therefore, clergy are not able to help couples in the best way that they can, according to counselling providers. They suggest that clergy seek further training, professional training, in order to be more well-rounded and efficient in offering counselling to couples and becoming more competent in their approach to adequately address the issues that couples might face. Nyandoro (2010) states that clergy feel incompetent in providing counselling and express their need for further training and skills development, concurring with the view of the counselling providers.

On the contrary, married individuals acknowledged that they do not consider professional counselling to be the only form of counselling that is used to help and benefit couples. However, they consider informal counselling also as a means of education and form of guidance and prefer this type of counselling more than receiving professional counselling. This might be true due to the fact that married individuals are of the Christian faith, in addition to their positive experiences of receiving counselling from the church. Furthermore, the findings derived from the study, also show that they consider the church or counselling from clergy to provide a firm foundation of biblical principles, criteria and characteristics for marriage, in addition to also recognising that counselling can come from family and therefore, knowledge transferred based on experience and that the lack of counselling, especially premarital counselling can lead to self-teaching.

The majority of married individuals received counselling from the church. Therefore, these individuals found clergy counselling it to be beneficial, especially because they opined that in order to build a strong and healthy relationship or marriage, couples need to understand and implement the biblical principles as well as the criteria and characteristics of a marriage. This, according to them, can only be done via the Bible and teachings from the church. The Word of God becomes the foundation for counselling the participants, and the pastor/clergy serve as the counsellors to bring forth the Word's instructions. As a result, couples approach the church to

teach them how to strengthen their marriage by following the instructions and guidance of the Bible and its principles.

Furthermore, based on the experience of counselling through the church, participants recollected several focuses on topics that the counselling sessions covered. These include gender roles, family dynamics and how to navigate potential adversities within the marriage. As mentioned in Chapter Five, counselling providers had a specific problem with how gender roles are emphasised and socialised by clergy. This was one of the issues that made them critical about counselling offered by the church and therefore, they considered this type of counselling to be one-sided, recommending that clergy should seek training in a more professional sense. This is consistent with the literature and is supported by what Wayne Oates (1989, as cited in Nyandoro, 2010, p. 1) said about clergy, highlighting the need for clergy to be fully trained as counsellors. Oates opines that “pastors do not have the privilege of deciding whether to counsel with people. The choice is not between counselling and not counselling but counselling in a disciplined and skilled way...” (p. iv).

Furthermore, pastors must have excellent counselling abilities, according to Oates, because they must counsel for the rest of their lives as pastors. (Nyandoro, 2010). Additionally, based on Nyandoro’s (2010) study conducted in the assessment of the counselling skills gauged among the Catholic clergy in the Masvingo Diocese in Zimbabwe, clergy had pastoral counselling skills but no theoretical base in secular and scientific skills that were needed to blend with pastoral skills. It could then be said that counselling providers are of the view that if clergy can then upskill themselves with the necessary professional theoretical and practical counselling skills training, that their scepticism could dissipate and a deeper trust in the effectiveness of clergy counselling could be restored as well as their trust in the competency of the counselling offered to help couples.

From the discussion above, it is clear that both counselling providers and married individuals agree that premarital and marriage counselling is helpful to couples who are interested in attending. However, it is apparent that counselling providers perceive professional counselling as the best form of counselling. This is clear from their scepticism of counselling offered by the church. While, married individuals, on the contrary, firstly, find all forms of counselling useful regardless of its orientation and secondly, they expressed that even though the latter is true, they prefer counselling from the church instead of professional counselling. Their preference for

informal counselling could be due to their religious orientation and/or their unconscious observation and modelling of receiving counselling from the church as discussed above or maybe because it is a free of charge service. But besides this, the only reason they expressed they would consider a professional counsellor is mainly for mental health reasons and resolution.

6.5. EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNSELLING: A SUBJECTIVE UNQUANTIFIABLE CONCEPT

Even though it has been stated that premarital and marriage counselling are regarded to be useful to couples, the effectiveness of counselling was also important to gauge. Assessment of the effectiveness was more formally posed to counselling providers during interviews and properly analysed, while this question was not explicitly presented to married individuals. However, married individuals discussed how premarital and marriage counselling could be improved in order to be more effective and impactful. Therefore, speaking directly to this point. With this said, the views of the counselling providers on the effectiveness of premarital and marriage counselling are discussed first, followed by the suggestions made by the married individuals.

At first glance, determining the effectiveness of counselling appeared to be a difficult task for counsellors. However, many were able to identify that effectiveness is based on the commitment that couples have towards each other and the counselling programme and process. Whereas, some counselling providers found the effectiveness of premarital and marriage counselling to be ineffective due to the high and rising divorce rates, especially for formal counselling (counselling provided by professional counsellors) versus the lack of training contributed to the ineffectiveness of informal counselling (counselling provided by clergy, family and friends). Additionally, counselling providers also acknowledge that higher education training is mostly focused on providing theoretical knowledge and does not provide adequate practical training. Therefore, even professional counsellors lack sufficient training. Hence, they acknowledged that providing training for both formal and informal counsellors would assist in the effectiveness of counselling and circumvent the decision to divorce.

The first results that speak to the commitment of two people contributing to the effectiveness of counselling, is in line with the literature. Studies by Parish (1992) and Stucky, Eggeman,

Eggeman, Moxley and Schumm (2008) which focussed on gauging perceptions of the effectiveness of premarital counselling specifically found that couples perceived effectiveness of premarital counselling was related to the duration of counselling hours, therefore, active participation in the process. Therefore, when couples are committed to each other and the process or counselling programmes, the effectiveness of counselling is clear. Contrary to this, it could then be assumed that when couples participate in counselling, regardless of which type of counselling, that if they are not committed to each other and the process, the effectiveness of the counselling process and the programme is affected and/or compromised.

Besides the effectiveness being determined by the commitment of couples, some participants found the effectiveness of premarital and marriage counselling to vary. Some viewed counselling to be ineffective based on the high and rising divorce rates (mostly skewed towards formal counselling) and counselling to be ineffective due to the lack of training among clergy/church (skewed towards informal counselling). However, as mentioned before, participants acknowledged that providing training would assist in the effectiveness of counselling altogether and circumvent the decision to divorce. The former point seems to be a critical finding. This is because counselling programmes were not developed due to the rise in divorce but to help couples improve their relationship/marriage or sustain a happy and healthy relationship/marriage in order to try and prevent divorce. The latter part finding is consistent with the literature. The literature shows that lack of training for clergy affects the quality of counselling because “many leaders of religion are willing to take on a psychological counselling role. However, the majority of them are not as adequately equipped to deal with the diverse issues brought by their clients in the counselling session. This is because leaders lack professional training and competencies” (Wango, 2010, p. 1). As a result, this makes counselling ineffective. In accordance with this, Participant 4 stated that *“I know they offer counselling in churches but not by trained therapists. It’s normally the pastors that do it”*. Participants mentioned that in order to rectify this, training is needed and literature shows that “training programmes in theology have a more formal design with emphasis on philosophy/psychiatry and theological foundations now” (Wango, 2010, p. v) but would be even more effective if these programmes included “psychotherapeutic approaches (counselling theories), counselling skills and techniques as well as professional ethics” (Wango, 2010, p. v).

As previously stated, married individuals were not asked how effective they believe premarital and marriage counselling is, but rather what improvements or suggestions they would make for

counselling to be more impactful and in this sense, effective. They made two specific recommendations. Firstly, they recommended that counsellors during the counselling sessions, provide practical, real-life examples/scenarios that are relevant and relatable to couples. And secondly, that counsellors need to have first-hand experience of marriage or more broadly relationships. This, they believe, gives the counsellor a subjective and relatable experience of what couples may go through, allowing them to provide couples with advice that is not only theoretical but also subjective and relatable, making it more impactful and effective. They perceive these two points to be specifically lacking in counselling sessions, or perhaps in their counselling experience. With this said, the first suggestion is something that could easily be added to what counsellors are currently doing, but the second one could pose a challenge for counsellors, especially because counsellors do not usually talk about their personal lives to a client in which they deal with in a professional capacity.

Based on the discussion, the reasons for the ineffectiveness of counselling are highlighted. However, a few factors were indicated that could possibly make premarital and marriage counselling more effective. Firstly, the training and upskilling of professional and non-professional counsellors. When counsellors receive the necessary training and upskilling, they will possibly be able to provide the type of counselling that will best meet the needs of the couples, potentially making their counselling more effective and impactful with the hope that it would result in a stronger bond and happier relationship for couples. Secondly, the couples' involvement and dedication to each other and the counselling process are required, and thirdly, the couples and counsellors shared that commitment to the counselling process is essential. With this said, the factors mentioned that could possibly contribute to the effectiveness of counselling are still very subjective and immeasurable in nature. What makes this immeasurable is the level of training and upskilling could differ for counsellors. The commitment of couples to each other and the process is subjective as well as the commitment of both the couples and the counsellors to each other and the process. Consequently, it shows that the effectiveness of counselling is a difficult concept to measure.

6.6. A HELPFUL STRATEGY FOR COUNSELLING PROVIDERS

The intention of this study was to develop a strategy for premarital and marriage counselling that could be helpful to counselling providers. Therefore, questions were posed to participants that would provoke topics that they perceived to be important and relevant for premarital and

marriage counselling respectively. More topics were identified by married individuals compared to counselling providers, merely because there was more focus given on this topic with married individuals. The reason for this is because the end goal was to develop a strategy for counselling providers and for that reason it was important to know what the married individuals thought in order for the counselling providers to gain a glimpse into the topic expectations of married individuals.

The first set of topics to be covered in marriage and premarital counselling was gained during the separate male and female focus groups. Topic suggestions were again gauged in the mixed-gender workshop to see if new ones would arise, which did. For this strategy, I will combine the results from the focus groups and the workshop and offer one inclusive strategy for counselling providers. See strategy below in Figure 6.1:

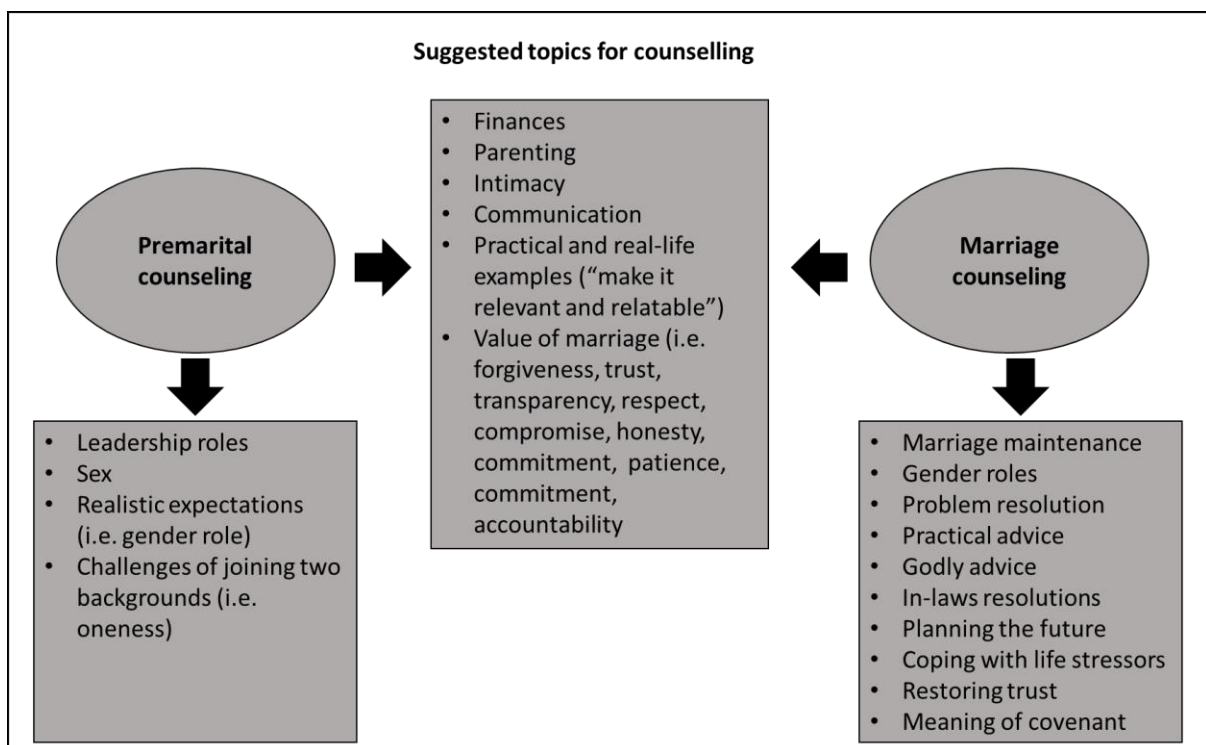


Figure 6.1 A strategy to enhance counselling providers’ helpfulness in premarital and marriage counselling

Additional information that also emerged from the theme improves premarital and marriage counselling: “I did not learn it from a book”, is important to consider in conjunction with the strategy. This speaks about the expectation of married individuals as they felt that the

counselling providers should have first-hand experience of marriage. This might not be possible, but it is valuable for counselling providers to know the expectations and to be able to manage them.

The strategy was developed to be utilised by any type of counsellor, lay or professional, it is important to note that counselling providers, in this research study, make use of a number of counselling approaches or modalities, as discussed in Chapter Four. In their practice of providing premarital and marriage counselling, the majority of counselling providers make use of the same approach or technique to tackle the issues confronting couples. With marriage counselling being more complex than premarital counselling, according to the interviewed counselling providers, the technique utilised is adapted accordingly. This seems to work for many counselling providers and therefore, the majority of them regard their technique as useful and helpful to couples. However, there were a few participants that stated that they would change or modify their technique if a more effective approach were available. The counselling providers experience as discussed above could be true for counsellors practising informal or formal counselling in general. Therefore, the strategy developed is intended to provide a scope of important topics to be covered in premarital and marriage counselling, from the perspective of married individuals. It is not designed to replace current approaches or techniques utilised by counselling providers offering informal or formal counselling, but rather add richness to what they already know and do. The hope is for all types of counselling providers to consider the strategy as a helpful tool.

The next section discusses the theoretical framework and how some key findings tie in with it.

6.7. CONTEXTUALISING SOCIAL ROLE THEORY

For this research study, the social role theory was utilised as a lens. This theory was viewed as most suited as it assists in offering a way for us to understand societal role assignments and how these play a role in expectations society has for different genders. Within marriage, particularly, roles are usually ascribed depending on gender. Gender roles, as discussed by Eagly and Wood (2012), are an important part of every society's cultural and social structure. Because gender roles are shared expectations that apply to individuals based on their socially influenced sex (Eagly et al., 2000), people believe that others are likely to react more approvingly to behaviour that is in line with these roles. People's concept of themselves appears

to have gender-stereotypical content because people accept gender roles as personal gender identities (Bam, 1974; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). People fulfil gender roles by taking on various social responsibilities such as mother or father, wife or spouse, employer or employee, and so on. The focus of this study, for example, was on the marital relationship. Through socialisation, men and women can develop "appropriate" personality traits and talents, making it simpler to accomplish certain gender-specific tasks (Eagly & Wood, 2012). These characteristics might be seen in gender stereotypes or shared ideas. As a result, communities undergo complete socialisation to develop personality traits and abilities that assist role performance in order to prepare men and women for their family and job duties, as well as gender-appropriate obligations. Some, but not all, findings can be identified and addressed with respect to the theory.

Counselling providers, as previously emphasised, have a sceptical view of informal counselling, especially counselling offered by the church. They perceive it to be one-sided and mainly based on the Bible. This means that if couples receive counselling from the church, this type of counselling tends to be rigid in terms of assumed gender roles. To illustrate this, Participant 5 had the following to say, *“sometimes I get the impression that there has been talked about the right things in the right way but I guess 90% of it is what does the Bible say a man should be and what does it say a woman should be, just love each other, pray, read your Bible and everything will be great. And so within about 3 years for couples under 30, it’s like what is going on, why we are fighting so much... both of us are really trying and we’re doing all these things that we’re supposed to do in terms of gender roles taught to us...but it’s not working.*

This extract implies that when a one-sided approach is the only consideration, problems in marriage can occur that are related to socialised gender roles. Additionally, gender role expectation also affects the relationship and marriage if this is not taught correctly. Married individuals in this study, on the other hand, receive most of their relationship and marriage instructions and directions from the church and mentioned that clergy teach biblical principles in order to build a firm foundation for relationships and marriage. To illustrate this, Participant 6 (female focus group) said that counselling includes, *“the roles of husband and a wife”*. Participant 7 (female focus group) went further to state that the church *“teaches how the husband should operate as a provider, sustainer and protector. As well as the role of a wife is to be submissive”*. Married individuals have no issue with these teachings and usually subscribe

to them since they believe that this is the best way for a marriage to function. However, when these roles are taught, society looks at a couple expecting these gender roles and expectations to be fulfilled. If they are not fulfilled, people disapprove of that behaviour. This can make married couples feel trapped in their marriage and divorce is often viewed as an optional escape.

Furthermore, infidelity and financial challenges are topics of discussion that emerge from counselling sessions, according to counselling providers. Married individuals also highlighted these factors as potential topics that should be covered in premarital and marriage counselling. When it comes to infidelity, the male is perceived to be the perpetrator, according to the perceptions and experience of counselling providers, more than females. This speaks to the ‘common beliefs or gender stereotypes’ as mentioned above. Males have been socialised that this type of behaviour is common for them and therefore, even though it is frowned upon, it is not unforgivable. This speaks to how the beliefs that people hold about sexes are contrived and based on observations of the role performance of men and women (Eagly et al., 2000). Financial challenges, on the other hand, can cause a power dynamic between husband and wife. According to the social role theory, males are socialised to be the breadwinner and take on more instrumental roles whereas females are socialised to take on more communal roles. Women usually leave the workforce after marriage, as discussed in Chapter 2, and become homemakers, consuming the role of wife and mother (role cluster). This means that they become financially dependent on the husband, exacerbating their financial situation and dependence, making them feel trapped. In order to avoid situations where one partner or even both partners within marriage feel trapped due to certain factors/challenges in their marriage that they feel are unresolvable, marriage counselling can assist in dismantling specific strong gender-typical beliefs and behaviours and help create a ‘normal’ belief and therefore behaviour (mind shift equal change in behaviour).

Through modelling as well as teaching, society ultimately decides what gender roles are acceptable or not. However, as mentioned in Chapter 2, patterns of behaviour or roles for men and women in modern society are not as fixed as they used to be. There has been a shift in role expectations between married couples in line with the changes taking place within various societies.

6.8. CONCLUSION

The chapter presented an integrated discussion of the results of the research study bearing in mind that it was drawn from counselling providers who were all white, and married individuals with specific demographics leaning towards a Christian orientation or faith. The findings suggest that couples can benefit from premarital and marriage counselling, but that counselling offered by clergy could be improved even though it is considered a means of education and guidance. By evaluating various findings, a strategy was devised, and a clear picture of topics for premarital and marriage counselling was generated. As a result, it can be concluded that the research questions have been answered and the objectives achieved. The conclusions, recommendations, and limitations of the research study are presented and discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of the study was to determine counselling providers and married individuals' perceptions of the usefulness of marriage and premarital counselling. This was done to be able to develop a counselling strategy for marriage counsellors that takes seriously the needs and expectations of those who seek counselling services. At a time when divorce rates seem to continue rising, it is critical to constantly seek ways to find possible alternatives and strategies that could contribute towards curbing the high rates of divorce. Such strategies will not only be beneficial to the couples, but by extension to the children, and communities at large. In this chapter, I offer a reflection and an overview of the study, what is highlighted and the possible implications for research on premarital and marriage counselling. I also pay attention to the limitations and link these to possible future studies.

7.2. REFLECTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Marriage is the desired goal for many couples. The institution of marriage, on the other hand, appears to be in jeopardy, especially as the divorce rates continue to rise globally, notably in South Africa. Preller (2013) estimates that one-third of all marriages in South Africa end in divorce, with half of all first-time marriages ending in divorce (Statistics South Africa, 2017). Divorce has wide negative implications. It has negative effects not only on the divorcees but also on their families. According to research, the impacts of divorce do not stop there; it also has detrimental consequences for society as a whole, affecting individuals on a social, psychological and economical level (Gahler, 2006). Based on this knowledge, I was very curious to learn why the divorce rate is so high and what could be done to help and support couples before and throughout marriage in order to reduce the likelihood of divorce. As a result, I decided to embark on the journey to conduct a research study that could potentially provide me with the answers to my questions. Therefore, research questions and objectives were formulated and situated within the study.

In order to reach the answer to my questions, a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design was identified as best suited for such a study. This is because this approach firstly allowed me to understand the lived experiences of the participants and to

consider the participants' perspectives on the topic under investigation as a means to broaden what is already understood (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Therefore, based on the purpose of the study, I recruited counselling providers and married individuals to get both perspectives of the providing of counselling and receiving of counselling. Data were collected utilizing semi-structured individual interviews with counselling providers, using the snowball sampling method. It is important to highlight that the findings of the counselling providers on the research topic are limited to one ethnic group, the white group, as the counselling providers' recruitment technique resulted in an unintentional white homogeneous group. Data collection from married individuals was done through focus groups and a workshop, using the purposive sampling method. I encountered some challenges with the recruitment of married individuals. The aim was to recruit them in a general sense; however, I could only find married individuals in the church that were willing to take part in the study. For this reason, it could be then the reason why there is pro informal counselling, as previously mentioned and discussed. However, with the utilisation of this methodology, the following findings were discovered.

The study highlights that premarital and marriage counselling is perceived to be useful and helpful, providing a light, blueprint and catalyst for couples who decide to attend counselling. Literature echoes this notion, especially when couples are committed to the process as well as to each other. This speaks to the findings based on the effectiveness of counselling, being difficult to measure. Literature shows that counselling programmes are effective but their effectiveness is mainly based on the active participation and commitment of the couples. Furthermore, the findings revealed that when couples are committed to each other and the counselling process, the effectiveness of the process is more tangible. The finding based on counselling being a resolve, speaks to the reasons why couples attend counselling and more importantly, how communication is viewed as an important skill to teach couples. Furthermore, the findings indicate that communication is key to resolving other issues within the relationship.

Poor communication, according to literature (see Chapter 1), is one of the reasons for divorce. Therefore, teaching couples this skill could assist them in resolving their issues in a more effective and impactful manner to reach a happy compromise and place in their relationship. The finding based on the usefulness of formal versus informal counselling indicated that even though formal counselling is viewed as useful for all participants, married individuals still leaned more towards informal counselling, particularly from the church. Research shows that most couples attend counselling through the church, but that clergy are not always well trained

to deal with the issues faced by couples. Therefore, training is suggested for clergy, however, it does not exclude professional counsellors. This is a very critical point to take note of, particularly because when counsellors are not properly trained, couples reap the consequences. This means that couples do not then receive the proper help and skills that are usually intended when attending counselling. For that reason, counsellors must get the proper training to provide proper counselling to couples. Furthermore, I utilised the social role theory as a way to get an understanding of how socialisation and expectations from the various genders (in this case, men and women) influence how they perceive marriage and their expectations of a marriage relationship. Patriarchy continues to dictate how gender roles play out, which means these roles are done in a very 'traditional' manner by allocating communal roles to the wife/female and masculine roles to the husband/male. In South Africa, traditional views and roles of men and women are still very prominent. The emancipation of women and gender equality challenge this notion of gender role expectations. However, this does not always play out with marriage experiences. It is important to note that women's rights and gender equality are shifting women's place in society and therefore this needs to be acknowledged and engaged, as role expectation plays a critical role in relationship dynamics. This is particularly important because women's empowerment appears to have an impact on the divorce rate in countries with more traditional perceptions of male and female roles, according to literature (see Chapter 1).

Based on one of the research objectives, a strategy was developed in order to assist counselling providers in ensuring that they focus on relevant and helpful topics when providing premarital and marriage counselling. Especially because so many internationally developed counselling programmes are used by South African counselling providers as the literature indicates (see Chapter 1). This is not necessarily a problem per se but understanding the specific needs of the South African couple could help decrease the decision to separate or divorce. Therefore, the strategy could be viewed and used to add richness to the current approaches used by counselling providers.

With reflecting on the research study and its findings, it is evident that the divorce rate in South Africa is high and the need for a solution is required. Premarital and marriage counselling are identified as possible solutions to assist the couple with their challenges, get them to a happy place and ultimately influence the decision not to divorce. Therefore, well-trained counsellors are needed in order to be effective in their tasks. The findings highlight that there is a need for skilful and well-trained counsellors because only when counsellors receive proper training, will

the effectiveness of counselling improve and couples receive the counselling that they deserve, especially because their training dictates how they approach therapy. Additionally, it is important to reiterate the role of communication in relationships, in particular, in marriages. Counsellors need to put a lot of emphasis on the topic of communication as the lack of this skill can derail a relationship and marriage. Especially because many issues develop from the lack of effective communication. Therefore, it can be said that the way couples communicate can be learned and relearned on how to engage within marriage. Other topics that should be at the core of counselling include finances, parenting, intimacy, practical and real-life examples, and the value of marriage. I would add an additional topic that was not explicitly mentioned which is the changing gender role expectations. The latter, I perceive, is critical when it comes to marriage, especially because male/female roles in general as well as in marriage are constantly changing. Moving away from patriarchal views which used to be the status quo and moving towards a more egalitarian view of gender roles. Therefore, rethinking the way counselling is conducted and focusing on the important topics that could help and improve couples' relationships and marriages so that they can thrive to contribute to stable and healthy marriages, which then contribute to stable and healthy children, and ultimately result in a stable and healthy society, minimising the number divorced individuals.

7.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Based on the reflections of the research study, the following recommendations are made. Firstly, given the criteria of counselling providers recruited from the Boland and Heidelberg region as well as married individuals recruited from the Tygerberg sub-district, the scope of the provinces were limited. Incorporating other provinces in South Africa, including Gauteng, Kwazulu-Natal, and Northern Cape etc., could provide different or varied perspectives of the topic under investigation. Secondly, married individuals were recruited based on a set of specific selection criteria such race, heterosexuality etc. (see Chapter 3) with an additional unexpected criterion of being of the Christian faith. The results, therefore, is only depicted in this context. The results would have been different if the study had included married individuals of other faiths and religions, as well as atheists. Therefore, it is recommended that further research consider a more heterogenous group of participants. Thirdly, the study only included married individuals from heterosexual marriages. This, therefore, only provided the view of this specific group of people. If married individuals from same-sex marriages were included in the study, the results might have been more diverse. Further research that include married

individuals from same-sex marriages is recommended. Fourthly, the counselling providers recruited using snowball sampling resulted in a white homogenous group by chance, hence the data obtained and presented on the topic are exclusively limited to this ethnic group. Further research using a purposive sampling method to recruit counselling providers from different races is recommended, since this could lead to a more nuanced outcome of the research topic. Fifthly, only professional counselling providers were recruited and therefore, the results is only based on their views. If clergy counsellors were included, it would have provided the study with a more nuanced results. Sixthly, the findings of counselling providers' views on informal counselling show that counselling from clergy is one-sided and mainly biblical. Further research on the type of training received and different counselling approaches/techniques' utilised by clergy and their effectiveness are recommended. Seventhly, the findings from the research study show that participants found it difficult to measure effectiveness. As a result, further research on the effectiveness of premarital and marriage counselling, particularly programmes developed in South Africa is recommended. Eighthly, the research study focussed on married individuals. It would be beneficial to study couples rather than individuals as well as divorced to see how they perceive premarital and marriage counselling as a unit and the effectiveness thereof. Ninthly, longitudinal studies based on how effective premarital counselling is and how it can guide or direct a couple in their marriage also deserve a closer look. It would make the effectiveness of premarital counselling more tangible if the implementation of the learned work is studied over a period of time by following consenting couples into their respective marriages. And lastly, more research can be done to see how women's emancipation and the changing of gender role expectations influence/affects marriage and divorce rates.

With all the recommendations highlighted, it is important to also look at the limitations of the study. These are outlined next.

7.4. LIMITATIONS

This section discusses what I identified as limitations in this research that can be linked to possible future studies. The limitations outline, firstly, that the research findings cannot be extrapolated to the overall population of professional counselling providers and married individuals marrying for the first time in South Africa, due to the qualitative nature of the study.

Secondly, the research study only focussed on the perceptions of professional counselling providers. The study did not recruit a sample of clergy counsellors to get their views on premarital and marriage counselling. As such, the study could only provide the views of the counsellors.

Thirdly, the research study recruited married individuals, mainly from church due to issues outlined in Chapter 3. It would have, however, been useful to have the views of premarital and marriage counselling from married individuals or couples that have secular views. Exploring this could have maybe provided richer information.

Fourthly, having the views of divorced or remarried individuals could have provided a varied perspective if compared to individuals married for the first time, regardless of the duration of the marriage. And lastly, because this research study only focused on the coloured community for married individuals versus no race restriction for counselling providers, incorporating research on the perceptions of the usefulness of premarital and marriage counselling of other cultures and races, such as Black, White, and Indian, could have contributed to a more diverse understanding of the perceptions of premarital and marriage counselling and its usefulness in South Africa.

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Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Ref #: PSYRERC_14080]

Decision: Referred back for amendment/clarification

Student name: Ms Victoria Justine Christians

Student number: 41251784

Project title: The effects of premarital counselling on divorce rates for first time marriages in a selected group from Stellenbosch, Western Cape Province, South Africa

Qualification: Postgraduate degree

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Psychology Department Research Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. The proposal was evaluated for adherence to appropriate ethical standards as required by the Psychology Department of Unisa and the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics.

The following comments, emanating from the meeting, are tabled for your attention and clarification:

Concern with confidentiality related to sampling procedure

It is necessary to clarify how the participants will be recruited. It is not at all clear what is meant by "purposive sampling on the basis of my knowledge of the population and its elements" and how sampling bias will be limited. It is risky to approach people without by implication breaching confidentiality. That is to say, how does the researcher know which people are undergoing counselling? Note that the fact that certain couples are undergoing counselling may be construed as confidential information which counsellors should not make available, since some people may be sensitive about this and feel that their rights to privacy and confidentiality were breached.

Methodological considerations which may affect design

Purely methodological concerns is usually not considered by the Psychology Department Ethics Committee unless the method may have the potential to cause harm to the participants or other persons involved. But in this case we need to comment on the something that could be a problem, as the method does not seem to link up with the research question.

It is not clear how one would determine "The effects of premarital counselling on divorce rates for first time marriages" by interviewing couples during a pre-marital phase. How will the divorce rates be determined in this way? One can also not determine the effectiveness of the counselling in this way (without anything like a control group for comparison or some kind of a long term follow up study). The best one could do with interview data which was obtained during a pre-marriage counselling phase is to attempt to describe how couples experienced the counselling and how they think they were affected by this.

Please provide the committee with a cover letter explaining how you have addressed the above mentioned aspects. Additionally, the application should be amended to indicate the changes. The study should not commence until you received formal notification of research ethics approval following the review of the response to the approval conditions.

Signed:



Prof P Kruger

[For the Ethics Committee]
[Department of Psychology, Unisa]

Date: 8 December 2014

Appendix B: Invitation to participate in research

CONSENT FORM FOR COUNSELLING PROVIDERS

My name is Victoria Christians and I am a doctoral student in the Psychology department at Unisa. My research project is entitled **“The effects of premarital counselling on divorce rates for first time marriages in a selected group from Stellenbosch, Western Cape Province, South Africa.”** This is a research study intended to explore, describe and understand the experiences of premarital counselling for couples married for the first time as well as counselling providers’ experiences of providing premarital counselling. The aim is then to develop a strategy conducive to bridge possible gaps that might cause ineffectiveness of premarital counselling.

I would like permission to interview you about your experience.

This interview will take approximately 90 minutes. With your permission, I would like to audio-record this interview so I can record the details accurately. The tapes will only be heard by me and my supervisor. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential, and will be stored in a locked file cabinet, to which only I, and my supervisor, will have access. At any time you can refuse to answer any questions or end this interview.

The risk involved in this study, is that you may feel uncomfortable discussing some of your experiences during the interview, and should this happen please know that you can stop at any time, and should you need to talk further about the uncomfortable feelings that might arise I will have someone whom you can speak with. The benefit of your participation is that what you share with me might help us understand how effective or ineffective premarital counselling might be. There will be other participants taking part in this study as well.

I may publish results of the study, but names of people, or any identifying characteristics, will not be used in any of the publications unless you want your name to be mentioned. If you would like a copy of the study, please provide me with your address and I will send you a copy in the future.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at 074 193 8333 or my

supervisor Dr Puleng Segalo by email, segalpj@unisa.ac.za. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact the Unisa Ethics Office.

Thank you for your participation in the study. I will give you a copy of this form to take with you.

I agree to have this interview audio-recorded please [circle one]:

Yes	No
-----	----

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date

CONSENT FORM FOR MARRIED INDIVIDUALS

My name is Victoria Christians and I am a doctoral student in the Psychology department at Unisa. My research project is entitled **“Till death do us part: perceptions on marriage counselling in the Stellenbosch area, Western Cape Province, South Africa”**. The purpose of the research study is to explore the perceptions on marriage counselling. The aim is then to develop a strategy, conducive to bridge possible gaps, which can be useful in enhancing counselling providers' helpfulness in premarital counselling for first time marriages in South Africa.

I would like you to form part of two focus groups to share your perceptions on marriage counselling. Depending on your gender, you will firstly, form part of an all-female or all-male focus group and then secondly, you will form part of a mix (females and males) focus group. The focus group discussion will comprise of 6 married individuals.

This focus group discussion will take approximately 90 minutes. With your permission, I would like to audio-record the group discussion so I can record the details accurately. The tapes will only be heard by me and my supervisor. All information gathered will be kept strictly

confidential, and will be stored in a locked file cabinet, to which only I, and my supervisor, will have access. At any time you can refuse to answer any questions or dismiss yourself from the group discussion.

The risk involved in this study, is that you may feel uncomfortable discussing some of your perceptions during the interview, and should this happen please know that you can stop at any time, and should you need to talk further about the uncomfortable feelings that might arise I will have someone whom you can speak with. The benefit of your participation is that what you share with me might help us understand the role that premarital counselling play and what the possible gaps might be to facilitate with a helpful strategy. There will be other participants taking part in this study as well.

I may publish results of the study, but names of people, or any identifying characteristics, will not be used in any of the publications unless you want your name to be mentioned. If you would like a copy of the study, please provide me with your address and I will send you a copy in the future.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at 074 193 8333 or my supervisor Dr Puleng Segalo by email, segalpj@unisa.ac.za. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact the Unisa Ethics Office.

Thank you for your participation in the study. I will give you a copy of this form to take with you.

I agree to have this interview audio-recorded please/ [circle

Yes	No
-----	----

 one]:

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date

Appendix C: Information Sheet

Research Title: **Till death do us part: perceptions on marriage counselling in the Stellenbosch area, Western Cape Province, South Africa**

Principal Research Investigator: Victoria Justine Christians

Thesis Promoter: Prof. Puleng Segalo, Department of Psychology, Unisa, Pretoria, 0003.
Segalpj@unisa.ac.za

Introduction

We invite you to take part in a research study being conducted by Victoria Christians who is a Doctoral/PhD student at the University of South Africa. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The study is described below.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research study is to explore the perceptions on marriage counselling. The reason for this exploration is to get an understanding of the effects of counselling on first time married individuals. Married individuals indicates male and female who are married and have received premarital counselling.

Who Can Participate in the Study?

This research is open to counsellors and married individuals. These participants have different inclusion criteria (see table below):

Counsellors	Couples
- Marriage counsellors (with a minimum of 5 years' experience in counselling)	- Heterosexual - Coloured - Married for the first time - Age between 29-44 - Afrikaans or English

Who Will Be Conducting the Research

The principal investigator, Victoria Christians, will be conducting the research.

What You Will Be Asked to Do

You are being asked to participate in a focus group consisting of between 6 married individuals, which will take approximately 90 minutes.

Compensation

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this research project.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participants will not be personally identified in any reports or publications. All the data collected, including audio files, will be stored on the researcher's computer and a backup on the hard drive. Both the computer and backup drive data will be password protected and only Victoria Christians will have the password. Data will be securely maintained on the researcher's computer for seven years, post publication.

Questions, Problems or Concerns

If you have any questions, problems or concerns about this research, you can contact me at 074 193 8333 or my supervisor Prof. Puleng Segalo by email, segalpj@unisa.ac.za. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact the Unisa Ethics Office.

Interested in participating?

Please contact me on the number above or leave your contact details with the counsellor and I will contact you to arrange for the focus group.

Appendix D: Interview guide for counselling providers

Section A: Perception on providing marriage counselling

1. What are your general perceptions of marriage counselling?
2. Does marriage counselling have a place in South Africa and why?
3. How effective do you think marriage counselling is in general here in South Africa?
4. What are your experiences of providing marriage counselling?
5. How many years have you been providing marriage counselling?
6. What counselling techniques are you using for marriage counselling and why?

Section B: Perceptions on providing premarital counselling

7. During your experience of providing marriage counselling, have you provided premarital counselling as well?

If yes:

What are your experiences of providing such counselling?

If no:

Why not?

8. Does premarital counselling have a place in South Africa and why?
9. How effective do you think premarital counselling is in general here in South Africa?
10. How many years have you been providing premarital counselling?
11. What counselling techniques are you using for premarital counselling and why?
12. How well do you think this counselling technique work?

If very well:

6.1 In what way?

If not very well:

6.2 Why not?

13. Would you change anything about your technique?

If yes:

7.1 What would you change?

If no:

7.2 Why not?

14. What do you recommend can be put into place to improve premarital counselling provided to couples?

Section C: Perceptions regarding why married couples seek marriage and premarital counselling

15. Why do you think couples come for marriage counselling?
16. Why do you think couples come for premarital counselling?
17. What do you think these couples' reasons are for seeking guidance before they get married?
18. Would you say that the information they received during premarital counselling helps them with the obstacles in their marriage?
If yes:
In what way?
If no:
Why not?
19. What are the issues that are raised during the marriage and how do they deal with it?
20. Are these issues dealt with by the married couple using the information provided to them when they received premarital counselling?
If yes:
In what way?
If no:
Why not?
21. Would you say that premarital counselling contributes towards long lasting marriages?
Please elaborate.
22. What do you suggest can be put into place, for premarital counselling, to assist married couples to deal with issues in their marriage more effectively?
23. Any last comments you would like to share?

Appendix E: Focus group discussion guide for married individuals

Discussion Guidelines (Adapted from Thinkroom, 2014):

I would like the discussion to be informal and conversational, therefore you do not need to wait for me to call on you to respond. In fact, I encourage you to respond directly to the comments other people make. If you do not understand a question, please let me know. I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share.

If the group seems to be stuck on a topic, I may interrupt you and if you are not saying much, I may call on you directly. This is just my way of making sure we obtain everyone's perspective and include everyone's opinion.

I do ask that we all keep each other's identities, participation and remarks private.

As discussed, I will be digitally voice recording the discussion, because I do not want to miss any of your comments. No one outside of this room (except my supervisor) will have access to the recordings and they will not be made public in any manner.

May I kindly request that we introduce ourselves to each other before we start so that we get an idea of who is in the room.

[Note: This is just a way to make the participants feel at ease before the facilitator starts asking questions]

Questions

Question 1:

What are your perceptions on marriage counselling?

Question 2:

What kind of expectations would you have if you were to go for marriage counselling?

Question 3:

What kind of information do you think marriage counselling provides?

Question 4:

How do you think this information might be helpful in a marriage?

Question 5:

Can you think of some of the benefits that marriage counselling could provide for married couples?

Question 6:

What obstacles do you think marriage counselling could assist in overcoming?

Question 7:

What are your perceptions on premarital counselling?

Question 8:

What kind of expectation would you have if you were to go for premarital counselling?

Question 9:

What kind of information do you think premarital counselling provides?

Question 10:

How do you think the information might be helpful?

Question 11:

Can you think of some of the benefits that premarital counselling could provide for married couples?

Question 12:

What obstacles do you think premarital counselling could assist in overcoming in a marriage?

Question 13:

Could you share any suggestions or recommendations on how marriage and premarital counselling could be conducted so as to respond to couple's needs?

Any last comments you would like to share?

Appendix F: Declaration of professional edit

13 January 2022

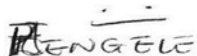
DECLARATION OF PROFESSIONAL EDIT

I declare that I have edited and proofread the Doctor of Psychology thesis entitled: **TILL DEATH DO US PART: PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF PREMARITAL AND MARRIAGE COUNSELLING IN THE BOLAND, HEIDELBERG AND TYGERBERG SUB-DISTRICT AREAS, WESTERN CAPE PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA** by **VICTORIA JUSTINE CHRISTIANS**.

My involvement was restricted to language editing: contextual spelling, grammar, punctuation, unclear antecedent, wordiness, vocabulary enhancement, sentence structure and style, proofreading, sentence completeness, sentence rewriting, consistency, referencing style, editing of headings and captions. I did not do structural re-writing of the content. Kindly note that the manuscript was formatted as per agreement with the client.

No responsibility is taken for any occurrences of plagiarism, which may not be obvious to the editor. The client is responsible for ensuring that all sources are listed in the reference list/bibliography. The editor is not accountable for any changes made to this document by the author or any other party subsequent to my edit. The client is responsible for the quality and accuracy of the final submission/publication.

Sincerely,



Pholile Zengele
Associate Member

Membership number: ZEN001
Membership year: March 2021 to February 2022

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