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THE STRATEGIES USED BY MARRIED COUPLES IN SELECTED PARISHES IN THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF NAIROBI TO INCREASE THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

This study was instigated by the urgent need for effective strategies for increasing the levels of psychological well-being among married couples in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi (CAN), whose lack thereof has led to a steady increase in the number of divorce cases therein. The specific objective of the study was to explore the strategies used by married couples in selected parishes in CAN to increase their psychological well-being. The study was anchored on the Adlerian and Emotional Focused Theories and implemented using the concurrent convergent mixed methods research design. The study targeted the 19,828 Catholic faithful, who have exchanged their marital vows in CAN within the last 5 to 25 years. The sample comprised of 784 married men and women in couples and were selected by multistage sampling. A focus group discussion schedule was used to collect data, which was by thematic analysis method. Findings revealed married couples in the CAN relied on six major strategies to increase their levels of psychological well-being thus; maintaining constant good communication with one another, understanding and tolerating one another, seeking forgiveness from one another, seeking guidance and counseling services and seeking divine intervention. It is recommended that policy should be made by the government of Kenya through the office of the Attorney general by formulating a legal framework to ensure all newly married couples are trained on various aspects of psychological well-being so as to ensure stable marriage.

KEYWORDS: Strategies, Psychological Well-Being level, Married Couples, Nairobi Catholic Archdiocese

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

A stable marriage institution has always been the prime focus of any community, religious organization, governments and other stakeholders in ensuring a harmoniously existing community and mankind in general (Ramirez, 2024). Marriage is a duty and a requirement from the society that has been perceived as the natural order of things that ensures continuity of life and lineages within the family context. Marriage is one of the most important stages in the development of personal and social

lives of individuals. An unstable marriage is therefore a recipe for many societal problems ranging from non-law-abiding citizen to a morally rotten community (Dimetman, 2021).

In Brazil, Dutra-Thome et al (2019) found that of those who are separated or divorced were about 63% while those legally divorced were 32%. American community Survey 3-year Estimates, 51.5% of males and 47.7% of females over the age of 15 were married. The parting rate was 1.8% for males and 0.1% for females (US Census Bureau, 2020).

In Asia the situation of marriage is wanting because since 2005, crude divorce rates have increased in most Asia/Pacific countries – and by around 25% across the region on average, while crude divorce rates in China more than doubled (OECD, 2023). In contrast, crude divorce rates fell among the OECD countries in the Asia/Pacific region – Australia, Japan, Korea and New Zealand. Across the Asia/Pacific the mean age of first marriage has increased by 3 years on average since 2005. In 2005, the mean age at first marriage across the selected Asia/Pacific economies was 24.0 years for women and 27.4 years for men. By 2019, the mean age at first marriage had increased to 27.5 years for women and to 30.1 years for men, still some 3 to 3.5 years below the OECD average for men and women. A strong tendency of postponing marriages is observed across Asia/Pacific economies, but large cross-national differences remain: since 2005, the mean age at first marriage has increased by about four years among men and women in Armenia, while change was much more limited in New Zealand and Singapore where the mean age of first marriage for men increased by less than a year. Only in Viet Nam, is the mean age for women in 2019 slightly lower (OECD, 2023).

In Africa, several studies show that 45% of families struggle to survive due to the rise of conflicts. Couples often undergo strained relationships (Amato, 2014). In Nigeria, there have been strong and vocal religious forces that dictate morality, thus policy, and ultimately family life education instructions (Ogunfowokan & Fajemilehin, 2012). Egypt teaches family life education that focuses on knowledge about male and female reproductive systems, sex organs, conception, and sexually transmitted infection. In the second and third years of the middle preparatory phase, this is taught in public schools. Other countries view family life education as just one of the many life skills that young people require (UNESCO & UNFPA, 2012).

In Kenya, the change in family life education was a decline in marital satisfaction as manifested by an increase in marital violence, an upsurge in cases relating to custody and maintenance of children, and an increase in divorce cases (Meru County Law, 2016). Data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics indicated that there was a total of 567,990 divorced and separated people in Kenya as per the 2009 population census whereas Kithinji (2009) attributed the differences in marital satisfaction to the impact of colonialism, Kithinji's study attributed the differences in stability in marriages to differences in family life knowledge and marital satisfaction.

The study was guided by two theories namely, Adlerian Theory (2006) and Emotional Focused Theory (1988). Adlerian theory is an approach to psychotherapy invented by Alfred Adler, an Austrian psychiatrist in the year 2006. Adlerian therapy techniques focus on addressing individuals' feelings of inferiority and discouragement in the greater context of their community and society.

Adlerian therapy is goal-oriented and is based on the principle that the client can overcome feelings of inferiority with the help of insight provided by a therapist. Psychological well-being was investigated in this study to determine the extent to which it can predict marital stability. This was because according to Adlerian theory, the patient must overcome feelings of inferiority in order to be able to connect positively in a stable family. The ultimate goal of the theory is to support a person's confident integration into society through a holistic approach to personal growth.

Adlerian theory is also known as individual theory. This is because it focuses on a patient's individual personality and ability to change their own life by altering their behavior. Although individualistic in its primary focus, Adlerian theory also acknowledges each individual person as fitting into the greater society. Underneath a person's anxiety and sense of inferiority, all humans possess an innate desire to belong and be significant. Adlerian theory has been praised for its holistic approach. Its ultimate goal is to reorient patients and return them to society so that they can contribute in a healthy manner and feel a sense of belonging.

The aspects of personality that were considered in this study in line with the Adlerian theory were autonomy, positive relations, purpose in life, environmental mastery, as they are all aspects a personality of the married couples that were respondents of this study as they cumulatively constitute the psychological wellbeing, which was the study's independent variable.

On the other hand, emotionally focused theory was developed by Dr. Sue Johnson and Dr. Les Greenberg in 1980s to help couples with relationship problems. It works on the bases that human emotions are connected to human needs. So, by activating and working through patients' feelings, they can adapt and change problematic emotional states and improve their relationships. This theory inspired the research because family is a social unit and emotional focused institution, yet it was the epicenter of all data collection exercises that were carried out in this study. The issue of marital stability was the depended variable under investigation in this study, whose indicators as named in the conceptual framework of this study allude to the basic tenets of the Emotional Focused theory hence guiding the data collection and interpretation in this study.

The study was instigated by the urgent need for effective strategies for increasing the psychological well-being among married couples in the CAN whose lack thereof has occasioned an alarming number of divorce cases therein. Kenya is one of the countries that has recorded increased number of divorce and domestic violence cases in the recent past, which is threatening harmonious existence of families therein. Many married couples in Kenya are experiencing psychological and emotional challenges,

brought about by tough economic times and job losses among others, which are consequently affecting the sustainability of marriage. Some of these challenges have led to high numbers of divorces, suicide and domestic violence cases in the country, especially Nairobi County (KNBS, 2019).

Research done by the Kenya National Bureau of statistics (2021), shows considerable growth in marriage dissolution during the last five years nationwide. According to the Arch-diocesan office of the judicial vicar, between 2017 and 2022, there were a total number of 133 marriage cases presented to the tribunal for consideration for annulment (Arch-diocesan tribunal register 2017-2021). Despite pre-marital trainings/seminars before any marriage is solemnized. This poses a question as to why it happens. Proper levels of psychological well-being among married couples play a crucial role in ensuring married couples settle challenges in their marriage in an amicable manner, and therefore has potential to reduce chances of divorce and separation. In the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi however, there's minimal research that addresses the increasing number of these occurrences. This study was therefore conducted to provide empirical evidence in form of facts and figures that can be benchmarks for future policy formulation to arrest the issue of increased cases of divorce and troubled marriages in the country.

The specific objective of this study was to explore the strategies used by married couples in selected parishes in CAN, to increase their psychological well-being. The research question that guided the study was "what are the strategies used by married couples in selected parishes in the CAN to increase their psychological well-being?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

A firm, steady, well balanced and healthy marital relationship is vital between couples. Marriage becomes stable when each member fulfils his/her responsibility in the relationship. Echebe (2010), observed that marital stability led to a well-balanced and well-adjusted family which in turn leads to a well-adjusted progressive society.

Omotosho as cited in Garba (2006) referred to marital stability as any interpersonal relationship which is not fixed or final instead a relationship that is dynamic and evolving. Thus, there may be periods of joy and excitement followed by times of conflicts, struggle, pain and distance (Garba, 2006).

A study in Port Harcourt Municipality, Nigeria by Ambakederemo and Ganagana (2006) who used a sample size of 150 subjects revealed that self-control, peer group influence and spending quality time at home are the most positive indicators to marriage stability in Nigeria. They cited the causes of marital instability to be absence of love and trust, anti-social vices, economic, socio-cultural and sex related conditions (Ambakederemo & Ganagana 2006). Adejare et al. (2019) recommended the need of premarital and family/marital counselling be emphasized to avoid instability in the family.

Premarital Counseling

Premarital counselling is an effective way to increase marital satisfaction resulting in overall improvement for families in society. Premarital counselling is effective in enabling partners to gain better communication skills and have time to slow down and think about what is going on in a couple's marriage thus increasing marital satisfaction (Adejere et al., 2006).

Abubakar (2016), refer to pre-marital counseling as a type of therapy that help couples prepare for marriage. Premarital counseling can enable one to ensure that he/she and his/her partner have a strong, healthy relationship giving one a better chance for a stable and satisfying marriage. When couples receive counselling from a professional counsellor before engaging in marriage relationship they are equipped with better knowledge of what the marriage union is all about, the good and bad moments, to know their spouses better and learn how to adjust better and coping strategies to employ in marital lives (Adejere et al., 2006).

Pre-marital counselling is intended to improve and enhance premarital relationships leading to more pleasing and established marriages with the envisioned consequence intended to avoid divorce. The ultimate goal of premarital counselling is to support relationships prior to marriage in order to prevent the risk of future divorce and give them a better base for a stable and satisfactory marriage (Stahmann, 2000). According to (Waite & Gallagher cited in Abubakar, 2016) the following are considered as reasons for marital counselling:

Effective Communication

It is considered as one of the most important aspects of any marriage. Communication allows for expression of love and affection between spouse and families. Olagunju and Eweniyi (2002) maintained that, marriage without effectively communication is likely to crumble. Communication is a life wire of any marriage relationship or any other meaningful relationship (Olagunju & Eweniyi, 2002).

Social sciences have shown recurrent interest in the associations between marriage and its psychological outcomes. Marriage may provide numerous psychological benefits by offering meaning and purpose, facilitating interactions between spouses, sharing financial resources, and generating emotional and social support. Although previous research has demonstrated clear links between marital quality and well-being (Musick & Bumpass, 2012; Carr, Freedman, Cornman, & Schwarz, 2014), the role of specific marital relations and communication styles in psychological well-being remains not fully discovered.

Positive Attitudes

Partners in happy marriages are more prone to associate positive meanings to their spouse's behavior than spouses in unsatisfying marriages (Abubakar, 2016). Phillips, Bischoff, Abbott and Xia (2009), review these findings and other similar research by describing happy spouses as more likely to see the

optimistic, relationship-building behavior of their partner. Negative behavior occurs in all marriages but when it happens among happily married couples, they are more likely to justify it as being unusual or as attributable to the pressure and anxiety of the situation (Phillips et al., 2009).

Repetition of everyday positive interactions and routine involvement in joint activities produces an increase in marital satisfaction and adjustment (Phillips et al., 2009). A study by Driver and Gottman (2004) discovered that couples that are satisfied in their marriage frequently participate in behaviors such as conversing with the spouse about their day, hugging, and kissing. The routine engagement in these types of communications leads to thoughts of closeness and connection that give to a shared value; when repetitive, patterned, and significant; they take on a symbolic and strong meaning of cohesion (Driver & Gottman, 2004).

One of the negative behaviors that negatively affect marital stability is domestic violence. According to the United States Department of Justice, domestic violence is defined as a pattern of behavior in a relationship when one person uses against another to gain power or control. It can include manipulation, coercion or force and the violence can be physical, sexual, spiritual, financial or psychological. Domestic violence most often occurs between parents, partners, ex-spouses, roommates and so forth. Domestic violence is sometimes used to describe abuse in a household, meaning that the violent or frightening behavior is also directed towards children.

Marital Counselling

Marriage is viewed as a holy and permanent binding legal partnership between a man and a woman who have agreed to live a life of vocation, love, and sharing for each other in order to promote their mutual progress and welfare as individuals on their life's journey (Reamen et al., 2022). This suggests that married relationships are intended to remain until death separates both parties. Marriage is also considered to be a social institution in which a man and a woman are legally wedded to form a lasting partnership as husband and wife for the formation of a new family unit.

Experts opine that “marriage as a legal union between a man and a woman for help mate and often procreation (Reamen et al., 2022). This accepted way of life requires much from spouses to sustain the marriage from collapse”. Marriage is therefore a social process in which a man and a woman agree to live together for the rest of their lives as husband and wife in the presence of at least two witnesses.

A study by Onyechi (2003) revealed that factors such as lack of sexual satisfaction, childlessness, communication gap, in-law influence, poverty among others generate crisis and conflicts that are detrimental to marital relationships such as desertion, negligence, malicious beating, child abuse, abscondment, assault, disobedience and several other feature in marital relationship. There are however some positive factors such as good communications, marital intimacy among others that tend to strengthen marital relationships.

Nwobi (2015) observed that “over the years, the society has witnessed an alarming rate of divorce, marital dissatisfaction, loss of affection between couples and cases of marital violence which lead to marital instability among couples”. He asserts that “marital instability is on the increase, and the society needs efficient and effective marital counselors to handle these problems before they get out of control”. Also, Garba (2015) asserts that “at the initial time couples have high opinion of each other and may overflow with joyous thoughts. Each has a firm intention of pleasing and nourishing feelings of affection and love towards a person who is about to be a partner for life”. The author continued by stating that as time passes, things start to change and the once-warm and romantic relationship starts to cool off since they might be residing in a chaotic environment of hate, fear, and confusion that leads to constant conflict.

Omeje (2000) rightly observed that “conflicts could lead to couples’ separation, divorce and maltreatment of multi-dimensional on the children (socially, morally, physically and emotionally). According to him, no marriage is a bed of roses; hence some couples try to tolerate one another to avoid marital conflicts in their home while others don’t tolerate each other hence the conflict in marriage”.

According to Turner (2016), marital stability is important because it prevents marital conflicts from degenerating into total collapse of the marriages and emergence of deviant children from such marriages. It also ensures that none of the parties in the conflicts will have his or her self- image damaged. The aim of any marital conflict resolution is to minimize misunderstanding and enhance cordial relationship between the couples.

Oputa (2003) asserted that “marital stability involves persuasion, dialogue, tolerance, co-operation and mutual understanding. Conflict resolution does not involve the use of verbal or physical force. It does not involve the use of coercion, antagonism, competition and avoidance. All parties involved in family dispute or marital conflicts, must have mutual respect for each other and should address issues and principals involved in the conflicts”. This means that marital conflict should be settled peacefully within the family. Most married people when involved in instability in their marriages report to elders in the family, parent’s in-law, marital counsellors and to their church ministers when issues or conflicts are getting out of their control. Sometimes, stability in marriage can be resolved by these different groups depending on the interest of the parties involved coupled with the extent of counselling behaviour in the marriage.

Several scholars such as Abekhale (2016) believe that “involving an individual in resolving his or her marital conflicts such instability in marriage, lack of trust and poor communication have been found to be positively related to marital happiness and success in marital affairs. It is on this backdrop that the study intended to examine the role of marital counselling on marital stability among couples in the CAN.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Mixed Methods Research Design was used to implement this study. According to Masinde (2023), a mixed methods approach is characterized by the combination of at least one qualitative and one quantitative research component. For this study, the concurrent convergent sub-type was used in this study to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data that independently addressed the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study. Research data were collected at the same time, because this approach demands collection of both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time (Masinde, 2023). This being part of a larger study on psychological well-being and marital stability, only qualitative data were collected with respect to the research objective as previously stated.

The research location was in selected parishes in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi (CAN), Kenya. Geographically, the area covers two counties - Nairobi and Kiambu, covering an area of 3,721sq. Km. the archdiocese comprises of 15 deaneries, 115 parishes and over 4,000 Small Christian Communities, with 2.03 million faithful (CAN, 2022). This population is highly cosmopolitan due to the fact that Nairobi city is the capital of Kenya, and therefore attracts workforce from all communities in Kenya and the world at large. The study location was ideal for data collection due to readily available records of married couples for the last 5 to 25 years hence sampling was practical.

The target population comprised of the Catholic faithful living and worshipping in catholic churches within the archdiocese of Nairobi, who have exchanged their marital vows in Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi for the last five to twenty years. These were 19,828 in number, distributed in the various deaneries in the archdiocese albeit in varying proportions (Archdiocese, 2023). This number was obtained after thorough scrutiny of the holy matrimony records in all the Archdiocesan records for the years 1997-2017.

The sample of this study was selected by multistage sampling, a combination of census, proportionate quota and simple random sampling techniques, due to the tier-like arrangement of the sampling units i.e. deaneries, parishes and actual respondents within the archdiocese. To execute this, census sampling was used to select all the 14 deaneries in the research area, since the researcher was interested in collecting data from respondents of all socio-economic classes, who are spread out in the Nairobi metropolitan area, from which the CAN was formed. The Yamane (1967) formula was used to determine the number of married couples (n) that were to be selected from the sampled parishes. This was executed by substituting N and e in the formula with 19828 and 0.05 respectively thus the required number of couples was 392 couples hence 784 married men and women. Out of these, 78 of them were selected by simple random sampling to participate in the qualitative data collection exercise.

Data was collected using the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) schedule. The Focus Group Discussion Schedule was used to conduct the focus group discussion. It had 5 items, which sought respondent's views on how they maintained their levels of PWB. The researcher assessed content validity of the FGD schedule by consulting counselling psychology research experts within CUEA. This helped the

researcher to determine whether items in the instrument were accurate. Trustworthiness of the FGD schedule was assessed by triangulation method where different versions of the said instrument were administered to the same set of respondents. This was done by asking similar questions to different sets of respondents in different formats, settings and languages (some in Kiswahili, some in English, some in mother tongue, some via video conferencing, some face to face). Results revealed no conflicting responses and therefore the FGD schedule used in the actual study was deemed to be trustworthy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to explore the strategies used by married couples to increase their psychological well-being in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. The corresponding research question was “what are the strategies used by married couples to increase their psychological well-being in Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya?” To address this research question, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted on a subset of the sampled married couples in the CAN using the FGD Schedule. The FGD schedule had five discussion items that were the focal point in the discussions that were held in groups of 3 to 5 married couples in the research area, at least one from each deanery. Responses to the five discussion items were analyzed in themes as they emerged in the course of the focus group discussions.

The first item in the FGD schedule was:

“Please talk briefly about your psychological well-being i.e. what it means to you and how you can ensure it is high.”

From the responses that were given in the 15 FGDs, the following themes clearly stood out:

Table 1: PWB and Steps taken to Keep it High

Probe	Themes
How to ensure high levels of PWB	Trust
	Guidance and counselling
	Tolerance
	Understanding
	Forgiveness
	Communication

As the table indicates, trust for one another, openness to one another, seeking consultation from external sources, endurance of one another’s personal and socio-cultural differences, understanding of one another’s strengths and weaknesses, forgiveness of one another’s wrongs and maintaining constant good communication between themselves were the key words used to describe the strategies of ensuring high psychological well-being by participants of the FGD.

The second item in the FGD schedule was:

“What do you do to ensure you are okay psychologically?”

From the responses that were given by participants of the 15 FGDs, the following themes emerged.

Table 2: Dealing with Low PWB

Probe	Themes
What is done to be okay psychologically	Tolerance
	Seeking divine intervention
	Counselling
	Communication

As the table indicates, application of good anger management skills, seeking divine intervention, consultation of parents, performing physical exercises, motivating one another and application of good listening skills were the key words used by the respondents during the FGD to explain what they usually did to ensure they were okay psychologically.

The third item in the FGD schedule was:

” What are some of the issues that lead to low psychological well-being?”

From the responses that were given in the 15 FGDs, the following themes were apparent:

Table 3: Issues Leading to Low PWB

Probe	Key Response Words
Issues, triggers, causes, factors that lead to low PWB	Infidelity/cheating
	Drug and substance abuse
	Domestic violence
	Lack of communication
	Financial challenges
	Socio-cultural differences

As the table indicates, cases of infidelity among spouses, drug and substance, domestic violence, lack of communication among spouses in a given marriage, financial challenges in the family and socio-cultural differences among spouses in marriage were the key words used by the respondents to describe the issues that negatively affected their psychological well-being.

The fourth item in the FGD schedule was:

“How do you ensure a positive relationship between you and your spouse?”

From the responses that were given in the 15 FGDs, the following themes came out clearly:

Table 4: Strategies of Maintaining Positive Relationships

Probe	Theme
Ways, methods, skills or techniques of maintaining positive relationships	Professional counselling
	communication

As the table indicates, seeking professional counselling services, application of good listening skills, application of good communication skills, seeking financial education and use of non-verbal communication skills were the key words that were used to describe the methods that the respondents applied in an attempt to maintain positive relationships with their respective spouses.

The fifth item in the FGD schedule was:

“Are there any external forces that threaten your psychological well-being?”

From the responses that were given by participants in the 15 FGDs, the following themes emerged.

Table 5: External Threats to PWB among Couples

Probe	Theme
External forces that affect level of psychological well-being among couples [explanations]	Tolerance
	Understanding
	Trust

As the table indicates, cases of gossip among workmates, rumor-mongering among close friends, interference from in-laws of either side, pressure from the local community and peer pressure were the words that were used to describe the external threats that affected the respondents’ level of psychological well-being.

From the summary of the responses to the five points of discussion during the focus group discussions, several themes emerged as the strategies employed by married couples in the research area to increase their levels of psychological well-being:

Communication

The first strategy that came out clearly during the FGD to maintain high PWB was maintaining good communication among couples. This entailed each person in a couple being able to let their partner know their likes, dislikes, personal preferences and other actions that affected their PWB either negatively or positively. When these are properly communicated early in marriage, couples are able to set boundaries among themselves hence preventing unnecessary disagreements, quarrels and fights. This was according to the sentiments of one of the respondents during the FGD thus:

Due to the constant good communication, we have in our marriage, my spouse knows very well the little things that boost my psychological well-being and so he occasionally surprises me by buying small gifts and these really maintain positive relationship between us.

Setting ground rules was also found to be a crucial form of communication that played an important role of ensuring peace and harmony prevails among married couples. The mobile phone was found to be at the center of disagreement and fights among couples, as it was one of the major ways couples have been able to unearth cases of infidelity, flirting and other related activities among married couples. Some of the successful marriages have been able to cope with this through setting ground rules on mobile phones e.g. doing away with passwords, allowing unrestricted access to messages, call data records and photo galleries. This was an important way of building trust among couples as each was able to know via the mobile phone some of the social activities that their spouse engages in when away from home. One of the respondents had this to say:

To ensure that our psychological well-being is high, we always try our best to practice maximum communication with each other in any issues that are bothering any of us, however small, for example if one of us gets due to one reason or another is unable to make it home at the normal time, he or she calls their spouse to let them know of the reason. This prevents many unnecessary confrontations and suspicions. On the issue of mobile phones, we have agreed to be open, setting no passwords and allowing unconditional access.

Ventilating pertinent and emerging issues was also found to be an important component of communication among the sampled respondents. Some of the sampled married couples asserted that through constant communication, they were able to let their partner know of any new challenges that they were encountering within and outside their marriage life, as long as they affected their psychological well-being such as frustrations at the workplace, demands from family and friends etc. Through constant communication, married couples have been able to circumvent and withstand some of the emerging issues that would otherwise affect their PWB negatively. The following were the sentiments of one of them during the FGD:

For the sixteen years I have been in marriage, some of the things I have learnt the hard way to maintain a stable marriage is addressing any challenges however small as they arise among spouses. The only way to address the issues is by talking. Each partner should be free to freely say what is bothering them, be it at home or at work, as each is bound to affect one's psychological well-being. By airing our grievances, a lot of bad things that we hear of in other marriages have been averted in real time.

Socio-cultural differences were found to be a key factor that contributes to the psychological well-being among married couples either positively or negatively depending on how the parties involved deal with them. Examples of traditions that were found to vary significantly among communities include but not limited to; rites of passage, marriage traditions, burial traditions, child-naming rites etc. Resolving such issues was a milestone achieved by seeking indulgence from in-laws of either or both partners in a marriage whenever any of the contentious issues arose among spouses. One of the respondents had this to say during the FGD:

It has been very tricky coping up with some of the habits of my in-laws. The fact that I have been living with my in-laws ever since I got married has been a bitter-sweet experience. The downside of it was having to deal with some not so good encounters with my brother-in-laws, who imagine that I was a family wife in the sense that they wanted me to wash their clothes among other tasks. For the sake of my marriage however, I've had to put up with some of these bad habits that are unheard of where I come from. Though experience, I have learnt the art of surviving every hurdle that is brought about by our socio-cultural differences like child naming rights, burial rites circumcision ceremonies, for the sake of peace and my own psychological well-being.

Two of the sampled couples revealed during the FGD that demonstrating high levels of tolerance and understanding one another as the game changer in avoiding major disagreements of the said socio-cultural differences. The following were some of their sentiments:

External forces like conflicts by in-laws threaten my psychological well-being. That is for example when I do some projects at home, my in-laws usually think it's their brother (my husband) who had financed it, and so they shamelessly demand a share from it. I therefore have to endure some of their improper behaviors but most importantly, I politely ask him (my husband) to talk to his people so that they stop interfering with my projects, which has in turn given me peace of mind.

The other respondent had this to say on the same subject during the FGD:

There are many individual differences and personal preferences between me and my spouse which we have both tried to understand one another and strike a balance for the sake of coexistence and ensuring our own good psychological well-being. For example, my spouse prefers his food prepared in a particular way, which I personally don't like but have tried my best to do it his way. This sort of understanding has greatly improved our relationship.

Forgiveness

Infidelity was found to be one of the threats to the stability of most marriages. When such cases arose, the affected spouses encouraged one another to be open on the reasons that led to their infidelity as a way of trying to prevent the vice from recurring in future, hence guaranteeing reasonably good level of psychological wellbeing among married couples as one of the respondents put it during the FGD:

It is important for the cheating spouses to be open to their spouse on the reasons that led to their infidelity as a way of trying to prevent the vice from recurring in future, hence guaranteeing good level of psychological wellbeing among married couples. The problem is that none of the cheating spouses is usually willing to open up unless they are caught. From the stories I have heard first hand, those that have been caught only survived the threat of a crumbled marriage because of revealing to their partners because they cheated in the first place and promising to stop the habit.

Domestic violence also came out as another cause of low levels of PWB among married couples in the research area. Whenever disagreements arose, some spouses resorted to physical, verbal and other forms of domestic violence, hence leading to low PWB levels on their spouses. Those that have been victims of domestic violence have used forgiveness as the only viable solution to ensuring their PWB was not adversely affected. The following were the words of one of the respondents during the FGD:

Many a times when I was very low psychologically was because of domestic violence. I remember at one time; my husband came home drunk and started battering me for reasons he couldn't even explain even after sobering up. One time I was so hurt and ran away to my parents and stayed there for a whole month. However, he later came with his parents and asked for forgiveness and let's just say that the rest is history. He eventually stopped drinking and that has really helped stabilized our marriage.

Guidance and Counselling

The third strategy was seeking guidance and counseling on need basis. This was found to be an effective strategy used by some married couples in the CAN as a way of increasing their level of psychological well-being. Some of these sessions were formally organized by the Catholic Men Association (CMA) and the catholic Women Association (CWA) through regularly organized meetings, seminars, workshops and training sessions at parish, deanery and diocese level to sensitize their members on how to maintain good levels of psychological well-being in their respective marriage. Through such forums, members of CMA and CWA in the research area have greatly benefitted and thus sustained their otherwise crumbling marriage life. The following were the sentiments of one of the respondents during the FGD:

There are some challenges that arise in a marriage that the concerned parties cannot resolve on their own no matter how educated they are. For instance, I am a teacher while my wife is a nurse but we have visited a professional counsellor on two occasions already when we faced two challenges several years back, though I will not go into details. The bottom-line however is that we seek external support. On the first occasion we involved parents from both sides to settle our problem and on the second occasion, we sought services of a marriage counsellor. This has really help us maintain good levels of psychological wellbeing in our marriage.

Consultation of professional counsellors, parents, relatives and god-fathers and priests in one's sub-parish was also found to be the option for some of married couples in the CAN whenever they faced challenges in their marriages that were affecting them negatively. Through guidance and counselling from the said sources, some respondents admitted to restoring good levels psychological well-being hence saving their respective marriages from crumbling. The following were the comments of some of the respondents:

Whenever things got tough in our marriage to the extent that I was very low emotionally I usually take remedial steps to ensure I am okay psychologically. This involves seeking the services of professional marriage counsellors. Their counselling sessions have really help to sustain our marriage and I would recommend it to anyone who is having challenges of any kind in their marriage. In our case, we benefitted from some training sessions that CMA and CWA organize in our parish and sometimes deanery level. A few years back, I attended one that was organized by the archdiocese of Nairobi and it was an eye-opener because very relevant issues were discussed by the facilitator, who was a certified counselling expert.

In a rejoinder, another responded had this to add:

The first person we run to whenever our marriage is troubled are our god-parents, who normally give us valuable insight into finding lasting solutions to the problems we face. However, when the problems are beyond our godparents to handle, we usually seek advice from our parish priest. Both have really kept our psychological well-being intact despite the numerous challenges we have faced in the seven years of our marriage.

Tolerance and Understanding

Spouses respecting one another was also found to be an important strategy that was embraced by spouses for the sake of good psychological well-being. This entailed respecting one's personal preferences, beliefs, choice of friends, hobbies and other things that normal human beings may not have the same taste or preferences. Accommodating such differences was responsible for good levels of PWB among some of the married couples in the research area, going by the sentiments of one of the respondents during the FGD thus:

At the early stages of our marriage, phones were a constant of conflict between me and my partner to the extent it was impacting negatively on the psychological well-being of both of us. For example when the spouse's mobile phone contained password in their SMS, WhatsApp, photo gallery and all over such that someone can't access it. This raised red flags and fears of infidelity. These obviously lowers the trust one has towards the spouse. We later resolved to have no passwords in our phones and this did the trick of restoring love, trust and respect for one another, which explains why our psychological well-being is okay.

Trusting One Another

Maintaining mutual trust was another strategy that played a significant role in ensuring high levels of psychological well-being among married couples in the CAN. Some of the sampled couples achieved this through reciprocation of good deeds and rare acts of kindness as one of the respondents said. Lack of trust and respect for each other leads to low psychological well-being. For example, my wife used to get angry the moment she heard or saw me laughing or smiling with other my female colleagues at the job place. These sentiments were echoed by another respondent as follows:

External forces like gossips threatens my psychological well-being for example there was once when he (the husband) was called by his friend and told him that his wife was cheating on him, by sleeping with female choir members, slept in pubs and took beer.

Divine Intervention

Seeking divine intervention was also another strategy that was utilized by majority of the sampled couples in the research area to deal with cases of low psychological well-being. Whenever they encountered challenges that negatively affected their PWB, some addressed this through normal prayers, special prayers, novenas, reciting the rosary, holding communal prayers, celebrating holy mass and partaking of the holy communion and fasting. One of the respondents had this to say during the FGD:

In my marriage, we believe in spiritual intervention in everything we do. Whenever any member of our family encounters a pressing problem affecting them psychologically, we all revert to prayers like praying the holy rosary or reciting novenas.

All these spiritual forms of intervention played a significant role in restoring high levels of PWB among married couples in the research area. The following sentiments from some of the respondents alludes to this:

Once in a while, we usually ask our parish priest to celebrate holy mass in our family residence and truth be told, this has kept every single member of our family in good psychological state.

The same was supported by another respondent thus:

We regularly hold communal prayers since we believe that a family that prays together stays together. Once we pray together before going to bed, each of us is able to table his issues to the almighty God and we believe the good status of psychological well-being in our marriage is God's response to our prayers.

DISCUSSION

It was found in this study with respect to the fourth research question that married couples in the CAN majorly relied on six strategies to maintain high levels of psychological well-being thus; maintaining constant good communication, understanding and tolerating one another, seeking forgiveness, seeking guidance and counseling and seeking divine intervention. These findings are in agreement with those of a number of prior studies related to the current study.

For instance, the study by Njeri (2020) agrees with findings of this study in the sense that it asserted the role of communicating challenges among married spouses has been found to elucidate that the advantage of marriage is low when both couples are working, which marks poor marital stability. On the other hand, the economic opportunity hypothesis maintains that by women working it brings progressive results into the relationship as women are in a position to slow down the financial burden in marriage by supporting their partners. Thus, women participating in labour force may result into more psychological well-being level or may increase divorce or poor marital satisfaction due to their income.

Seeking guidance and counseling was a strategy used by respondents of this study. This is supported by Hewison, Casey and Mwamba N. (2023) whose study asserted that

"If you're still having challenges in your marriage or fear that divorce might be imminent, consider counselling or couples therapy. This can be a helpful way to work through problems you might have and develop new skills that will strengthen your marriage. Seeing a psychologist can help them resolve conflicts effectively, get to know each other better, and set new goals as a married couple. If you aren't sure where to look, ask your primary care provider for a referral to a qualified professional in your area. You can also check with your workplace. See if you (or your partner) have access to an employee assistance program (EAP), which can often direct you to initial help or provide a referral. If you and your partner share faith, you might also consider meeting with a trusted religious leader"

Results of this study also found understanding to be an effective strategy to manage psychological well-being among married couples. However, (Njeri (2020) notes that education is a tool that builds self-confidence, understanding, independence and brings sense of individuality in women. It has helped women gain emotional strength and mental maturity so that they can be accountable and make more independent decisions and facing life with more confidence and resourcefulness (Kamla, 2006). The problems arise when married couples have different levels of education, which could be a source of concern in terms of its impact on psychological well-being among the concerned parties.

Seeking divine intervention was also found to be an effective strategy that is utilized by respondents in the CAN to address their psychological well-being. These findings are supported by those of Hook & Worthington (2009) who asserted that religious practices helps married couples to adjust positively in their marriages. The same is reiterated by Sperry (2010) whose study indicated that the level at which people are involved in religious practices and Christian counselling are considered as predictive criteria for a successful marriage.

Just like the present study, (Zakaria & Ibrahim, 2022) asserted that although marriage can be a protective factor in avoiding social problems, the drug abuse issues at an early phase, especially within 1 to 5 years of marriage, can cause risk and conflicts in the household. Both studies are therefore highlighting the importance of specific interventions for women whose husbands are drug-addicted to remain alert and aware of the risk of domestic abuse like seeking guidance and counselling, tolerance and forgiveness.

On the question of issues that lead to low psychological well-being among married couples, findings of this study are in unison with those of several previous researches. For instance, (Marziah et al., 2020) as cited in (Zakaria & Ibrahim, 2022) asserted that marital satisfaction is characterized by several predictive factors such as communication style and life adjustment significantly affect the quality of marriage and psychological well-being for young couples 1-10 years in marriage in Malaysia.

In the same vein, Abd. Majid and Hudin, (2017) proved the marriage duration, especially the first five years, young couples, and communication style are catalysts for divorce problems. Financial circumstances were also often associated with marital instability (Dew & Steward, 2012). This factor therefore is undeniably a trigger for couples to have low psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of empirical evidence arising from data that were collected in this mixed methods investigation, the major conclusion arrived at is that the six strategies used by married couples in the CAN are responsible for the high-level marital stability that was recorded while those with low level marital stability do not employ the six strategies to keep their levels of psychological well-being in check.

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