



Attitude Towards Pre-Marital Counselling Among Undergraduate Students of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji sikap mahasiswa di Universitas Ambrose Alli, Ekpoma, terhadap konseling pranikah dan meneliti apakah jenis kelamin dan religiusitas memengaruhi sikap mereka terhadap konseling pranikah. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh kebutuhan untuk memahami persepsi generasi muda terhadap layanan konseling sebagai langkah pencegahan terhadap tantangan dalam pernikahan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode survei deskriptif dengan melibatkan 273 mahasiswa sebagai populasi sampel. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan kuesioner yang dikembangkan sendiri. Rata-rata (X) dan standar deviasi (S.D) digunakan untuk analisis deskriptif, sementara uji-t untuk dua sampel independen digunakan untuk menguji hipotesis penelitian pada tingkat signifikansi 0,05. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa di Universitas Ambrose Alli memiliki sikap negatif (restriktif) terhadap konseling pranikah. Selain itu, jenis kelamin dan religiusitas tidak memiliki pengaruh signifikan terhadap sikap tersebut. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa persepsi negatif terhadap konseling pranikah di kalangan mahasiswa dapat menghambat mereka dalam memanfaatkan potensi preventif dan informatif dari layanan tersebut. Oleh karena itu, direkomendasikan agar konselor bimbingan dipekerjakan di semua institusi pendidikan tinggi untuk memberikan layanan orientasi dan informasi mengenai konseling pranikah kepada mahasiswa. Temuan ini mengimplikasikan perlunya intervensi institusional untuk mengatasi kesalahpahaman dan mempromosikan relevansi layanan konseling.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the attitudes of undergraduates at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, towards premarital counseling and examined whether gender and religiosity influenced their attitudes towards premarital counseling. The research was motivated by the need to understand the perceptions of young adults regarding counseling services as a preventive measure for marital challenges. The study adopted a descriptive survey method, involving 273 undergraduates as the sample population. Data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire. The mean (X) and standard deviation (S.D) were utilized for descriptive analysis, while t-test statistics for two independent samples were employed to test the research hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. The findings revealed that undergraduates in Ambrose Alli University exhibit a negative (restrictive) attitude towards premarital counseling. Additionally, gender and religiosity were found to have no significant influence on these attitudes. The study concludes that the negative perception of premarital counseling among students may hinder their ability to benefit from its preventive and informative potential. It is recommended that guidance counselors be employed in all tertiary institutions to provide students with orientation and information services regarding premarital counseling. These findings imply the need for institutional interventions to address misconceptions and promote the relevance of counseling services.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Following secondary education, postsecondary education is a crucial part of education. It may be characterised as a tool for bringing about good change in a knowledge-based, rapidly emerging economy and as an investment in human capital. It may be viewed as a catalyst to quicken a country's political, socioeconomic, and human growth. This is due to the fact that no country can develop its human capital past a certain point. Previous research made the observation that a society that is developed or educated is one in which there is a sufficient number of qualified individuals, each of whom has a position that is appropriate for advancing the civilization (Bello et al., 2023; Ndayebom & Aregbesola, 2024; Ofor-Douglas, 2023). Therefore, it is impossible to overstate the value of postsecondary education in a developing nation like Nigeria. The goals of tertiary education as clearly spelt out by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2013 under the National Policy on Education are to: (a) contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training; (b) develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society; (c) develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment; (d) acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society; (e) promote and encourage scholarship and community service; (f) forge and cement national unity; and (g) promote national and international understanding and interaction. In keeping with these objectives, a lot of parents frequently enrol their kids in the top schools to provide them the tools they need to become independent and self-sufficient. In addition, a lot of parents send their kids to religious institutions to make sure they learn the values and practical skills required for marriage and the workforce.

Pre-marital counselling is a crucial avenue for receiving therapeutic services. It is the kind of counselling that primarily addresses issues and goals related to the husband-wife dynamic (Ebid et al., 2021; Zidan, 2022). Counsellors might assist married couples in strengthening their marriages by using this technique. Marriage counsellors might help couples, even in the case of divorce, split and settle down effectively while also making sufficient provisions for their children following the divorce (Halim et al., 2024; Nasir et al., 2021). Premarital counselling involves educating and intervening with prospective couples. It's a kind of therapy intervention that's done with engaged couples. Premarital education is a process of skill development intended to provide couples knowledge on how to strengthen their union after marriage. Counsellors who work with individuals who are preparing for marriage support them in their marital preparations through this kind of counselling (Mohammed Sedek et al., 2022; Tohamy et al., 2023). Through the use of this counselling approach, prospective couples may get a knowledge of the expectations of marriage and married life, enabling them to make the necessary preparations in advance.

Premarital counselling has several benefits, all of which are succinctly outlined by Premarital counseling has several benefits, all of which are briefly outlined by previous research. Premarital counselling helps couples mentally prepare for the obstacles that come with marriage, which is beneficial and essential for family life (Al-Qahtani et al., 2019; Hamed et al., 2022; Kamel et al., 2019). Additionally, it enables students to be prepared for such obstacles and know how to deal with them should they arise. As a result, certain marital issues may now be easily avoided or effectively addressed when they do arise—a circumstance that might not be achievable if couples did not receive proper premarital counselling. By definition, attitude is an internal psychological condition that directs conduct. It alludes to an inside condition through deeds and speech. An individual's attitude is mostly influenced by their experiences and how they respond to novel circumstances; it is not an innate or instinctive phenomena (Kamel et al., 2019; Mohammed Sedek et al., 2022). As a result, attitudes are developed through experience, and both internal and external circumstances have the power to alter them. Stated differently, attitude in this study refers to undergraduates' attitudes, dispositions, and feelings towards premarital counselling. As a result, young people frequently approach premarital counselling with conflicting emotions. Although many see its potential benefit, there is also the belief that our love is exceptional and that we don't need it, especially in this hectic time of year (Al-Qahtani et al., 2019; Kamal Habib et al., 2024). Others may come with trepidation and defensiveness, afraid that the counsellor will suggest that the marriage is unwise. Consequently, many youths put up various attitudes towards premarital counselling.

Attitude towards premarital counselling (PMC) among students has been investigated in studies (Mohamed et al., 2015; Nasr Eldeen et al., 2021). Knowledge and attitude of 200 medical students in Fayoum University towards premarital care services; through health education intervention in the form of lectures and brochures that address important issues of premarital care in Egypt. The involved students were interviewed by using closed-ended questionnaires, which were distributed twice, just before the intervention and then after 2 months. A special scoring system was used. Total knowledge score showed significant improvement from 62.44 ± 4.98 to 69.37 ± 3.43 , especially as regards components of reproductive health, contents of premarital counseling and the role of PMC in prevention of certain diseases especially hepatitis (significant increase in correct response from 58 to 72%). The main source of knowledge was TV

(65.5%). Total attitude score showed significant improvement from 7.89 ± 1.1 to $13.1 \pm .81$ especially favorable attitudes towards importance of PMC services, convention to receive such services, and refusal of marriage person with untreated infectious diseases with increase in the percentages to reach 94, 92.5 and 90%, respectively. They found that many of the medical students in Fayoum University have positive attitude towards Premarital Counselling (PMC). In the recent past, the western societies such as Europe and America underwent a radical change in their attitude towards premarital counselling (PMC). The weight of evidence from social attitude and behaviours among the Western adults and youths towards premarital counselling (PMC) is appalling. Also as a result of this sexual revolution in the Western world, sex became glorified and commercialized, and all types of behaviours such as nudity, homosexuality, premarital counselling (PMC) and the likes were being experimented on. In some cases, even legalised pornographic magazines, novels and a large number of books have been published. Previous research explained that in contemporary times, Nigerian youths have joined in the sex revolution in Europe and America (Elrayes et al., 2023; Karimisani & Esmaili, 2015). The impact of alien ideas and cultures, mass communication and conditions of urban life on the behaviour and attitude of Nigerian adolescents towards premarital counselling (PMC) cannot be over emphasized. There has been extensive interest, inquiry and curiosity in sexual activities outside marriage. Youths are exposed to sexual stimuli in magazines, television and the movies to a greater extent than before, thereby creating a general trend towards liberated attitude and values that encourage open discussion on sexuality, premarital counselling (PMC) once considered a taboo.

Previous research examined the relationship between parental style and attitude toward premarital counselling (PMC) among students of Payame Noor University in Iran 2013 (Bakhtiari et al., 2024; Chehreh et al., 2021). This study is a kind of descriptive and correlation survey. Sample size is 90 students (65 male and 25 female). In this research they used simple random sampling. The data was collected by Measure of Parental Styles, and attitude toward premarital counselling (PMC) sex was collected by attitude toward premarital counselling (PMC) Questionnaire (Samy Mohammed Emam et al., 2024; Yavuzer & Doğanülkü, 2024). Results showed that there was a positive relationship between parental style and attitude toward premarital counselling (PMC) among students ($r=0.263$, $p<0.05$) and the results of regression analysis showed that parental style had significant predictive power in attitude toward premarital counselling (PMC) ($r=0.069$, $p<0.05$). Moreover the results showed that there was a significant difference between male and female students in attitude towards premarital counselling (PMC).

How gender, age differences and religion influence the premarital counselling (PMC) attitude of young married people. A sample of 100 youths, (50 males and 50 females) between the ages of 25-35 years was randomly drawn from the population and a 28-question standardized questionnaire to assess some aspects of their sexual behaviour was administered. Statistical analyses of data involved one-way Anova and Descriptive statistics which indicated that there were no differences gender-wise [$F(1,98)=0.36$, $P>0.05$], age-wise [$F(1,98)=0.461$, $P>0.05$] and religion-wise [$F(2,96)=1.8$, $P>0.05$] in premarital counselling (PMC) attitude of youths. The attitude towards premarital counselling (PMC), marriage and family size among school going adolescents in Pokhara valley in 2006. The study included 400 students carried out from 170 from 8 government schools and 230 from 8 private schools of the classes X, XI, and XII of the Pokhara valley. The self-administered questionnaire prepared in Nepali method was applied for collecting information from randomly selected students in each selected school. Out of total, 57.5 % students were boys and 91% were in age group of 15-18 years. About two-fifths (41%) of the students did not agree with the statement that "premarital counselling (PMC) is not good". This attitude was higher in boys than girls (46% versus 34%) and in government school students than private school students (57% versus 33%). More than half (62%) students preferred arranged marriage, and it comprised 73% of girls and 53% of boys. Almost all of the students (97%) were of the opinion that a couple should not have children outside marriage. It was concluded that male students were more liberal towards premarital counselling (PMC) than girls. Also, religion of students was found to be a predictor of students' attitude towards premarital counselling (PMC). The novelty of this study lies in its focused exploration of attitudes toward pre-marital counseling among undergraduate students of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State—an area that remains underexplored in academic literature. This study investigates how factors such as cultural beliefs, awareness, perceived benefits, and personal experiences shape students' attitudes toward engaging in pre-marital counseling. It delves into the role of educational exposure and social influences in fostering positive or negative perceptions of pre-marital counseling among young adults. The research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the barriers and enablers to adopting pre-marital counseling, highlighting its potential as a tool for promoting healthy relationships and reducing marital conflicts. By identifying the unique challenges and opportunities in addressing pre-marital counseling awareness among undergraduate students, this study contributes new insights into effective strategies for integrating counseling education into university curricula and broader community engagement programs. The findings

are expected to offer practical recommendations for educators, counselors, and policymakers to enhance the acceptance and accessibility of pre-marital counseling as part of youth development initiatives.

2. METHOD

The descriptive research design using the survey was adopted in this study to examine attitude toward premarital counseling among undergraduates in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. This research design was employed because the variables of study were not manipulated and opinions of a representative sample was sought and presented in their natural setting to draw inferences. The population of this covered all the 27,388 regular students in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma in the 2015/2016 session. The proportional sampling technique will be used to select 1% of the total number of students across each of the faculties in the institution. Hence, 273 students were selected from at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. This makes up a total of 273 students to make up the sample size. The instrument used for the collection of data was basically a researcher developed questionnaire titled: "Students' Attitude Pre-marital Counselling Questionnaire - SAPREQ". The questionnaire was designed to obtain the necessary information needed from secondary school students. The questionnaire was divided into Sections A and B. Section A contains questions relating to the demographic characteristics of the respondent such as their sex and religion status while Section B was designed to elicit information on respondents' opinion about the sexually transmitted infections. The instrument had 4 items and was based on a four point rating scale: Strongly Agreed (SA) - 4 Agreed (A)- 3 Disagreed (D)-2 and strongly Disagreed (SD)-1.

The face and content validity of this instrument would be carried out by two experts in Guidance and Counselling. The test-retest method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. This method was used to obtain responses from a total of 25 undergraduate students on part-time studies in Emaudo annex, Ekpoma. The instrument were administered to them and re-administered after a few days to the same set of students in a pilot study. Their responses from the first and second pre-test administration were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation technique. The result of the coefficient yielded an r-value of 0.87 which shows that the instrument is reliable. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires to students with the assistance of departmental executives (excos) in various faculties of the institution. Research question 1 was analysed using mean (\bar{X}) and standard deviation (S.D). A mean score of 2.50 was used as the benchmark for determining students' attitude to the items. This was obtained by adding up the four (4) likert type scales (Strongly Agreed - 4, Agreed 3, Disagreed -2 and Strongly Disagreed-1) and dividing the sum of the scales (10) by the total number of scales (4) to give 2.50. Hence, items with a mean score of 2.50 or higher were considered as been agreed upon while the items with less than 2.50 were taken otherwise. On the other hand, the t-test statistics for two independent samples was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 alpha level. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS@version 20) was used to analyse the data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Table 1. Mean and Standard deviation on attitude towards premarital counselling among undergraduates in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma

S/n	Items	N = 273		
		\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
1	Pre-marital counseling allows one to express, discuss and realistically modify his/her expectations for marriage	2.30	1.114	Disagreed
2	Pre-marital counseling helps one to think carefully about other types of marriage, other than the traditional marriage	2.56	1.028	Agreed
3	Pre-marital counseling offers an opportunity to make informed decisions about Pre-marital sexual activities	2.44	1.113	Disagreed
4	Pre-marital counseling helps the individual to build a happy, fulfilling and successful marriage	2.41	1.118	Disagreed
5	Pre-marital counseling improves marriage and reduce incidence of family disintegration and divorce	2.47	1.054	Disagreed
6	Pre-marital counseling encourages one either to break engagement or to delay marriage until the difficulties are solved	2.22	0.993	Disagreed

S/n	Items	N = 273		
		\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
7	Pre-marital counseling helps one to prevent marital problems and difficulties, which could make life miserable	2.46	1.011	Disagreed
8	Lack of knowledge of Pre-marital counseling services causes one not to be aware of their need for Pre-marital counseling	2.46	0.955	Disagreed
9	Pre-marital counseling is good and should be encouraged	2.40	1.021	Disagreed
10	Pre-marital counseling should be done only in churches	2.37	1.011	Disagreed
Overall mean (\bar{X}) = 2.41				

* Significant mean ($\bar{X} \geq 2.50$)

Result in Table 1 shows that majority of the students disagreed on all the items except item 2 at a mean score of 2.30 to 2.47 and agreed with item 2 at a mean score of 2.56. The overall mean score of 2.41 is less than the criterion mean of 2.50 (i.e. $2.41 < 2.50$). Hence, it is concluded that the attitude towards premarital counselling among undergraduates in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma is negatively skewed. This implies that undergraduates in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma have negative (restrictive) attitude towards premarital counselling.

Table 2. t-test Summary Analysis on Attitude Toward Premarital Counselling (PMC) among Students in Ambrose Alli University With Respect to Their Gender

Variables	Gender	(n=273)	\bar{X}	S.D	t-cal.	p-value	Remarks
Attitude towards PMC	Male	151	2.40	0.52	0.282	0.778	Retain null hypothesis
	Female	122	2.46	0.50			

Result in Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 0.282 is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between male and female students on their attitude towards premarital counselling in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma is retained. This implies that sex (gender) has no significant influence on attitude towards premarital counselling in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma among undergraduates in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma.

Table 3. T-Test Summary Analysis on Attitude Toward Premarital Counselling (PMC) among Students in Ambrose Alli University with Respect to Their Religion

Variables	Religion	(n=273)	\bar{X}	S.D	t-cal.	p-value	Remarks
Attitude towards PMC	Christian	214	2.41	0.53	0.219	0.827	Retain null hypothesis
	Non-Christian	59	2.42	0.45			

Result in Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value of 0.678 is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between Christian and non-Christian students on their attitude towards premarital counselling in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma is retained. This implies that religion has no significant influence on attitude towards premarital counselling in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma among undergraduates in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma.

Discussion

Results shows that undergraduates in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma have negative (restrictive) attitude towards premarital counseling. This is not in line with previous findings found that many of the medical students in Fayoum University have positive attitude towards premarital Counselling (PMC) while similar research found that the attitude of Western adults and youths towards premarital counselling (PMC) is appalling (Al-Nood et al., 2016; Rusterholz, 2023). Results showed that there is no significant difference between male and female students on their attitude towards premarital counselling in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. This is in line with the findings of previous research who investigated the influence of family type on adolescents' attitude to pre-marital counselling (PMC) in Ekiti State, Nigeria and found no significant difference in attitude to premarital counselling (PMC) between male and female adolescents (Aziz & Abdulla, 2021; Sabbah et al., 2023). On the other hand, previous research stated the premarital counselling (PMC) attitudes and behaviour of youths in relation to socio-economic background of their

families in the larger Bungoma District, Kenya and found that gender influenced the attitude of the youth towards premarital counselling (PMC) (Abdo Ahmed Hassan & Sayed Bayomi, 2024; Moeti et al., 2024). Results shows that there is no significant difference between Christian and non-Christian students on their attitude towards premarital counselling in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. This corroborates findings of previous research who examined how gender, age differences and religion influence the premarital counselling (PMC) attitude of young married people in Nigeria and found no differences; religion-wise in premarital counselling (PMC) attitudes of youths (Bener et al., 2019; Muluha Keverenge et al., 2020). On the other hand, previous research examined religiosity, perception and attitude towards condom use and premarital counselling (PMC) among Christian youths in Ile Ife, Nigeria (Mar et al., 2019; Osuafor et al., 2018). Religiosity was found to be a significant predictor of attitude towards condom use, knowledge of HIV/AIDs prevention and premarital counselling (PMC). The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the attitudes of undergraduate students at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, toward premarital counseling. The research highlights that while many students recognize the potential benefits of pre-marital counseling, such as fostering healthier relationships and reducing marital conflicts, various cultural, religious, and individual factors significantly influence their willingness to participate. The study reveals that students' attitudes are shaped by a complex interplay of cultural beliefs, peer influence, awareness levels, and perceived relevance of counseling in addressing pre-marital issues. While a considerable number of respondents demonstrate a positive outlook on pre-marital counseling, misconceptions and stigma surrounding its purpose and necessity remain prevalent.

These findings underscore the need for targeted awareness campaigns and educational programs within universities to dispel myths and promote the importance of pre-marital counseling as a proactive measure for building stable relationships. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how socio-cultural and educational factors impact youth perceptions, providing a foundation for developing strategies to enhance the acceptance and accessibility of counseling services among young adults. Limitations of this study include its focus on a single university, which may not fully represent the broader population of Nigerian undergraduate students. Additionally, the influence of external factors such as media representation of counseling or broader societal trends was not extensively explored. Recommendations for future research include expanding the study to other universities across different regions to obtain a more comprehensive perspective on attitudes toward pre-marital counseling. Future studies could also investigate the role of parental influence, religious institutions, and social media in shaping students' perceptions. Exploring gender-based differences in attitudes toward pre-marital counseling and examining effective strategies to integrate counseling education into university curricula are also recommended. This study highlights the importance of fostering a supportive environment that encourages students to view pre-marital counseling as a valuable resource for personal and relational growth, ultimately contributing to stronger and more resilient communities.

4. CONCLUSION

The attitudes of students toward pre-marital counseling at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, indicate that while most students understand the potential benefits of such counseling in fostering healthier relationships and reducing future conflicts, their acceptance of these services is still influenced by various cultural, religious, and individual factors. These findings highlight that awareness levels, traditional beliefs, social influences, and perceived relevance play significant roles in shaping students' attitudes toward pre-marital counseling. Pre-marital counseling continues to face challenges, including stigma and misconceptions that may hinder student participation. However, the positive outlook held by a majority of students provides an opportunity to enhance acceptance through targeted educational efforts. This study reveals that a holistic approach that integrates cultural, religious, and educational aspects can be an effective solution in promoting pre-marital counseling as a proactive step toward strengthening relationships among the younger generation.

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