

# **Influence Of Christian Marriage Seminars In Mitigating Extramarital Affairs In Nakuru County, Kenya**

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## **Abstract:**

**Background:** Marriage seminars have become a defining feature of the modern day Christian Church with limited empirical basis. The purpose of the study was to establish the influence of Christian marriage seminars on extra-marital affairs in Bondeni Sub-location, Nakuru County- Kenya.

**Materials and Methods:** The study was anchored on the Sound Relationship House Theory. Descriptive survey design was adopted. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 310 married members from six Churches that run pre-marital counseling and couple seminars/programmes. Data was collected through questionnaires and interview guide. The data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques, and more specifically, the Chi Square and Spearman's Rank Correlation tests at 0.05 significance levels.

**Results:** It was found that there was a significant inverse relationship between incidences of extra-marital affairs and skills gained from marriage seminars, with most of the respondents of the view that marriage seminars were effective. Through marriage seminars, the Churches were able to reduce extra-marital affairs in the study area.

**Conclusion:** Church need to give greater prominence to marriage seminars/programmes.

**Key Word:** Marriage Seminars, Extra-marital Affairs, Sound Relationship House, Church.

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Date of Submission: 04-12-2023

Date of Acceptance: 14-12-2023

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## **I. Introduction**

Marriage is the most intimate adult bonding, serving as a primary source of affection, love and support (Rokach & Philibert-Lignieres, 2015). Extra-marital affairs often communicate that a spouse does not value and honour their commitment to marital relationship. This may arouse jealousy in the offended spouse because of an awareness of an actual threat to the marriage. It also arouses feelings of betrayal. This stems from the concept of exclusivity which characterize marital union, at least, within the Church. This concept of exclusivity runs through several Bible verses in the Old and New Testaments. For example, in the Book of Proverbs, husbands are exhorted to enjoy the wife of their youth and let her breast satisfy them always (Cf. Proverbs 5:18-23, NIV). It is, also, echoed in the teachings of Jesus Christ on marriage and divorce (Cf. Matthew 19:9, NIV).

Mugweni, Pearson and Omar (2015) observed that extra-marital affairs occur in a cycle that manifest in four stages. According to this scholar, dissatisfaction with aspects of the marriage (Stage 1) pushes the spouse, usually the husband, into the "arms of another woman." The dissatisfaction is described as either accute (the product of temporarily unmet needs in the marriage) or chronic (perpetual) dissatisfaction with the spouse. They find that, depending on the source of dissatisfaction, different types of extra-marital affairs develop (Stage 2). These are: a sexual affair with a sex worker, a casual friend, a regular girl-friend/boy-friend or a concubine. Once the affair commence, it is kept secret through deception and other forms of discreteness in order to avoid raising suspicion, usually to protect the marriage from falling apart (Stage 3). The cycle ends with having the dissatisfaction being addressed (Stage 4). Two possible outcomes are associated with this stage: either (a) the extra-marital affair is terminated when the unmet need is fully addressed in the marriage or upon the affair being discovered; or (b) the needs remain unmet in the marriage and the cycle of extra-marital affair continue whether or not it has been discovered. The current study sought to analyze the effectiveness of marriage seminars in breaking this cycle.

The study applied the Sound Relationship House (SRH) Theory developed by Gottman (1999). The theory draws from research findings on the risk and protective factors associated with stable and satisfying marriages (Gubbins, Perosa & Bartle-Haring, 2010). Henderson, Robey, Dunham and Dermer (2013) depict the SRH as one comprising of friendship, fondness and admiration, and holding an emotional bank account.

Gottman (1999) present this theory using an illustration of a house. According to Gottman, trust and commitment are the pillars for sound relationship. The SRH focuses on cognitive love maps or one's knowledge of his/her spouse, consideration for one another, and how couples either turn toward or away from one another in

times of non-conflict (Henderson, Robey, Dunham and Dermer (2013). Gottman (1999) asserts that having a strong foundation is necessary to move to the next levels of the house. The elements identified by Gottman (1999) often form the content that characterize Christian pre-marital counselling, marriage seminars/programmes organized in Church, and the examples that is expected of a spiritual leader.

In a study of extra-marital affairs undertaken among married Zimbabweans, Mugweni, Pearson and Omar (2015) found that, relationship dissatisfaction played a key role in the prevalence of extra-marital affairs. The dissatisfaction with aspects of the marriage that Mugweni et al. (2015) discussed in the cycle of extra-marital relationships, has been linked to a number of predisposing factors. In a study undertaken by Jeanfreau, Jurich and Mong (2014), it was found that lack of quality time, inability to resolve conflict, and a lack of attention within the marriage, were the main predisposing factors to an affair.

Johnson (2012) examined clergy and seminary couple reactions to marital satisfaction, trustworthiness, and positive feelings toward a spouse, before and after participation in a program called Strong Marriages Successful Ministries (SMSM). Results from his study indicated significant increases in trustworthiness and positive feelings toward a spouse following participation in the SMSM programme. From this study, it can be inferred that such programmes mitigate predisposing factors linked to extra-marital affairs by drawing couples closer to each other in line with SRH. However, the study did not explain the relationship between the programme and extra-marital affairs or marital chastity.

Rhoades' (2015) study examined the effectiveness of a couple-based relationship education programme called "Within Our Reach." This was based on analysis of secondary data from the federal Supporting Healthy Marriage project in the United States of America. Couples were randomly assigned to receive "Within Our Reach" and associated services or to a no-treatment (treatment-as-usual) control group. Those assigned to "Within Our Reach" reported better couple and individual outcomes on 8 of 12 outcomes measured - such as higher relationship happiness, more warmth and support, more positive communication, less negative behaviour and emotion, less psychological abuse, less physical assault (for men), lower psychological distress (for women), and less infidelity. They were also less likely to report that their marriage was in trouble than those assigned to the control group. The study by Rhoades, therefore, provides evidence of the role of couple seminars and programmes in mitigating extra-marital affairs. However, the study was undertaken in the western world whose cultural dynamics differ in many ways from the Kenyan context.

Murray (2006) undertook a survey of 167 clergy on the topics they considered important in marital enrichment programme organized by their Church. It was found that the top five most important topics were, in order of importance: commitment to the marriage, communication skills, attitudes and beliefs towards marriage, conflict resolution, and the importance of spending time with one's partner. Murray's study, therefore, suggests that couple seminars enhance commitment to marriage, equip couples with communication skills and enhance relationship behaviours that mitigate extra-marital affairs.

Worthington, Ripley, Hook, Miller and Crawford (2007) evaluated a couple seminar that adopted a hope-focused approach to couple therapy. They describe hope focused approach as aimed at re-routing negative marital relational patterns, giving couples a safe space in which to bond with each other and providing hope that things can change for the better. They found that the programme helped people remain positive by promoting a strategy of building love, commitment and faithfulness. Four reasons were found to explain its efficacy, two of which underpins Christian marriage seminars: a focus on hope and focus on repairing damaged emotional bond through forgiveness anchored in the Scriptures. It can, thus, be inferred from these findings that couple seminars run by the Church fosters love in marital unions that keep extra-marital affairs at bay. However, whether such interventions were effective in the Kenyan context was the subject of the current study.

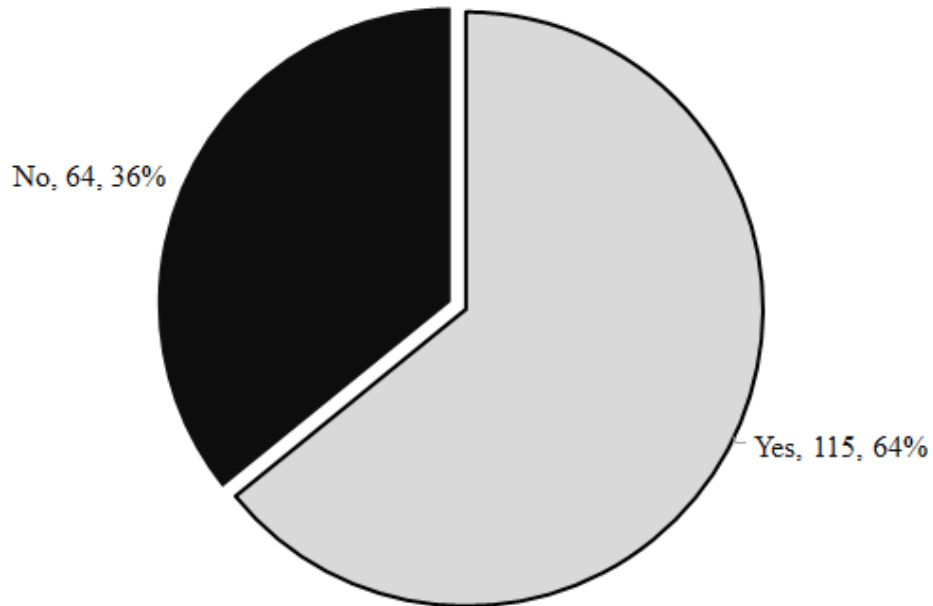
Marriage seminars are being undertaken by Churches as a form of intervention to either prevent the beginning of extra-marital affairs or bring an end to the cycle. According to Goddard (2010), attending marriage seminars give access to new insights and provide great opportunities for learning and growing in the role of being a spouse and how to maintain marital chastity. Many Churches organize such seminars as part of their marriage and family enrichment benefits for their flock. It is a form of post-marital counselling, which Moeti (2015) identified as a factor that can restore broken marriages and prevent engagement in extra-marital affairs. However, these claims are not supported by compelling research evidence. The prevalence of extra-marital affairs in Kenyan society, raises the question about the effectiveness of marriage seminars in mitigating the vice.

## **II. Material And Methods**

Descriptive survey design was used. Six Churches that run pre-marital counseling services were selected for the study. The study location was Bondeni Sub-location in Nakuru County, Kenya. A sample of 310 respondents comprising of Pastors and Church members was used. Purposive sampling technique was applied to select Churches in the study area that conduct marriage seminars. Qualitative data entailed opinion of respondents with regards to the nature and effectiveness of marriage seminars. Data was entered and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

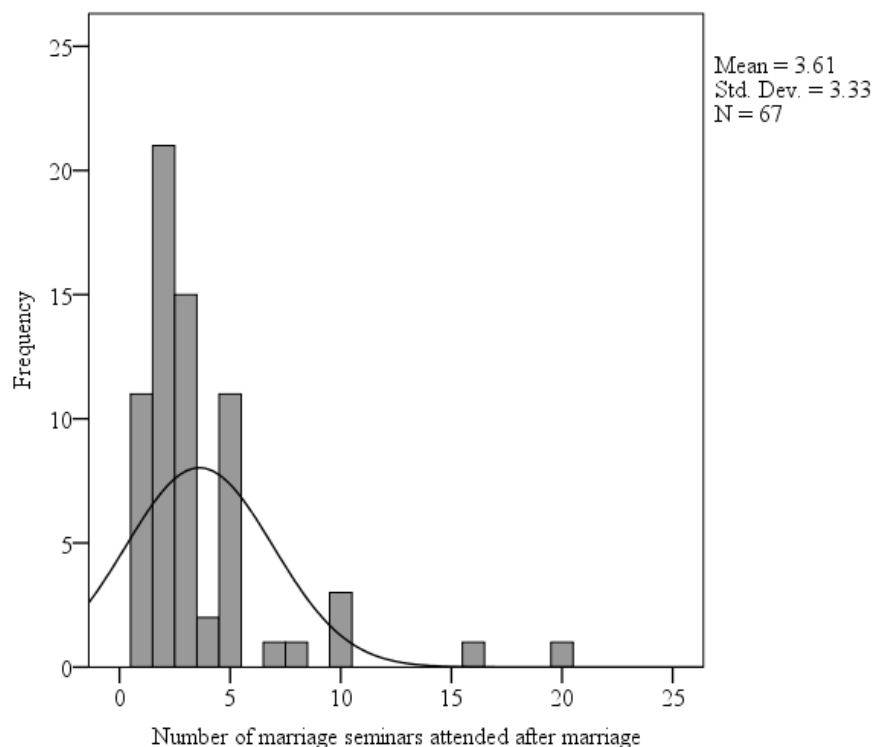
### III. Result

The study sought to establish whether respondents attended marriage seminars. The distribution of respondents by attendance of marriage seminars is shown in figure 1. The figure shows that 64% of the respondents had attended marriage seminars/programmes and 36% had not. Therefore, most of the respondents attended marriage seminars/programmes.



**Figure 1 Attendance of marriage seminars after marriage**

The distribution of respondents by number of seminars attended is shown in figure 2. As per figure 2, participants had attended on average about 4 seminars with the number of sessions deviating from this average by about 3 seminars ( $M=3.61$ ,  $SD=3.33$ ). The findings showed that, the minimum seminars/programmes attended was 1 and the maximum was 20. The figure depicts a positively skewed distribution suggesting that most of the respondents attended less than four seminars.



**Figure 2 Distribution of respondents by number of seminars attended**

The study sought to establish respondents' views on the role of marriage seminars in influencing their marital relationships in terms of mitigating occurrence of extramarital affairs. The frequencies and percentage distribution of the respondents on a 5-point scale are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Role of marriage seminars in mitigating extramarital affairs**

Role of marriage seminars		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Attending marriage seminars have helped me be faithful to my spouse	F	4	3	13	59	36	115
	%	3.8%	2.3%	11.5%	51.1%	31.3%	100.0%
Marriage seminars have helped me think more positively of my spouse	F	5	0	8	55	47	115
	%	4%	0.0%	7.1%	47.6%	41.3%	100.0%
I have become happier with my marriage because of the insights I have gained from marriage seminars	F	4	4	19	50	38	115
	%	3.1%	3.1%	16.5%	44.1%	33.1%	100.0%
Marriage seminars have helped me work on my marriage without resorting to extramarital affairs	F	10	4	12	49	40	115
	%	8.8%	3.2%	10.4%	43.2%	34.4%	100.0%
By attending marriage seminars, I have gained practical skills on how to keep extramarital affairs off my marriage	F	8	3	10	49	43	115
	%	7.3%	2.4%	8.9%	43.5%	37.9%	100.0%

The table shows that 51.1% and 31.3% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed, respectively that, attending marriage seminars/programmes helped them to be faithful to their spouse. However, 11.5% of the respondents were neutral, 2.3% of the respondents disagreed and 3.8% strongly disagreed. The results suggest that attendance of marriage seminars/programmes promoted marital faithfulness.

Concerning whether marriage seminars/programmes helped respondents think more positively of their spouse, 47.6% of the respondents agreed and a further 41.3% strongly agreed. Some 7.1% of the respondents were neutral but 4% of the respondents strongly disagreed. Thus, participating in marriage seminars was perceived by the respondents as having a positive influence on marriage.

In terms of effect of marriage seminars/programmes on marital happiness, 44.1% and 33.1% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed, respectively that they were happier with their marriage because of the insights gained from marriage seminars/programs. However, 16.1% of the respondents were neutral whereas 3.1% of the respondents disagreed and another 3.1% strongly disagreed. Therefore, most of the respondents considered participation in marriage seminars/programmes as a factor leading to happier marriages. This suggests that, couples participating in marriage seminars/programmes were able to avoid predisposing factors, such as lack of attention within the marriage, discussed by Mugweni et al. (2015) as precursors of extra-marital affairs. This means that marriage seminars equipped participants with skills on how to manage and resolve issues in their marriages without resorting to extra-marital affairs.

Respondents' views were sought with respect to whether marriage seminars/programmes have helped them work on their marriage without resorting to extra-marital affairs. The results revealed that 43.2% of the respondents agreed and a further 34.4% of the respondents strongly agreed. However, 10.4% of the respondents were neutral whereas 3.2% and 8.8% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. Therefore, most of the respondents were in agreement that marriage seminars/programmes have helped them work on their marriage without resorting to extra-marital affairs. In terms of whether respondents gained practical skills on how to keep extra-marital affairs off my marriage by attending marriage seminars/programmes, 43.5% and 37.9% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed, respectively. However, 8.9% of the respondents were neutral whereas 2.4% of the respondents disagreed and a further 7.3% strongly disagreed. Thus, majority of the respondents gained practical skills on how to keep extra-marital affairs off their marriage by attending marriage seminars. The results suggest that marriage seminars were effective in reducing risk of indulgence in extra-marital affairs.

In order to test the significance of marriage seminars in mitigating extra-marital affairs, Spearman's rank correlation analysis was performed on duration and impact of marriage seminars on marital relationships. The findings are presented in Table 2.

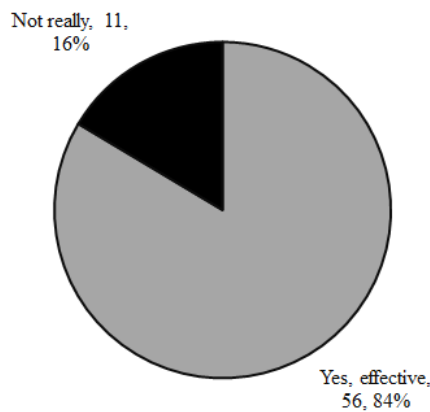
**Table 2: Correlation between marriage seminars and extra-marital affairs**

Spearman's rho		1	2	3
1. Incidences of extra-marital affairs	Correlation Coefficient	1.000		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.		
	N	115		
2. Skills gained from marriage seminars	Correlation Coefficient	-.792**	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	
	N	115	132	
3. Number of marriage seminars attended	Correlation Coefficient	-.204	.192	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.109	.123	.

	N	115	66	67
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 2 shows that there was a statistically significant inverse relationship between incidences of extra-marital affairs and skills gained from marriage seminars ( $r=-.792, p<.01$ ). The table also shows the correlation between incidences of extra-marital affairs and number of seminars attended was also negative but weak ( $r=-.204, p>.05$ ). This means that the relationship between incidences of extra-marital affairs and number of seminars attended was not statistically significant.

The study sought to establish respondents' attitudes and perceptions towards the role of marriage seminars in mitigating extra-marital affairs. Out of the 115 respondents who attended marriage seminars, a total of 67 participants responded to the question. Of this, results presented in Figure 17 shows that 84% were of the view that marriage seminars/programmes were effective. However, 16 percent of the respondents did not think so.

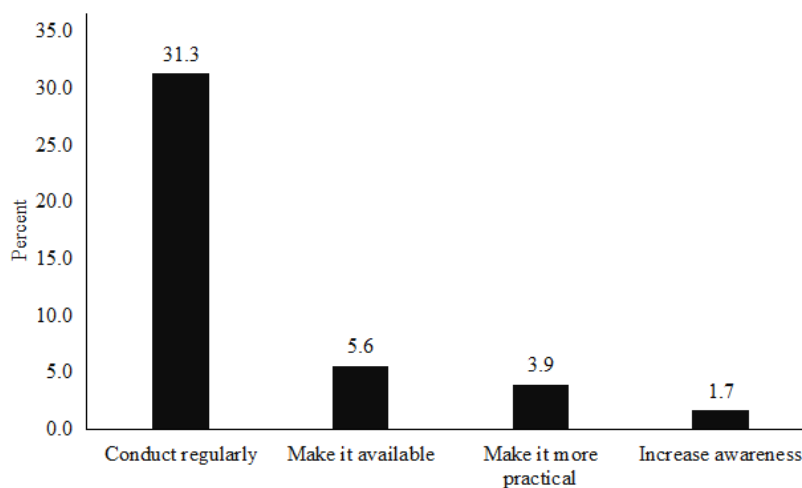


**Figure 3 Perceived effectiveness of marriage seminars in mitigating extra-marital affairs**

Some of the sample verbatim responses were as follows:

- “They do a lot because you gain more knowledge and skills which you did not have before.”
- “Very effective because (1) they rekindle the fire (2) Restore relationship (3) Provides healing of wounds.”
- “Yes as you understand one another in weaknesses and another's behaviour you adjust your views and accept one other.”
- “Yes it is very effective, it helps you to understand how you can stay together.”
- “Yes. Because through seminars we interact with others for more practical experience.”
- “Some point yes it all depends on the attitude from both partners.”
- “Extra-marital depends with the behavior of a person.”

Respondents' views were sought on how marriage seminars could be improved to be more effective. The results are presented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4 Suggestions on how marriage seminars can be improved**

Out of the 115 respondents who had attended a marriage seminar before, 57.5% made no suggestions and were excluded from the analysis in Figure 4. The figure shows that out of the 42.5% that remained, most of the respondents suggested that the seminars be conducted regularly (31.3%); be made more available (5.6%) and more practical (3.9%). Further, 1.7 percent of the respondents also suggested that awareness about the seminars should be increased.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The purpose of the study was to establish the influence of Christian marriage seminars on extramarital affairs in Bondeni Sub-location, Nakuru County- Kenya. There was a statistically significant inverse relationship between incidences of extramarital affairs and skills gained from marriage seminars/programmes. It was evident from the study that marriage seminars/programmes are important in mitigating extramarital affairs. This is, especially, because couples who did not undergo pre-marital counselling have an opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to manage issues in their marriages without resorting to extramarital affairs. The Church should consolidate gains made through pre-marital counseling programmes by undertaking marriage seminars/programmes. Another research that compares the trends, values and behaviours between Church goers and non-Church goers should be conducted to determine whether significant differences exist.

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