

### **Abstract**

Premarital counseling (PMC) is a program designed to equip couples with strategies that can facilitate healthy marriages and relationships. This research sought to examine topics that participants who received premarital counseling thought were not adequately covered for them and topics participants believed would help strengthen their marriage. Data was collected from 241 Ghanaian participants who identified as being married, separated or widowed. Each participant was allowed up to three open-ended responses. There were a total of 531 responses out of a maximum of 723 potential responses. Participants for this study were either living in Ghana (74%) or were living abroad (26%). The majority of the participants were female (61%) with an average age of 36 years (Range 31-76). At the time of the study, the majority of the participants were married (69%), Cohabiting (28%), Divorced (2%), or Widowed (1%); however all participants had taken part in PMC at some point in time before marriage. The qualitative data were coded using the Thematic Analytic approach (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Two researchers coded for the question “Name three topics that were not adequately covered for you” and two different researchers coded for the question “Which topics would help strengthen your ongoing marriage?”. After the coding was completed it was reviewed by a fifth researcher to determine the reliability among coders for the questions. Results showed that 14 themes emerged from the coded data. The top three topics that participants reported as receiving insufficient training on doing PMC were sex/intimacy, finances and parenting difficulties. The top three topics proposed for in depth information during PMC were values in marriage, finances, and sex/intimacy. Findings from this study show empirical evidence for the importance of coaching couples about these topics to prepare and promote healthy behaviors in intimate relationships and marriages. Findings from this study will benefit marriage counselors by providing empirical data on topics to prioritize during premarital counseling sessions. Secondly, findings will help develop/improve current premarital counseling training manuals in Ghana. Future Cross-cultural research is recommended. Further research and coding are currently being completed on the remaining questions from the survey.

*Key Words:* Premarital Counseling, Ghana, Marriage, Relationships, Intimacy, Thematic Analytic Approach, Qualitative Research