



ISSN: 0976-3031

Available Online at <http://www.recentscientific.com>

CODEN: IJRSFP (USA)

International Journal of Recent Scientific Research
Vol. 9, Issue, 5(A), pp. 26481-26485, May, 2018

**International Journal of
Recent Scientific
Research**

DOI: 10.24327/IJRSR

Research Article

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF PREMARITAL COUNSELLING FOR ADDRESSING DIVORCE ISSUES IN KERALA

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24327/ijrsr.2018.0905.2066>

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 16th February, 2018

Received in revised form 12th

March, 2018

Accepted 20th April, 2018

Published online 28th May, 2018

Key Words:

Social milieu, Psychosocial intervention,
Premarital Counselling, Mantra,
Empowerment

ABSTRACT

The rising number of divorces in Kerala is a telling pointer to the deterioration of family relations in the State. The social milieu prevailing today indicates that stability of families in Kerala is heading towards a staggering state of affairs. Healthy marital relationships are the launching pad of any society which drives the younger generation to think and act progressively, potentially and productively. As long as an individual is plagued by teething marital problems, he/she no longer turns out to be a performer. A resourceful State like Kerala cannot afford to let off families from breakdown on the grounds of strained relationship between life partners. Here comes the relevance of a psychosocial intervention like premarital counselling.

Marriage counselling is not just about what to do or what not to do. More than that, it is a therapeutic process which focuses on education, empowerment and exposure to social values for sustaining harmony and happiness of couple relationship. The article aims at developing an awareness of the influence, indispensability and advantages of premarital counselling among unmarried youth and their parents.

Life partners should learn to know each other, the one and only mantra to happiness. How to underplay sentiments is indeed a subtle skill. Also that realization of realities is a natural mechanism to unknot the cord of problems. Sex education is another major component to be looked into. One cannot expect a modern day youngster to be too liberal or accommodative to outdo any kind of marital problems sans some kind of educative training and empowerment. Premarital counselling is a very effective technique to create healthy attitudes in the new generation for overpowering marital issues most pragmatically.

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INTRODUCTION

The rising number of divorces in Kerala is a telling pointer to the deterioration of family relations in the State. The social milieu prevailing today indicates that stability of families in Kerala is heading towards a staggering state of affairs. "From 8,456 divorce cases in 2005-06 to 38,231 in 2011, the statistics from recent months indicate an increase in the number of broken families. Incidentally, Kerala accounts for 1.96 lakh of the nation's 23.43 lakh divorced or separated women". (Times of India). The news paper also reports that "Statistics spanning over 2010-2011 point to an alarming increase in the number of suicides and divorces in Kerala." "Most of the divorce cases filed at court are by couples who have lived together for less than five years". (ibid)

Healthy marital relationships are the launching pad of any society which drives the younger generation to think and act progressively, potentially and productively. As long as an individual is plagued by teething marital problems, he/she no longer turns out to be a performer. Obviously the Nation will have to pay a high price if the youth of the country becomes vulnerable. A resourceful State like Kerala cannot afford to let off families from breakdown on the grounds of strained relationship between life partners. What are the common marital problems which play havoc with family life? What can be done to address the real issues? Here comes the relevance of a psychosocial intervention like premarital counselling.

Marriage counselling is not just about what to do or what not to do. More than that, it is a therapeutic process which focuses on education, empowerment and exposure to social values for sustaining harmony and happiness of couple relationship. Some

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of the practices like Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) have demonstrated good results in restoring mutual faith and attachment.

Modern age is technology savvy, characterized by fast life, declining family values, increased consumerism and craze for opulence. Space for others in one's bosom is getting more and more constricted, whereby the individual loses accommodative thoughts and empathy. One of the direct consequences of such a state is the unbridled play of emotions and ego which may often go haywire. But it is very well within the reach of anyone to train and discipline himself/herself by taking valid lessons from a consummate counsellor. Professional social workers should not turn a blind eye to the problem and they have a great responsibility to take up the causes of premarital counselling in a big way.

It is worthy to note that Christian community follows a mandatory law which insists on premarital counselling for solemnizing marriage. Other communities should take a cue from such progressive approaches to ensure the stability and health of family relations. The article aims at developing an awareness of the influence, indispensability and advantages of premarital counselling among unmarried youth and their parents.

Marriage is much more than wedlock

Marriage is not just about a man and a woman agreeing to live together; nor is it about an exciting eventful family ceremony; nor is it an accreditation to let loose lust. More than anything else, Indians view it as a sacrosanct occasion which lays the bedrock of credibility, bonding and platonic love between husband and wife. Obviously these are great values which change lifemates into soulmates. The whole edifice of family stability arises therefrom.

“The concept of marriage has three aspects:

1. Social concept of marriage: Social concept has its roots in cultural traditions.
2. Individual or personal concept of marriage: Personal concept is based upon individual liberty.
3. Legislative & judicial concept of marriage: legal concept is enshrined in statutory marital laws.” (H Gopal, 2014).

“Marriage is taking the relationship with your sole-mate to a definite & socially acceptable conclusion. It creates a legal bond of relationship which binds the two parties for a life. Healthy and happy family is outcome of successful marriage”. (Prof. Jayashree Khandare, 2015). “Indologists look upon Hindu marriage as a sanskara, having three objects of dharma (fulfillment of religious duties), rati (sex gratification), and praja (procreation). Marriage performed for dharma was called dharmik marriage, while one performed for sexual pleasure was regarded as adharmik marriage”. (Puja Mondal)

“Muslim marriage, called nikah, unlike the sacramental marriage of the Hindus, is considered to be a civil contract. Its important objectives are: control over sex, procreation of children and perpetuation of family, upbringing of children, and ordering of domestic life. S.C. Sarkar also maintains that marriage among Muslims is a civil contract. But it will be wrong to say that Muslim marriage has no religious duty. It is devotion and an act of ibaddat”. (ibid)

“The three objects of Christian marriage are believed to be: procreation, escape from fornication (sex relations without marriage), and mutual help and comfort”.(ibid)

Whatever be the conventional philosophies and sociological perspectives attached to marriage of different communities, the fact is that serious damage to family relations is sure to create repercussions which can even lead to social anarchy. Marriage is the linchpin of social life, for it acts as the driving force behind the growth, development and social progress of society. Mutual trustworthiness of couples is more important than the type of marriage. It is immaterial whether the marriage is arranged one or it is love marriage or inter caste marriage or inter religious marriage. What ultimately matters is the outcome.

Objectives and design of research

- To make known to the unmarried youth and their parents the influence and indispensability of premarital counselling in modern age.
- To help them realize the value of mutual respect and mutual acceptance in between married couples.
- To convince them that premarital counselling is not against religious or non religious beliefs.
- To inform the new generation that pre marital counselling is highly instrumental in addressing divorce issues to a large extent.
- To exhort Professional Social Workers to promote premarital counselling among all communities in a big way.

The study is based on quantitative research using stratified random sampling. Primary data was collected from three sections of population - Christians, Muslims and Hindus. The tools used were Observation, Questionnaire and Case studies.

Analysis of the data collected

Primary data was collected from fifty five respondents belonging to three communities, Hindus (42%), Muslims (23%) and Christians (35%) from various parts of Kerala.

Given below is the analysis and interpretation of the data from married Christian population who have undergone premarital counseling.

Table 1 Age frequency - Christian population

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20-25	5	41.7	41.7
	26-30	3	25.0	66.7
	31-35	4	33.3	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0

Three age groups, 20 to 25, 26 to 30 and 31 to 35 were identified from Christian community. Table 1 shows the age distribution. 41.7% was from the age group, 20 to 25, 25% from 26 to 30 while 33.3% from 31 to 35.

Highly encouraging is to note that 73.7% of the respondents state that pre marital counselling is highly beneficial (Table 2), while 89.5% endorse that sex education is very much useful (Table 3).

Table 2 Is premarital counselling beneficial?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Highly Beneficial	14	73.7	73.7	73.7
	Somewhat beneficial	5	26.3	26.3	100.0
	Total	19	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 Usefulness of Sex education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very much	17	89.5	89.5	89.5
	Somewhat	2	10.5	10.5	100.0
	Total	19	100.0	100.0	

On the question, whether premarital counselling fosters values of mutual respect and mutual acceptance (Table 4), 78.9% responded most positively while 21.1% answered that they endorsed to some extent, which can neither be undermined nor regarded as negative. The fact is that, this 21.1% gives an element of hope, for their frame of mind can be effectively worked out to make them more receptive to the merits of pre marital counselling.

Table 4 Would counselling foster values of mutual respect and mutual acceptance?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very much	15	78.9	78.9	78.9
	Somewhat	4	21.1	21.1	100.0
	Total	19	100.0	100.0	

One of the phenomenal results of study is the understanding that premarital counselling has been educative enough to inculcate values for sharing family responsibilities equally between husband and wife. 78.9% gives the answer as 'very much' and 21.1% answered the question as 'somewhat'. (Table 5). Persuasive intervention will be able to make amenable changes in this 21.1% for the whole hearted acceptance of the services of pre marital counselling.

Table 5 Whether premarital counselling been educative enough to inculcate values for sharing family responsibilities equally between husband and wife?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very much	15	78.9	78.9	78.9
	Somewhat	4	21.1	21.1	100.0
	Total	19	100.0	100.0	

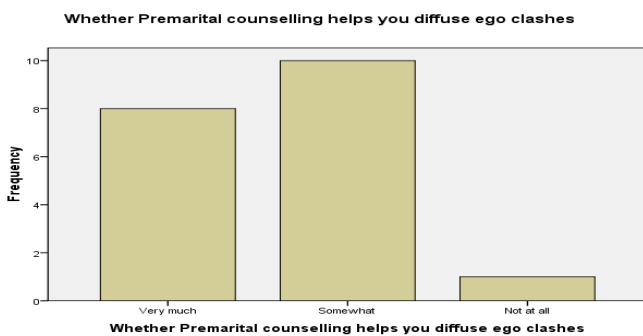


Figure 1 on diffusing ego clashes

Table 6 Whether Premarital counselling helps you diffuse ego clashes?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very much	8	42.1	42.1	42.1
	Somewhat	10	52.6	52.6	94.7
	Not at all	1	5.3	5.3	100.0
	Total	19	100.0	100.0	

The encouraging figures illustrated in Table 6 and Figure 1, give confidence that premarital counselling would be highly instrumental in diffusing ego clashes. Figure 1 & 2 bring out the supportive role of pre marital counselling in doing away with role conflicts.

Whether premarital counselling enables you to do away with role conflicts

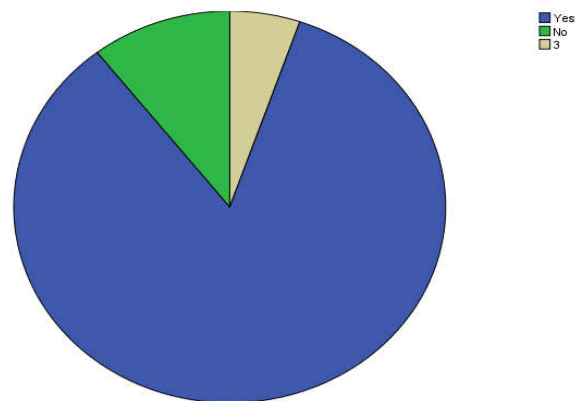


Figure 2 illustrates the role of pre marital counseling in doing away with role conflicts

Analysis of the data collected from married Hindus and Muslims who have not undergone premarital counseling shows that the respondents are very much in favour of it.

Figure 3 portrays that 65.22% of the Hindu respondents entirely endorse that pre marital counselling fosters values of mutual respect and acceptance. Significantly the remaining 34.8% have not expressed negative view, rather accepted the advantages of pre marital counselling albeit partially, which is also a good pointer. All the Muslim respondents agree that premarital counseling will strengthen family ties (Table 7) and that religious beliefs do not stand against it. (Table 8).

Table 7 Would premarital counseling strengthen family ties?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	12	100.0	100.0	100.0
	No	0	0	0	0

Table 8 Would religious beliefs stand against premarital counseling?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	12	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Yes	0	0	0	0

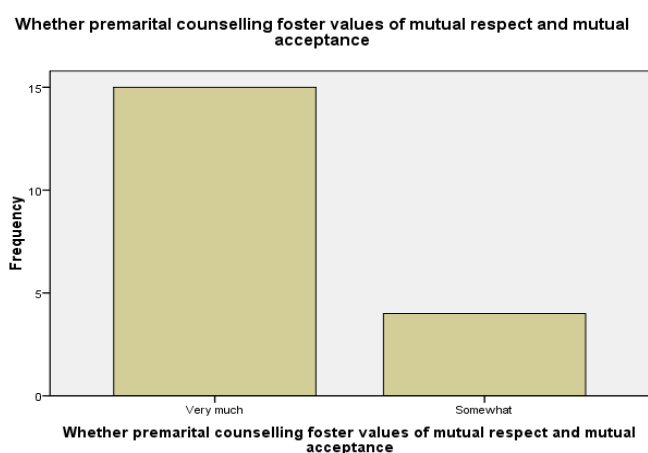


Figure 3 portrays that 65.22% of the Hindu respondents very much endorse that pre marital counseling fosters values of mutual respect and acceptance

The above figures apparently reflect the progressive mindset of Hindus and Muslims who acknowledge the merits of premarital counselling.

78.3% of Hindus are unaware of premarital counselling and 4.3% cannot make use of premarital services due to its unavailability in nearby areas. But 17.4% don't show interest in premarital counselling, which is a matter to be seriously looked into. The same attitude is evident among Muslims, illustrated in Figure 4. Social workers should be optimistic with a view to changing the psyche of this small population through effective intervention.

Table 9 Reasons for not availing of the services of premarital counseling – Hindus

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not aware of Premarital Counseling	18	78.3	78.3	78.3
Not Interested in Premarital counseling	4	17.4	17.4	95.7
Unavailability of Premarital counseling services nearby	1	4.3	4.3	100.0
Total	23	100.0	100.0	

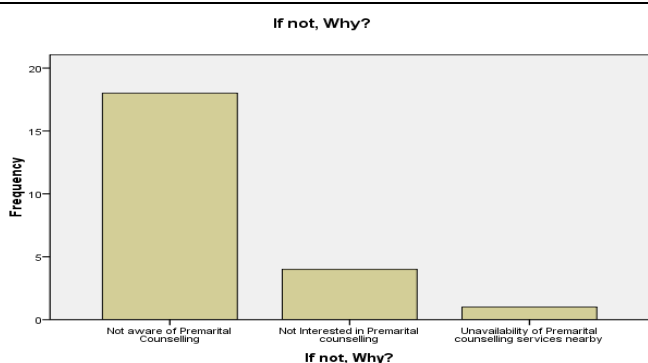


Figure 4 Reasons for not availing of the services of premarital counseling – Muslims

Success of marriage

“Research has found that couples are 31% less likely to divorce if they get some type of premarital training prior to marrying. Couples who participate in premarital training report a 30% higher level of satisfaction and enjoyment than those who do not participate. Going through premarital training is an

important step in safeguarding your relationship”. (Susan Goertz, 2017) The current study reveals that a large section of young population values the merits of premarital counselling. This is a factor which is really conducive for making premarital counselling legally obligatory for all communities. Why not we exploit the potential before us?

The concept of premarital counselling is so supple that it can harbour religious beliefs as well as non religious beliefs evenly. “Pre-marital counseling is the smartest decision that any couple can make, and you don't need to be religious to try it. No matter how cohesive a couple may be, problems and differences will inevitably arise, so pre-marital counseling really functions like the best insurance policy a couple could ever purchase”. (Seth Meyers Psy.D, 2011). It is not beliefs and practices which are to be regarded as cardinal in marriage; in lieu what truly matters are mutual trust and understanding which invariably demand supportive intervention. More than anything else what is expected from today's youngsters is genuine tête-à-tête. “For many couples, there exists an assumption that they are on the same page about faith and values. However, without having the explicit conversation around what they believe, it's hard to know for sure, and those assumptions can cause big problems down the road”. (Spencer Fox, 2018). “Taking the time to go through pre-marriage counseling can give you the skills to effectively communicate with your partner, proactively handle potential problem areas in your relationship, and strengthen your mutual respect for one another. This builds the foundation on which a strong and happy marriage can thrive”. (Source: pixabay.com).

In this regard Social Workers have to intensify their efforts by providing the right kind of pre marriage services to the youth. “There are a lot of different steps that social workers can take to promote happy and supportive marriages. Their ability to provide, encourage, advocate and collaborate with other premarital counseling providers can assist in targeting a higher population of couples.” (Amanda Kepler, 2015).

The spotlight of premarital counselling turns on

- Educating unmarried youth about healthy sexual relations.
- Extirpating misgivings and misunderstandings about sex.
- Helping them realize the value of mutual respect and mutual acceptance.
- Empowering them to strengthen complaisant skills for diffusing ego clashes.
- Teaching them about the responsibilities of taking multiple roles in life without conflicts.
- Creating awareness about genetic counselling.
- Enlightening them about sharing equal responsibilities between husband and wife with regard to family matters like cooking, child care etc.
- Giving lessons for strengthening mutual trust.
- Enlightening the necessity of spending a little time with all family members every day.
- Encouraging the couples to be transparent in between them and to facilitate free communication without reservation.
- Laying emphasis on the necessity of getting equal importance in decision making.

CONCLUSION

Marriage is like a fragile glass; if not handled carefully it will fall down and break; once broken it goes beyond your leeway. Life partners should learn to know each other, the one and only mantra to happiness. How to underplay sentiments is indeed a subtle skill. Also that realization of realities is a natural mechanism to unknot the cord of problems. Sex education is another major component to be looked into. One cannot expect a modern day youngster to be too liberal or accommodative to outdo any kind of marital problems sans some kind of educative training, enlightenment or empowerment. Premarital counselling offers such services and helps the new generation develop healthy attitudes for overpowering marital issues most pragmatically. Hence it is the responsibility of Professional Social Workers to promote premarital counselling among all communities. "Marriage is a commitment, a bond, a covenant like no other". (Monica Sager, 2018).

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How to cite this article:

Ramesh Chandran N.S.2018, Exploring The Potential of Premarital Counselling For Addressing Divorce Issues In Kerala. *Int J Recent Sci Res.* 9(5), pp. 26481-26485. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24327/ijrsr.2018.0905.2066>
