PROFESSIONALISM IN PENTECOSTAL AND CHARISMATIC MARRIAGE AND FAMILY COUNSELLING IN CAPE COAST METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to find out the level of professionalism exhibited by Pentecostal and Charismatic marriage and family counsellors in Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. Thirty seven (37) marriage counsellors from forty (40) Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in the metropolis were selected for the study. It was a descriptive study where questionnaire was used to collect the data. The study revealed that, normally the counselling works were left under the care of elders, deacons and deaconesses who mostly do not have the needed training and qualification. The study also recommended that the Christian Council of Ghana, Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, the Catholic Secretariat and the National Association of Charismatic Churches should organise regular in-service training for Christian marriage and family counsellors. Only professionally certificated counsellors should be employed to conduct counselling in churches.

Keywords: Professionalism, Marriage and Family counselling

Background to the Study

Every human being, regardless of race, religion or socio-economic background, is beset with innumerable problems and challenges to be solved from cradle to death (Taylor & Buku, 2006). Crabb (1997) asserted that Christianity does not automatically insulate one from everyday problems. Crabb argued further that some Christians believe that living according to biblical standards sometimes increases the severity of the everyday struggle. The apostle Paul admonished Christians to endure hardness (2 Timothy 2: 3-13, King James Version). However, Crabb posited that human suffering is sometimes related to unbiblical patterns of living.

At any time, individuals, couples or families can be confronted by uncertainties and life experiences which threaten to exhaust emotional and spiritual resources. The loss of loved ones, parent-teen conflicts, jobs, and marital problems are some common examples. While some individuals turn to a psychologist, social worker or psychiatrist, others want support and help from a spiritual context (American Association of Pastoral Counselors, 2010).

Spiritual counselling is almost as old as man. Early philosophers, priests and other representatives of religions and gods assumed the role of advising and counselling people in almost all known human societies (Taylor & Buku, 2006). Consulting priests and oracles for direction is still a common practice in many societies today. According to the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, the clergy have listened intently to personal problems for centuries, and have cultivated a spiritual counselling response to those who suffer from mental and emotional illnesses for ages. In Africa for instance, even professional counselling started somewhat in the form of Christian counselling, where Roman Catholic sisters, priests, pastors and Sunday school teachers were major guidance functionaries (Dankwa, 1981; Makinde, 1983; Pecku, 1991).

Antiri (2004) traced spiritual guidance from the Old Testament era during the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land. Moses acted as a judge and a counsellor. The
Israelites went to him to inquire from God (Exodus 18:13). He settled disputes among them and gave them guidance on God’s law from morning to evening. The counselling needs were so numerous and demanding that Moses himself received counselling from his father-in-law, Jethro, on how to effectively manage the Israelites (Exodus 18:12-15).

From the Christian perspective, the services of spiritual guidance and counselling in the Old Testament days were not limited only to the ordinary people. Biblical records reveal that counsellors were of service to the kings as well. Numbers 22: 1-7 mentioned that Balak, the king of the Moabites, sought for help from Balaam. Furthermore, Ahitophel and Hushai were much respected counsellors in the affairs of King David and Absalom (2 Samuel 15: 12; 2 Samuel 16: 21; 2 Samuel 16:23; 2 Samuel 17:1-11). King Nebuchadnezzar also enjoyed the services of counsellors (Daniel 3:2-3; Daniel 3:27). All manner of people were offered spiritual guidance in one way or the other.

Spiritual guidance and counselling were not limited to the Old Testament era. Essuman (2011) asserts that since the time of Jesus Christ, the church has been in the business of caring for its members through a number of activities including discipling and counselling. He opined that discipling and counselling have tremendous similarities because both discipling and counselling aim at helping the believer to become a better Christian, living by the tenets of the Christian principles. Moreover, a true Christian who disciples another, just as a counsellor, must be concerned with the total well being of the disciple (Essuman, 2011). Again, a disciple follows the steps of his master which is the equivalent of modelling in counselling. Essuman further argued that a client learns through modelling certain good behaviours of the counsellor. The Christian teacher and counsellor therefore serve as a model for the students or clients (Adams, 1970).

The importance Jesus gave to taking care of the counselling needs of the church is embedded in his very name and assignment on earth. He is the wonderful counsellor (Isaiah 9:6) who came to heal the broken hearted (Luke 4: 18-19). According to Essuman, the ministry of Jesus cared for the spiritual, health, mental, material, educational, social, and emotional needs of the church.

From the Christian point of view, Jesus Christ wants the church to be concerned for the body of Christ, Jesus commanded Peter to be a good shepherd to feed and care for the sheep as he did (John 10: 11-13; John 21:15-17). Peter also told the elders of the church to take care of the members of the church as the Lord commanded him (1 Peter 5: 1-4). Essuman opined that pastoral care derives from this command of taking care of the members of the church in every aspect of their lives. The holistic development of members of the church should therefore be a major concern of the shepherds of the flock.

In the days of the early church, the apostles deemed it necessary to appoint deacons to oversee the material and emotional needs of the church as they (the apostles) took care of their spiritual needs (Essuman, 2011). A functioning church therefore seeks the holistic welfare of its members (1 John 3:2). It is believed in the Christian circle that, the Apostle Paul, as well as Jesus, was concern about the marital needs of the church and subsequently counselled them on marriage and family life issues (Matthew 5:31-32; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Corinthians 7:1-17).

Christian counselling is one of the vital gifts to the church today. According to Foskett and Lyall (1988), it is counselling that has sustained the church from collapsing till today. Crabb (1997) posits that God ordained the local church as His primary instrument to tend the personal aches and pains of its members.

Demand for spiritually based counselling is on the rise (Antiri, 2004). Many people turn to the clergy for help partly because they cannot afford the services of secular counsellors. Again, because of the missionary nature of pastoral counselling, most Christian counsellors make every effort to ensure that services are available to those who seek them (American Association of Pastoral Counselors, 2010).

Commenting on the popular issues handled by Christian counsellors, Collins (1998) wrote that Christian counsellors might expect their clients to bring problems concerning prayer, doubt, doctrine, spiritual growth or guilt over sinful behaviour. However, according to Ogan and Ogan (2008), that is not the case. A survey found that only ten percent (10%) of pastoral counselling deals with religious issues such as prayer, doubt, doctrine, spiritual growth or guilt over sinful behaviour. More often, people sought Christian counselling services in areas concerning marriage and family tensions.
According to Ogan and Ogan (2008), this situation is not far from what pertains in Africa. Christian counselling in Ghana seems to follow a similar trend. A study by Antiri (2004) revealed that most issues brought to Christian counsellors in the Cape Coast municipality pertained to marriage and family issues. According to Ogan and Ogan, about 90% of pastoral counselling is directly or indirectly related to marriage and family tensions.

Statement of the Problem

Arnold (2007) stated that more than half of all marriages in the United States of America fail. The divorce rate is spiralling also in Africa (Ogan & Ogan, 2008). Ntreh (2010) posits that divorce has become a common phenomenon, among Christians in Ghana as well. Ntreh stated, for example, that 22% out of 2,199 customary marriages registered by the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) in 2005 ended in divorce. The statistics increased to 37% out of a total of 1,714 registered marriages in 2006. These figures show a 15% increase in divorce rate in just one year in Accra. Prince and Prince (1986) mentioned the wrong view of marriage among many people and inadequate preparation of partners for marriage as main causes of divorce even among Christians. Collins (2007) argued that it is good to offer premarital counselling to would-be couples since it has many benefits. If marriage is the basic unit of social structure (Pogrebin, 1983), then, a happy marriage will guarantee a happy family, church, community, nation, and world. It is therefore expedient to seek proactive measures to save the institutions of family and marriage from collapsing.

Ogan and Ogan (2008) have argued that non-Christians cannot salvage the failing institutions of marriage and family. Christians believe that marriage is an institution established by God and must be sustained by His Word (Oyedepo & Oyedepo, 1999). With about 70% of Ghanaians being Christians (International Religious Freedom Report, 2007; CIA-The World Fact Book, 2009), solving marriage and family problems among Christians could save many Ghanaian marriages and families from failing. Ogan and Ogan asserted that it is the church that can effectively save failing marriages and families. They however added that unfortunately, most people in the church also do not have a comprehensive view of the origins of problems in marriages and families and therefore cannot completely solve them. De Vogel (1986) asserts that it is becoming clearer that pastors seem to be far less able to take care of themselves and to help others. It can be deduced from the above studies that marriages are currently faced with problems.

Studies have shown that what teachers know and do are the most important influences on what students learn (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996). Again, highly effective teachers produce academically successful students and vice versa (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Therefore, how effective and competent the Christian marriage counsellors are can have influences on the success or failure of clients’ marriages and families, and may have lasting effects on their families and marriages. One may therefore wonder whether the Pentecostal and Charismatic marriage counsellors in Cape Coast Metropolis professionals or not.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to assess the marriage and family counselling services provided by Pentecostal and Charismatic churches of the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. Specifically, the study sought to find out the level of professionalism exhibited by the counsellors and identify some pitfalls of Christian counselling exhibited by the counsellors.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the level of professionalism exhibited by marriage and family counsellors of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the Cape Coast Metropolis?

2. What are the pitfalls (potential disasters) of Christian counseling in the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the Cape Coast Metropolis?

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was employed in carrying out this study. The descriptive survey design involves collecting data in order to test hypothesis or answer research questions concerning the current status of a phenomenon (Debrah, 2003; Gay, 1992). Polit and Hurgler (1995) added that, the
The descriptive survey design aims primarily at describing, observing and documenting an aspect of a situation as it naturally occurs. They added that the descriptive survey design provides an accurate picture of events. Babbie (1990) recommended the descriptive survey design for the purpose of generalising from a sample to a population so that inferences can be made about some characteristics, attributes, or behaviour.

The target population comprised all Christian counsellors in the 184 Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the Cape Coast Metropolis as provided by the headquarters of the Ghana Pentecostal Council (Council of Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches) and the Local Ghana Pentecostal Council of the Cape Coast Metropolis.

A sample size of 40 churches, representing 22% of churches in the study area was selected. A sample size of 40 churches was selected because, according to Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (1990), 10–15% of any population constitute a representative sample. The simple random sampling procedure was used to select the 40 churches. According to Sarantakos (1997), this type of sampling gives all units of the target population an equal chance of being selected. The sample unit were selected by using the table of random numbers. However, out of the targeted sample size of 40 marriage and family counsellors, the accessible sample size was 37. This indicates 92.50% return rate and this was due to the fact that three of the counsellors travelled outside the study area and could not be traced to collect their responses.

According to Gay (1992), all research studies involve data collection. The data of the study were collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was used because it is economical to use as far as time and funds are concern (Osuala, 2005). The questionnaire items were grouped into six sections with the first part dealing with the socio-demographic background information of the respondents. The rest of sections catered for each of the research questions.

The descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data collected. Specifically, the data were analysed through the computation of frequencies and percentages. This was done with the use of the computer software called Statistical Product for Service Solutions.

Results and Discussion

Level of professionalism of marriage and family counsellors of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches of the Cape Coast Metropolis

Table 1: Highest Level of Education of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SSS/SHS/O LEVEL/A LEVEL</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTC/Polytechnic/Any Diploma</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the highest level of education of the marriage and family counsellors in the Pentecostal and charismatic churches in the Cape Coast Metropolis who served as respondents for the study.

From Table 1, with regards to the counsellors highest level of education, 10 (27.0%) had either attained Senior Secondary School/Senior High School, O Level or A Level, and 16 (43.2%) had attained either Teachers’ Certificate ‘A’, Higher National Diploma (HND) or any other diploma. Also, Table 1 shows that 10 (27.0%) of the counsellors had attained a Bachelor’s degree whereas only 1 (2.7%) had a Master’s degree. Thus majority of the marriage and family counsellors in the Pentecostal and charismatic churches in the Cape Coast Metropolis who served as respondents for the study had attained either a Teachers’ certificate ‘A’, Higher National Diploma (HND) or any other diploma as their highest level of education.

This finding sharply contradicts with Christian marriage and family counselling under the auspices of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (2010), where the typical education for a pastoral counsellor requires a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university, a three-year professional degree from a seminary, and a specialized masters or doctoral degree in the mental health field (American Association of Pastoral Counselors, 2010). The American Association of Pastoral Counselors
added that as a result of this extensive study, pastoral counsellors are among the most educated of mental health professionals. This finding, however, agrees to a large extent with Antiri (2004) who found out that majority of pastors in the Pentecostals and Charismatic churches who conducted counselling had Teacher Training College as their highest level of education. Their responses also showed that only 1 (3.3%) of the counsellors had a direct education in counselling. The other 36 (97.3%) had their education in other disciplines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specialised professional training</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-service training seminars</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified counsellor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a counselling Association</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling activities evaluated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally, it can be seen from Table 2 that professionalism was compromised in the counselling activities of the respondents. For instance, as reflected in Table 2, only 8 (21.6%) of the counsellors had special professional training in counselling, indicating that 29 (78.4%) of the counsellors had no professional training in counselling. The Macmillan Education Limited (2002) defines a profession as a job that one needs special skills and qualifications to do. Ipaye (1983) opined that the counsellor must be well trained in the art of counselling and human relations. According to the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (2010), a typical education for a certified pastoral counsellor consists of study that leads to: a bachelor’s degree; a three-year professional degree; and specialized masters or doctoral degree in the mental health field. The training also includes a supervised clinical experience. This finding however does not meet this important characteristic of a profession according to Asamoah and Nyanteh (2002) and American Association of Pastoral Counselors (2010). This finding also confirms the assertion of DiCanio (1989) that only a limited number of the clergy are actually formally trained to handle psychological, emotional, therapeutic, marital or other types of counselling.

It can also be seen from Table 2 that only 18 (48.6%) of the counsellors had participated in in-service seminars, indicating that, more than half, 19 (51.4%) of the counsellors did not participate in any in-service training seminar for the period they have been counselling. This finding however does not seem to concur with the view of Collins (2007). Collins posited that most of the skills learnt by counsellors in the various training institutions get obsolete few years after graduation and that, counsellors like other professionals are to actively engage in in-service training and constant upgrading to be abreast with current skills and technology.

Similarly, Table 2 shows that only 3 (8.1%) of the counsellors answered that their counselling activities were evaluated regularly, indicating that the counselling activities of 34 (91.0%) of the counselling were not evaluated by any organization or association. This condition, again, does not concur to what pertains under the auspices of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, where counselling activities of members are evaluated on regular bases to either renew or annul their certificates. The general findings shown in Table 2 agree to a large extent with the assertion that professionalism tends to be weak in developing countries (Farrant, 1980). Also from Table 2, none of the counsellors, 0 (100%), were certified, and a whopping 34 (91.9%) did not belong to any counselling association. These findings are major compromises on professionalism (Farrant, 1980; Asamoah & Nyanteh, 2002; American Association of Pastoral Counselors, 2010).

Counselling, like other professions, has peculiar pitfalls which unsuspecting counsellors are likely to fall into. For instance, when counsellors visits their clients for prolonged hours or get overly involved emotionally with clients, there is the high tendency that the effectiveness of the counselling process may be reduced (Collins, 2007). Collins added that the counsellor’s attempt to start problem solving too early in the counselling process or becoming
judgmental of their clients may also reduce the
effectiveness of the counselling process. It is
therefore incumbent on counsellors to play their
roles tactically to avoid these unsuspecting
pitfalls. Counsellors’ responses to some pitfalls
in their counselling are shown in Table 3.

 Pitfalls of Christian counselling in the
Pentecostal and Charismatic churches of the
Cape Coast Metropolis

Every profession has its own peculiar
pitfalls (potential disasters) which unsuspecting
professionals fall into (Ogan & Ogan, 2008).
According to Collins (2007), counsellors can be
vulnerable if they are not on the alert. Collins
cautionsed counsellors to be especially aware of
counselees who might want to manipulate them
emotionally and resist feelings of sexual
attraction involving them and their clients.
Collins also cautioned counsellors not to start
problem solving too early, judge clients, and be
too much emotionally involved with clients. The
responses given by the counsellors are shown in
Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prolonged visits</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruct clients</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgemental</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly emotional</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsel with a theoretical framework</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsel with clearly defined goals</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsel along strict church doctrines</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up for one year</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrogation</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally, a look at Table 3
shows that there were some pitfalls in the
counselling activities of the counsellors to. As
shown in Table 3, 23 (62.2%) of the counsellors
visited their clients for prolonged hours for
counselling sessions whereas 14 (37.8%) did not
visit their clients for prolonged hours during
counselling sessions. It follows that majority of
the counsellors visited their clients for prolonged
hours during counselling sessions. Collins (2007)
perceives this finding as one of the six major
pitfalls of Christian counselling. He asserted that
visiting clients for prolonged durations has the
tendency to reduce the effectiveness of the
counselling process. He added that visiting is a
friendly activity that involves mutual sharing but
counselling is a problem-centred, goal-directed
conversation that focuses primarily on the
counsee’s needs.

Table 3 also shows that all the
counsellors, 37 (100%) gave instructions to their
clients on what they thought was right for them
to do during counselling sessions. Thus, all of
them were giving directions to their clients.
Collins (2007) admonished that counsellors must
have sufficient time and patience to listen to
clients, clarify the issues, and reflect on the
concerns of clients and help them to generate
options for solution to their problems rather than
directing clients to do what they perceive as right
for them. He added that problems usually take a
long time to develop, and it is unrealistic to
assume that they will disappear quickly. Thus,
the counsellor’s patience is needed to avoid
making hasty judgements.

It can also be seen from Table 3 that 32
(86.5%) of the counsellors were judgmental of
their clients whereas 5 (13.5%) were not. It can
therefore be concluded that majority of the
counsellors judged their clients. This finding
does not agree with the position of Collins.
According to Collins, rarely is anyone helped by
a counsellor who judges or fails to listen
sympathetically and respectfully. He admonished
counsellors to desist from quickly categorising
and judging clients.

Again Table 3 revealed that, 25 (67.6%)
of the counsellors were highly emotionally
involved with their clients while only 12 (32.4%)
were not. In this case, a greater number of the
counsellors were highly emotionally involved
with their clients. This finding also does not meet the recommendation of Collins (2007). According to Collins, being emotionally over-involved with the client can cause the counsellor to lose objectivity, thus, reducing the effectiveness of the counselling process.

It is also shown in Table 3 that 15 (40.5%) of the counsellors began their counselling with a theoretical framework whereas 22 (59.5%) did not. It follows therefore, that most of the counsellors did not begin their counselling with a theoretical framework. Counselling without a theoretical framework can rob the counselling process of a clear focus and purpose (Ogan & Ogan, 2008). Again, Table 3 shows that 21 (56.8%) of the counsellors counselled with clearly defined goals whereas 16 (43%) did not counsel with clearly defined goals. In this case, majority of the counsellors counselled with clearly defined goals.

Again, Table 3 shows that 35 (94.6%) of the counsellors counselled along some strict church doctrines whereas only 2 (5.4%) answered that they did not counsel along strict church doctrines. This finding supports the assertion of Ogan and Ogan (2008) that a major pitfall of marriage and family counselling is that most Christian counsellors counsel along the lines of strict and dogmatic church doctrines. They asserted that some Christian counsellors usually adopt wrong treatment method because of doctrinal rigidity.

It is also clearly visible from Table 3 that only 7 (18.9%) of the counsellors followed up on couples they counselled for at least one year after their marriage while 30 (81.1%) did not. It can be concluded therefore that, majority of the counsellors did not follow up on couples they counselled for at least one year after their marriage. This finding is in sharp contradiction with the recommendation of Ogan and Ogan (2008) that counsellors should follow up on the couples they counsel at least one year after their marriage to help them handle the real challenges in the marriage proper.

Finally, Table 3 shows that 34 (91.9%) of the counsellors interrogated their clients a lot during counselling sessions. Collins (2007) perceives this particular phenomenon as a major pitfall of Christian counselling. He recommended that it is more helpful for counsellors to ask few questions that will encourage clients to talk freely. He added that time must be allowed for silence while the counselee collects his thoughts in order to give a more complete picture of the issues rather than bombarding them with questions after questions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions could be drawn from the findings of the study. Initially, some pastors in the Pentecostal and charismatic churches have attained up to a diploma level of training in counselling. However, developing their skills and joining professional counselling associations becomes a mirage in their field of work. Normally, the counselling works are left under the care of elders, deacons and deaconesses who mostly do not have the needed training and qualification.

Again, the work of a counsellor is very demanding. There are pitfalls that could thwart the effectiveness of the counsellors. It follows that enough time, resources and skills are required to properly take care of the demands of the profession.

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations could be made to some key stakeholders. Initially, the Christian Council of Ghana, Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, the Catholic Secretariat and the National Association of Charismatic Churches should organise regular in-service training for Christian marriage and family counsellors. Professionally certificated counsellors should be employed to conduct counselling in churches. This is because counselling requires competent and trained personnel to handle. A governing body should be set up by the religious organisations to evaluate and oversee the activities of the Christian marriage and family counsellors.

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