

The Influence of Premarital Counselling on Marital Stability Among Ugandan Seventh-day Adventist Couples

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David Simwogerere

Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Studies, Bugema University, Kampala, Uganda.

davidsimwogerere@gmail.com

Pio Kiyangi

Department of Social sciences, Nkumba University, Kampala Uganda.

frank.kiyangi@sjhresearchafrica.org

Stephen kizza

Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Studies, Bugema University, Kampala, Uganda.

sskizza2011@gmail.com

Israel Kibirige

Department of Maths, Science & Technology Education (DMSTE), Faculty of Humanities, University of Limpopo, Polokwane, South Africa.

israel.kibirige@ul.ac.za

ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of pastoral premarital counselling on marital stability among Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) couples in Kampala, Uganda. Guided by Acceptance and Commitment Theory, the study employed a cross-sectional correlational design where data were collected using a questionnaire administered to one spouse from each of the 275 married couples. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and hierarchical regression analyses. Findings revealed significant positive relationships between all premarital counselling dimensions and marital stability. Communication ($r = .748$, $p < .01$) and conflict management ($r = .741$, $p < .01$) showed the strongest associations, followed by financial management ($r = .603$, $p < .01$) and role sharing ($r = .567$, $p < .01$). Collectively, these dimensions explained 69.1% of the variance in marital stability ($R^2 = .691$, $p < .001$). Conflict management emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .378$, $p < .001$), followed by communication ($\beta = .351$, $p < .001$), financial management ($\beta = .133$, $p = .003$), and role sharing ($\beta = .119$, $p = .006$). The findings demonstrate that effective communication, constructive conflict resolution, financial planning, and shared marital responsibilities are important mechanisms through which pastoral premarital counselling promotes stable marriages. The study highlights the need for comprehensive premarital counselling programmes within Ugandan SDA communities.

Keyword: Premarital Counselling; Marital Stability; Adventist Couples; Family Systems Theory; Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana religiusitas, kebijakan lingkungan institusional, dan kesadaran terhadap perubahan iklim membentuk perilaku pro-lingkungan pada mahasiswa

Corresponding Author

Name : Israel Kibirige

Email : israel.kibirige@ul.ac.za

Generasi Z di sebuah universitas Islam dan universitas Katolik di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan desain metode campuran konvergen, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan data survei dari 300 mahasiswa dengan enam wawancara mendalam untuk menilai sejauh mana institusi berbasis agama mendorong nilai-nilai ekologis tercermin dalam praktik kehidupan sehari-hari mahasiswa. Hasil analisis PLS-SEM menunjukkan bahwa kesadaran terhadap perubahan iklim memiliki peran paling sentral dalam mendorong perilaku pro-lingkungan. Sementara itu, kebijakan lingkungan institusional terutama berperan dalam memperkuat kesadaran mahasiswa, tetapi belum secara langsung memengaruhi kebiasaan ekologis mereka. Religiusitas cenderung berfungsi sebagai rujukan moral yang bersifat umum, tetapi belum secara konsisten menjadi pedoman bagi tindakan lingkungan yang konkret. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kesadaran iklim mahasiswa lebih banyak berkembang melalui pengalaman sehari-hari dan paparan media digital dibandingkan melalui pengajaran keagamaan formal maupun kebijakan lingkungan kampus. Studi ini menantang perguruan tinggi berbasis agama untuk merekonstruksi pendidikan lingkungan, dari pengajaran teologis yang abstrak menuju program berbasis pengalaman yang secara aktif melibatkan mahasiswa dalam praktik lingkungan berkelanjutan. Dengan demikian, nilai-nilai keagamaan dapat diintegrasikan ke dalam kebiasaan nyata melalui saluran yang benar-benar relevan dalam membentuk kesadaran Generasi Z.

Kata Kunci: Kesadaran Iklim; Perilaku Pro-Lingkungan; Generasi Z; Kebijakan Institusional; Religiusitas

1. Introduction

In Kampala City, Uganda, marriage remains an important social, spiritual, and family institution, especially among Christian communities such as the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. Within the SDA tradition, marriage is not treated merely as a private relationship between two individuals, but as a covenantal union with spiritual, social, and family responsibilities. For this reason, pastoral premarital counselling has long been used to prepare intending couples for married life. Ideally, such counselling should help couples develop communication skills, clarify expectations, manage conflict, negotiate family roles, handle financial responsibilities, and strengthen commitment before entering marriage. Marriage offers individuals emotional, social, and economic support, while also providing a stable setting for children's growth and the passing on of family and social values across generations. However, a marriage is more likely to remain stable when spouses have a healthy relationship and can communicate well, work together, and handle disagreements in a constructive way. Previous studies suggest that couples who build strong relationship skills before entering marriage are better prepared to sustain satisfying and long-lasting unions (Adebayo, 2025; Gichuri et al., 2024). This makes premarital preparation an important concern, particularly in urban settings where couples face multiple relational and socio-economic pressures.

Premarital counselling has therefore been recognised as one strategy for strengthening couples before marriage. Recent global trends suggest that marital strain and divorce are shaped by broader social transformations, including cultural change, economic pressure, shifting gender roles, and changing expectations of intimacy within marriage (John & Nitsche, 2022; OECD, 2024). In response to these challenges, counselling programs in different settings have focused on helping couples build communication skills, manage conflict, clarify shared expectations, develop emotional readiness, and strengthen empathy, trust, and commitment. Studies indicate that couples who take part in such programs often communicate more effectively, experience greater marital satisfaction, and are better able to withstand difficulties when conflicts arise (Lomotey, 2025; Mohammed et al., 2024; Spaumer et al., 2025). While this evidence is useful, its application to African faith-based settings requires careful contextual examination.

Within this structural scope, pastoral premarital counselling practices are operationally defined as structured, faith-based psycho-educational interventions administered by ordained clergy prior to marriage, measured specifically by an individual spouse's retrospective assessment of the depth, duration, and curricular inclusion of four core behavioural modules: communication, role-sharing negotiation, conflict management, and financial management. Correspondingly, marital stability is operationally defined not merely as the static absence of legal separation, but as a multi-dimensional latent construct measured through an individual spouse's subjective perception of emotional intimacy, relationship satisfaction, and structural

commitment, which represents the cognitive determination to maintain the union despite systemic urban stressors. Finally, psychological flexibility, within the individual context of marriage, is operationally defined as a spouse's capacity to engage in the present marital situation consciously and adapt their behaviour to align with deeply held shared values, rather than reacting defensively or avoidantly to immediate relationship distress.

From a psychological standpoint, premarital preparation serves as a critical preventative intervention rooted in family psychology, interpersonal relationship psychology, and commitment psychology. While religious frameworks view marriage through a spiritual lens, family psychology conceptualises it as a dynamic, evolving system where structural transitions demand high cognitive and behavioural adaptation. Interpersonal relationship psychology dictates that long-term marital dyadic stability relies heavily on behavioural modification and cognitive restructuring, which reduce maladaptive relationship patterns before they become entrenched. Furthermore, commitment psychology highlights that structural commitment, the cognitive decision to remain bound to a partner through systemic stressors, must be cultivated alongside personal dedication. Pastoral premarital counselling, therefore, operates not merely as a moral gatekeeping ritual, but as a psychological incubator where foundational dyadic competencies are established.

2. Theoretical Review

2.1. Contextual and Theoretical Foundations of Integration

To explore individual psychological flexibility and interpersonal dynamics, this study examined pastoral premarital counselling (PMC) through an integrated framework of Family Systems Theory and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). PMC forms a core component of faith-based marriage preparation, offering couples relational guidance and practical skills that support lasting marital partnerships (Moeti et al., 2024). The integration of these two frameworks follows a deductive, top-down approach (Saunders et al., 2019), moving systematically from macro-relational structures to micro-level individual cognitive-behavioural processes. Each framework provides a distinct, essential contribution to the study: 1) Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978) establishes the couple as an interdependent relational system. It provides the framework for understanding how relational dimensions, such as communication, conflict management, financial planning, and role sharing, function as shared, systemic patterns rather than isolated individual actions; 2) Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Zettle, 1985) supplies the explicit, internal behavioural mechanisms, namely psychological flexibility, values clarification, and committed action, required by individual partners to navigate and stabilise that shared system. These frameworks integrate seamlessly within a pastoral context. Family Systems Theory maps out the shared interpersonal architecture of the marriage. At the same time, ACT provides the practical, value-driven skills individuals need to meet those systemic demands without defaulting to conflict or emotional withdrawal. This dual lens directly addresses how personal emotional resilience translates into systemic relationship health.

2.2. Family Systems Theory

Developed by Bowen (1978), Family Systems Theory explains the family as an interconnected emotional unit in which the behaviour of each member directly influences the functioning of the whole system. Within a marriage, spouses operate as a mutually interdependent unit. Consequently, ineffective communication, unresolved conflict, or rigid role expectations are not merely individual flaws; they are systemic disruptions that disturb relational balance and weaken overall family cohesion.

Conversely, healthy interaction patterns characterised by open communication, adaptability, and emotional regulation stabilise the system (Spaumer et al., 2025). This perspective is vital because pastoral premarital counselling explicitly targets these systemic interaction patterns, seeking to realign interpersonal skills and clarify expectations before the formal marital union begins.

2.3. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

While Family Systems Theory outlines the structural and relational architecture of the couple, ACT focuses on the internal psychological processes that drive those relationship functions. ACT emphasises psychological flexibility, the acceptance of difficult emotions, mindfulness, and a commitment to behaviours aligned with deeply held values.

In a marital context, these internal capacities enable partners to respond constructively to inevitable stressors, disappointments, and conflicts, rather than defaulting to systemic defense mechanisms like avoidance, blame, or emotional withdrawal. For couples entering marriage, the psychological agility to accept relational challenges while remaining anchored to shared, value-driven goals serves as a critical predictor of long-term stability.

2.4. Theoretical Integration in a Pastoral Setting

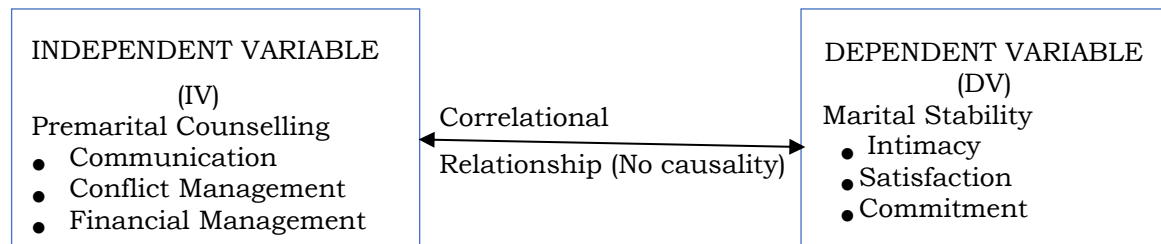
Applied to the pastoral setting of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, these two theories operate symbiotically to address both relational structures and spiritual functions. Through faith-based PMC, couples do not just learn practical competencies, such as communication, conflict management, financial stewardship, and equitable role sharing (the systems focus); they also cultivate the patience, forgiveness, mindfulness, and value-based commitment needed to execute those skills under pressure (the ACT focus).

Accordingly, this study conceptualises that effective pastoral premarital counselling positively influences marital stability among SDA couples in Kampala City by equipping them with the practical relational skills, emotional resilience, and value-based commitments necessary to sustain a healthy, enduring marriage.

2.5. Conceptual Model

Premarital counselling serves as a proactive intervention designed to equip partners with the essential psychological and practical tools necessary for long-term relational success. By focusing on effective communication, constructive conflict management, and aligned financial management (independent variables IV); and intimacy, satisfaction, commitment (dependent variables DV), premarital counselling aims to mitigate future marital distress. Understanding the direct relationship between these premarital interventions (the independent variables) and the resulting marital bonds (the dependent variables) is crucial for developing marital stability (Figure 1)

Figure 1. A Conceptual Framework of the influence of Premarital Counselling on Marital Stability



3. Method

3.1. Research Design

A cross-sectional correlational design was employed to examine the relationship between pastoral premarital counselling and marital stability among Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) couples in Kampala. This design allowed simultaneous data collection on both variables, enabling quantitative analysis of their associations within a natural social context (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2024; Field, 2024).

3.2. Research Setting

The study was conducted in Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), which comprises five administrative divisions: Central, Makindye, Kawempe, Nakawa, and Rubaga. Two SDA churches were purposively selected from each division, yielding a total of ten churches. The selection was guided by the churches' large and active membership, accessibility, and the presence of organised marriage ministries. This multi-site design ensured coverage of the diverse socio-economic profiles of married couples within the study area. Data were collected using quantitative research instruments designed to capture reliable and comparable information across all selected congregations.

3.3. Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

A The target population for the study comprised 2,675 married couples drawn from ten Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) churches located within the five divisions of Kampala Capital

City, Kampala Central, Kawempe, Nakawa, Makindye, and Rubaga. Using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula for Sample Size Determination. The formula for calculating sample size is:

$$n = \frac{N1 + N(e^2)}{1 + N(e^2)}; n = 1 + N(e^2)N$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error (expressed as a decimal)

The sample size from the calculation was 348. The questionnaire of 348 were distributed and a total of 275 were retrieved, providing a return rate of 79%. (see Table 1).

To ensure methodological rigour and avoid the statistical dependency issues associated with mixed dyadic data, individual respondents, rather than couple dyads, served as the unit of analysis. A total of 348 questionnaires were distributed to church members who had undergone pastoral premarital counselling. Out of these, 275 completed questionnaires were returned and validated, representing a 79% response rate. The final sample consisted of 142 female participants (51.6%) and 133 male participants (48.4%), with only single responses accepted per household.

An a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power software (Faul et al., 2009) to determine the sample size required for the multiple linear regression model, which included four predictor variables: pastoral counselling in communication, conflict management, financial planning, and role sharing. Using Cohen's conventional medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) and a significance level of $\alpha = .05$ the minimum required sample size to achieve a standard power of .80 is 85 respondents (and 87 respondents for a stricter power of .95). This sample size of 275 respondents significantly exceeded the thresholds, ensuring the study was highly powered to detect medium-sized effects and yield reliable statistical inferences. Ultimately, the observed regression model explained 69.1% of the variance in marital stability ($R^2 = .691$), which corresponds to a robust observed effect size of $f^2 = 2.236$, confirming the study was more than sufficiently powered for the primary analysis.

3.3.1. Participant characteristics

Participant characteristics include gender, age, years in marriage, education level, number of children, and duration of premarital counselling (Table 1)

Table 1. Background Characteristics of Respondents

Item	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	134	48.7
Female	141	51.3
Age of respondent		
20–29 years	41	14.9
30–39 years	123	44.7
40–49 years	75	27.3
50–59 years	34	12.4
60 years and above	2	0.7
Years in marriage		
0–5 years	90	32.7
6–10 years	66	24.0
11–15 years	46	16.7
16–20 years	45	16.4
21 years or more	28	10.2
Highest level of education		
Primary	12	4.4
Senior Four	59	21.5
Senior Six	32	11.6
Diploma	69	25.1
Degree	82	29.8
Master's	18	6.5
PhD	3	1.1
Number of children		
None	30	10.9
1–3 children	155	56.4
4–6 children	86	31.3
7 children and above	4	1.5

Period spent in premarital counselling before marriage		
1-3 weeks	117	42.5
4-8 weeks	94	34.2
9-12 weeks	37	13.5
13 - 24 weeks	27	9.8

Note. Percentages are based on the total sample size, N = 275.

Table 1 show 275 participants represented by a well-educated and relatively young demographic, with a nearly equal balance between men and women. The typical respondent was a parent in their thirties, raising one to three children, and holding a college degree or diploma. In terms of their relationships, most participants were still in the first decade of marriage, predominantly within the first five years, and the vast majority had completed a few weeks of premarital counselling prior to the wedding.

To ascertain the sample, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax rotation to examine the underlying factor structure of the measurement items. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for the Study Constructs

Construct	KMO	Bartlett's test of sphericity	Factors extracted	Factor loading range	Variance explained (%)	Cronbach's alpha (α)
Marital communication	0.81	$\chi^2 (6) = 456.270, p < .001$	1	.634–.846	58.547	0.843
Conflict management	0.643	$\chi^2 (3) = 118.529, p < .001$	1	.528–.747	40.527	0.659
Management of family finances	0.566	$\chi^2 (3) = 42.875, p < .001$	1	.365–.742	27.253	0.463
Role sharing in marriage	0.699	$\chi^2 (3) = 262.232, p < .001$	1	.684–.838	57.824	0.801
Marital stability	0.827	$\chi^2 (10) = 428.104, p < .001$	1	.594–.825	47.393	0.812

Note. Principal axis factoring was used. One-factor solutions were extracted because each construct was theoretically specified as a single latent dimension. Factor loadings of .40 and above were considered acceptable for retention. Management of family finances showed weak factorability, with only one item loading above .40, and was therefore retained on theoretical grounds but interpreted cautiously.

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to assess the dimensionality of the study constructs and to provide evidence for the retained measurement structure. Principal axis factoring was used, and each construct was examined separately because the items were theoretically specified to measure distinct latent dimensions. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to determine whether the data were suitable for factor analysis. As shown in Table 5, the KMO values ranged from .566 to .827, while Bartlett's tests were significant for all constructs, indicating that the correlation matrices were generally factorable.

Marital communication

Marital communication demonstrated good factorability, KMO = .810, with a significant Bartlett's test, $\chi^2 (6) = 456.270, p < .001$. A one-factor solution was extracted, explaining 58.547% of the variance. The factor loadings ranged from .634 to .846, and the construct showed good internal consistency, $\alpha = .843$. These results supported the retention of marital communication as a reliable unidimensional construct.

3.3.2. Conflict management

Conflict management showed acceptable factorability, KMO = .643, and Bartlett's test was significant, $\chi^2 (3) = 118.529, p < .001$. One factor was extracted, explaining 40.527% of the variance, with factor loadings ranging from .528 to .747. The Cronbach's alpha value was .659, which indicates moderate internal consistency. Although slightly below the conventional .70 threshold, the construct was retained because the items loaded acceptably on a single factor and were theoretically consistent with constructive management of marital disagreements.

3.3.3. Management of family finances

Management of family finances had the weakest psychometric performance among the constructs. The KMO value was marginal, $KMO = .566$, although Bartlett's test was significant, $\chi^2 (3) = 42.875$, $p < .001$. The one-factor solution explained only 27.253% of the variance, with factor loadings ranging from .365 to .742. The Cronbach's alpha value was also low, $\alpha = .463$. This suggests that the items captured related but not highly homogeneous aspects of financial management. Therefore, the construct was retained because of its theoretical relevance to premarital counselling, but the findings involving this variable were interpreted cautiously.

3.3.4. Role sharing in marriage

Role sharing in marriage showed acceptable factorability, $KMO = .699$, and Bartlett's test was significant, $\chi^2 (3) = 262.232$, $p < .001$. A one-factor solution was extracted, explaining 57.824% of the variance, with factor loadings ranging from .684 to .838. The Cronbach's alpha value was .801, indicating good internal consistency. These results supported the retention of role sharing in marriage as a reliable unidimensional construct.

3.3.5. Marital stability

Marital stability, the dependent variable, demonstrated good factorability, $KMO = .827$, with a significant Bartlett's test, $\chi^2 (10) = 428.104$, $p < .001$. One factor was extracted, explaining 47.393% of the variance. Factor loadings ranged from .594 to .825, and the Cronbach's alpha value was .812, indicating good internal consistency. These findings supported the use of marital stability as a reliable dependent construct.

3.4. Research Instrument

Data for this study were collected using a structured questionnaire specifically developed to evaluate the conceptual relationship between pastoral premarital counselling and marital stability. In strict alignment with the study's framework, the instrument operationalises pastoral premarital counselling as the independent variable and marital stability as the dependent variable. Although the correlational nature of this research design precludes the establishment of definitive cause-and-effect relationships, the instrument was carefully structured to assess the strength, direction, and predictive associations between these core variables.

The questionnaire items were adapted from established literature on premarital counselling frameworks and standardised relationship psychometric scales, such as those validated by Gopalakrishnan et al. (2025). The instrument utilised a uniform five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1, representing strongly disagree, to 5, representing strongly agree, to capture respondents' perceptions. This choice of scale yielded standardised, quantifiable data optimised for parametric statistical analysis, minimised the cognitive burden on participants, and ensured high measurement consistency across all sections.

The complete instrument comprised 45 items distributed across three structured sections that directly mirror the conceptual framework of the study. The first section gathered demographic profile data to capture relevant baseline characteristics of the respondents. The second section focused on the independent variable dimensions, assessing pastoral premarital counselling through four core practice domains: communication, conflict management, financial management, and role sharing. The final section measured the dependent variable dimensions of marital stability by focusing on key indicators of relational health and longevity, specifically intimacy, satisfaction, and commitment. This unified structural approach enabled robust statistical comparability and facilitated regression testing across the primary variables.

3.4.1. Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Instrument validity was evaluated to ensure that the items accurately and appropriately measured the intended constructs, following established quantitative validation procedures (Romero et al., 2023). Three research and counselling experts evaluated all 45 items for relevance, clarity, and representativeness, and the Content Validity Index (CVI) was computed as follows:

$$\text{Content validity Index (CVI)} = \frac{\text{Total number of relevant items}}{\text{Total number of items}} = \frac{45}{50} = 0.9$$

A Content Validity Index (CVI) value above 0.70 is commonly regarded as acceptable for research instruments, reflecting sufficient expert consensus on item relevance (Wang & Sahid, 2024). The CVI of 0.90 obtained in this study, therefore, indicates strong expert agreement that the instrument adequately represented the intended study constructs.

Reliability was tested through a pilot study involving 20 married couples from Kireka SDA Church, a congregation with characteristics like the study sites but not included in the main sample. The pilot sought to ensure consistency of responses across items and to identify ambiguities for refinement. Using Cronbach's Alpha, internal consistency reliability was computed with the aid of SPSS version 27. The instrument yielded a coefficient of 0.72, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.70 recommended for social-science research (Raykov et al., 2024). Based on pilot feedback, minor wording adjustments were made to improve clarity and item comprehension before the main data collection.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

The unit of analysis was the individual married respondent. Although the study focused on marital experiences, data were collected from individual spouses rather than matched couples. Therefore, the results reflect individual perceptions of premarital counselling dimensions and marital stability. The study did not analyse couple-level dyads, partner agreement, or interdependence between spouses. This distinction is important because the findings should be interpreted at the individual level rather than as direct evidence of couple-level interaction patterns.

After obtaining ethical clearance and authorisation from church leadership and the Division Local Administration, data collection proceeded through both church-based and home-based approaches. Self-administered questionnaires were personally distributed to consenting respondents after Sabbath services. In addition, with the assistance of pastors and church elders, selected SDA couples were identified and provided with questionnaires at their respective homes to ensure broader participation and representation. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were briefed on the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness, edited for consistency, and securely stored for analysis.

The questionnaire captured demographic variables, four dimensions of pastoral premarital counselling (communication, conflict management, financial management, and role sharing), and three dimensions of marital stability (intimacy, satisfaction, and commitment). The self-administered format ensured privacy and minimised interviewer bias.

3.6. Data Analysis

Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to address the research questions and test the hypothesised relationships between premarital counselling dimensions and marital stability. The analytical process was executed in three distinct phases, beginning with descriptive statistics and moving into primary inferential and supplementary predictive modelling.

Initially, descriptive statistics were computed to summarise the demographic characteristics of the sample and the primary study variables. Percentages and frequencies were utilised to analyse and report categorical demographic data, such as gender, duration of marriage, and the type of premarital counselling attended. Concurrently, means and standard deviations were calculated for the overall scores and individual dimensions of both premarital counselling, including communication, financial management, and conflict resolution, and marital stability. This established the baseline distribution, central tendency, and overall variability of the collected data.

Following the descriptive phase, inferential statistics were employed to explore the relationships between the variables. To examine the preliminary bivariate relationships between the various premarital counselling dimensions and marital stability, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed. This analysis determined the direction and strength of the linear relationships between each independent dimension of premarital counselling and the dependent variable, with statistical significance evaluated at the $p < .05$ (and) $(p < .01)$ levels.

To evaluate the collective and individual predictive power of these dimensions, a standard multiple regression analysis was conducted. The distinct dimensions of premarital counselling were entered simultaneously into the model as independent predictors, with

marital stability serving as the dependent outcome variable. This analysis yielded the overall coefficient of determination (R^2), which indicated the proportion of variance in marital stability explained by the counselling dimensions as a collective set, along with the t -statistic to test overall model significance. Standardised coefficients (β) and p -values were also examined to identify which specific dimensions of premarital counselling acted as the strongest unique predictors of marital stability when controlling for the other dimensions in the model.

Finally, a supplementary hierarchical regression analysis was performed to assess the incremental validity of the premarital counselling dimensions while controlling for potential confounding demographic factors, such as marriage duration or age. In the first step, these control variables were entered into the model to establish a baseline. The premarital counselling dimensions were then entered into the second block, allowing for the evaluation of the change and its corresponding significance. This determined whether the premarital counselling dimensions explained a statistically significant amount of unique variance in marital stability over and above the variance already accounted for by the baseline controls. Prior to interpreting either regression model, critical statistical assumptions, including linearity, homoscedasticity, normality of residuals, and multicollinearity, were verified using Variance Inflation Factors and Tolerance scores to ensure the validity of the final inferences.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

All ethical standards governing human-subject research were strictly observed. Approval was obtained from the relevant institutional research ethics committee, and formal permission was sought from church authorities before data collection. Respondents provided informed consent and were assured of anonymity, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. Data were used exclusively for academic purposes. Furthermore, the study adhered to all ethical standards for research involving human participants. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. Data was used strictly for academic purposes, and respondents retained the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Finally, a letter of authorisation from the Dean of Graduate Studies at Bugema University was obtained before data collection, and permission to conduct the study was also obtained from the SDA Church authorities in Uganda.

4. Results

4.1. Overview of Hypothesis Testing

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate the predictive capacity of various dimensions of premarital counselling, specifically marital communication, conflict management, management of family finance, and role sharing in marriage, on self-reported marital stability. To achieve this, four specific research questions and their corresponding null hypotheses were tested.

- Hypothesis One (H^1): An individual spouse's retrospective appraisal of premarital communication training significantly predicts their self-reported marital stability.
- Hypothesis Two (H^2): An individual spouse's evaluation of premarital conflict management training significantly predicts their self-reported marital stability.
- Hypothesis Three (H^3): An individual spouse's exposure to premarital financial management training significantly predicts their self-reported marital stability.
- Hypothesis Four (H^4): An individual spouse's premarital preparation regarding role sharing significantly predicts their self-reported marital stability.

Bivariate relationships were initially assessed using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients ($N = 275$). Subsequently, standard and hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed to isolate the unique predictive effects of each counselling dimension while monitoring for multicollinearity and controlling for demographic variables (gender and years in marriage).

The standard multiple regression model was statistically significant $F(4, 270) = 150.772$, $p < .001$, indicating that the four premarital counselling dimensions jointly explained the variance in marital stability. Multicollinearity diagnostics proved within safe parameters: tolerance values ranged from to (well above the threshold), and Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) ranged from to (well below the conservative threshold of 5.0).

To ensure the robustness of these findings, a supplementary hierarchical regression analysis was executed. In Step 1, the demographic control variables (gender and years in marriage) did not significantly account for variations in marital stability $R^2 = .019$, $F(2, 272) =$

2.697, $p = .069$. In Step 2, the block introduction of the premarital counselling dimensions yielded a highly significant improvement, accounting for an additional of the variance in marital stability $R^2.019$, $F(2,272) = 2.697$, $p = .069$. In this final controlled model, the overall framework remained highly significant, $F(6, 268) = 100.446$, $p < .001$, explaining 69.2% ($R^2 = .692$) of total variance.

4.2. RQ 1: Premarital Communication Training and Marital Stability

The first research question examined how and to what statistical extent an individual spouse's retrospective appraisal of premarital communication training predicts their self-reported marital stability. At the bivariate level, Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between marital communication and marital stability ($r = .748$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher appraisals of communication training co-occurred with stronger marital stability.

When evaluated simultaneously alongside other counselling dimensions within the standard multiple regression model, communication training emerged as a critical, statistically significant unique predictor of marital stability ($B = .351$, $t = 6.936$, $p < .001$, 95% {CI} [.238, .426]). This predictive validity was sustained in the supplementary hierarchical model after accounting for participant demographics, with marital communication maintaining a strong, unique, positive effect ($B = .339$, $\beta = .358$, $t = 7.010$, $p < .001$, 95% {CI} [.244, .434]). This implies that for every one-unit increase in communication training appraisal, self-reported marital stability increased by approximately 0.34 units when holding all other variables constant. Consequently, the first null hypothesis was rejected, and H1 was supported.

4.3. RQ 2: Premarital Conflict Management Training and Marital Stability

The second research question evaluated the manner and degree to which an individual spouse's evaluation of premarital conflict management training predicts self-reported marital stability. Pearson correlation metrics established a strong, positive, and statistically significant linear association between conflict management training and marital stability (stability ($r = .741$, $p < .01$).

Within the simultaneous multiple regression matrix, conflict management emerged as the single strongest unique predictor of marital stability across the entire framework ($B = .378$, $t = 8.050$, $p < .001$, 95% {CI} [.313, .515]). The supplementary hierarchical regression model further corroborated the supremacy of this variable when controlling for respondent gender and years in marriage, conflict management maintained its primary status (status ($B = .420$, $\beta = .384$, $t = 8.047$, $p < .001$, 95% {CI} [.317, .523]). This demonstrates that constructive conflict management mechanics learned or reinforced during premarital preparation have the highest relative impact on sustaining long-term marital equilibrium. These data officially confirm.

4.4. RQ 3: Premarital Financial Management Training and Marital Stability

The third research question sought to identify the predictive effect of an individual spouse's exposure to premarital financial management training on self-reported marital stability. Bivariate analysis using the Pearson coefficient indicated a moderate-to-strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation between family financial management preparation and marital stability ($r = .603$, $p < .01$).

In the standard multiple regression model, financial management accounted for a smaller but highly meaningful and statistically significant portion of unique variance. In the standard multiple regression model, financial management accounted for a smaller but highly meaningful and statistically significant portion of unique variance ($B = .133$, $t = 2.967$, $p = .003$, 95% {CI} [.044, .220]). When demographic controls were adjusted for in the hierarchical regression analysis, the predictive strength remained virtually unvaried and highly significant ($B = .131$, $\beta = .132$, $t = 2.929$, $p = .004$, 95% {CI} [.043, .219]). Based on these parameters, the third null hypothesis was rejected, verifying H3 that an individual spouse's exposure to premarital financial management training significantly predicts their self-reported marital stability. Notably, while financial training is a verified predictor, its lower standardised magnitude relative to conflict and communication suggests a secondary tier of predictive weight, which warrants minor measurement caution given internal consistency notes.

4.5. RQ 4: Premarital Role Sharing Preparation and Marital Stability

The fourth research question investigated how an individual spouse's premarital preparation regarding role sharing predicts variations in self-reported marital stability. The preliminary

Pearson bivariate test indicated a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between role sharing preparation and subsequent marital stability ($r = .567$, $p < .01$). When entered into the standard regression equation with the other independent dimensions, role sharing demonstrated a statistically significant, positive predictive effect ($B = .119$, $t = 2.777$, $p = .006$, 95% {CI} [.030, .176]). This significance was preserved during the final phase of the supplementary hierarchical analysis ($B = .097$, $\beta = .113$, $t = 2.595$, $p = .010$, 95% {CI} [.023, .171]), confirming that proper role allocation and alignment strategies addressed prior to marriage yield long-term protective benefits for marital systems. The fourth null hypothesis was rejected because its confidence intervals explicitly excluded zero, thereby supporting the hypothesis that an individual spouse's premarital preparation regarding role sharing significantly predicts their self-reported marital stability. The bivariate Pearson correlation coefficients between the four dimensions of premarital counselling and marital stability are presented (Table 3).

Table 3. Pearson Correlations between Premarital Counselling Dimensions and Marital Stability

Predictor variable	Marital stability
Marital communication	.748**
Management of family finance	.603**
Role sharing in marriage	.567**
Conflict management	.741**

Note. $p < .01$, two-tailed. $N = 275$.

Table 3 shows that all four predictor variables show statistically significant, positive relationships with marital stability ($p < .01$). Marital communication ($r = .748$) and conflict management ($r = .741$) exhibit the strongest correlations, followed by management of family finance ($r = .603$) and role sharing in marriage ($r = .567$). These results indicate that higher levels of preparation in each counselling domain are associated with greater marital stability.

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate effectively the four premarital counselling dimensions collectively and individually predict marital stability, with the results summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Predicting Marital Stability from Premarital Counselling Dimensions

Predictor	B	SE	β	T	p	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	.091	.154	-	.593	.553	-	-
Marital communication	.332	.048	.351	6.936	.001	.448	2.232
Management of family finance	.132	.045	.133	2.967	.003	.569	1.758
Role sharing in marriage	.103	.037	.119	2.777	.006	.619	1.616
Conflict management	.414	.051	.378	8.050	.001	.518	1.929

Note. Dependent variable: marital stability. Model summary: $R = .831$, $R^2 = .691$, Adjusted $R^2 = .686$, $F(4, 270) = 150.722$, $p < .001$.

In Table 4 the Multiple linear regression was conducted to examine whether premarital counselling dimensions predicted marital stability. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(4, 270) = 150.722$, $p < .001$, indicating that the set of predictors jointly explained a significant proportion of the variance in marital stability. The model explained 69.1% of the variance in marital stability, $R^2 = .691$, with an adjusted R^2 of .686, showing strong explanatory power.

At the individual predictor level, all four dimensions significantly and positively predicted marital stability. Conflict management emerged as the strongest predictor, $\beta = .378$, $t = 8.050$, $p < .001$, followed by marital communication, $\beta = .351$, $t = 6.936$, $p < .001$. Management of family finance also made a significant positive contribution, $\beta = .133$, $t = 2.967$, $p = .003$, while role sharing in marriage was also a significant predictor, $\beta = .119$, $t = 2.777$, $p = .006$. These results indicate that higher levels of conflict management, marital communication, family financial management, and role sharing were associated with higher marital stability. Multicollinearity diagnostics showed that tolerance values ranged from .448 to .619, while VIF values ranged from 1.616 to 2.232. Since all VIF values were below the commonly used threshold of 5 and tolerance values were above .10, multicollinearity was not considered a serious concern in the regression model.

The finding that conflict management was the strongest predictor suggests that the ability of couples to negotiate differences, adjust to challenges, and use constructive problem-solving strategies may be central to sustaining marital stability. This is closely followed by marital communication, indicating that open consultation, listening, emotional sharing, and discussion of marital expectations are also critical relational processes.

Although management of family finances significantly predicted marital stability, this finding should be interpreted cautiously because the financial management scale had low internal consistency. The construct was retained due to its theoretical importance within premarital counselling. However, future studies should strengthen its measurement by including more homogeneous items on budgeting, saving, spending decisions, financial transparency, and joint financial planning.

To determine the extent to which premarital counselling dimensions predict marital stability, a multiple regression analysis was conducted, and the results are shown in Table 4.

Table 5. Multiple Regression Predicting Marital Stability from Premarital Counselling Dimensions

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Constant	.091	.154	-	.593	.553	-.212	.395
Management of family finance	.132	.045	.133	2.967	.003	.044	.220
Role sharing in marriage	.103	.037	.119	2.777	.006	.030	.176
Conflict management	.414	.051	.378	8.050	.001	.313	.515
Marital communication	.332	.048	.351	6.936	.001	.238	.426

Note. Dependent variable: marital stability. B = unstandardised coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardised coefficient; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.

The regression results showed that all four premarital counselling dimensions significantly and positively predicted marital stability. Conflict management made the strongest unique contribution, $B = .414$, $\beta = .378$, $t = 8.050$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.313, .515], followed by marital communication, $B = .332$, $\beta = .351$, $t = 6.936$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.238, .426]. Management of family finance also significantly predicted marital stability, $B = .132$, $\beta = .133$, $t = 2.967$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [.044, .220], as did role sharing in marriage, $B = .103$, $\beta = .119$, $t = 2.777$, $p = .006$, 95% CI [.030, .176]. The confidence intervals for all predictors excluded zero, confirming that each predictor made a statistically significant unique contribution to marital stability.

A supplementary hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine further the contribution of premarital counselling dimensions to marital stability (Table 6).

Table 6. Supplementary Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Marital Stability

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI LL	95% CI UL	Tolerance	VIF
Step 1: Control variables									
Gender of respondents	-.173	.110	-.094	-1.567	.118	-.390	.044	.993	1.007
Years in marriage	-.064	.041	-.095	-1.580	.115	-.144	.016	.993	1.007
Step 2: Controls and premarital counselling dimensions									
Gender of respondents	-.012	.063	-.006	-.187	.851	-.136	.112	.972	1.029
Years in marriage	.027	.024	.040	1.141	.255	-.020	.073	.937	1.068
Marital communication	.339	.048	.358	7.010	.001	.244	.434	.440	2.272
Management of family finance	.131	.045	.132	2.929	.004	.043	.219	.568	1.760
Role sharing in marriage	.097	.037	.113	2.595	.010	.023	.171	.608	1.646
Conflict management	.420	.052	.384	8.047	.001	.317	.523	.504	1.983

Model summary. Step 1: $R = .139$, $R^2 = .019$, Adjusted $R^2 = .012$, $F(2, 272) = 2.697$, $p = .069$. Step 2: $R = .832$, $R^2 = .692$, Adjusted $R^2 = .685$, $F(6, 268) = 100.446$, $p < .001$. The addition of premarital counselling dimensions in Step 2 explained an additional 67.3% of the variance in marital stability, $\Delta R^2 = .673$, $\Delta F(4, 268) = 146.435$, $p < .001$.

Note. B = unstandardised coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardised coefficient; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. Gender and years in marriage were entered in Step 1 as control variables. Marital communication, management of family finance, role sharing in marriage, and conflict management were entered in Step 2.

A supplementary hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine whether premarital counselling dimensions predicted marital stability after controlling for selected participant characteristics. Gender and years in marriage were entered in Step 1, while marital communication, management of family finance, role sharing in marriage, and conflict management were entered in Step 2.

In Step 1, gender and years in marriage did not significantly predict marital stability, $R^2 = .019$, Adjusted $R^2 = .012$, $F(2, 272) = 2.697$, $p = .069$. This indicates that the control variables explained only 1.9% of the variance in marital stability and did not make a statistically significant contribution to the model.

In Step 2, the addition of premarital counselling dimensions significantly improved the model, $R^2 = .692$, Adjusted $R^2 = .685$, $F(6, 268) = 100.446$, $p < .001$. The counselling dimensions explained an additional 67.3% of the variance in marital stability beyond gender and years in marriage, $\Delta R^2 = .673$, $\Delta F(4, 268) = 146.435$, $p < .001$. This indicates that premarital counselling dimensions made a substantial and statistically significant contribution to marital stability after controlling for participant characteristics.

In the final model, conflict management was the strongest predictor of marital stability, $B = .420$, $\beta = .384$, $t = 8.047$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.317, .523], followed by marital communication, $B = .339$, $\beta = .358$, $t = 7.010$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.244, .434]. Management of family finance also significantly predicted marital stability, $B = .131$, $\beta = .132$, $t = 2.929$, $p = .004$, 95% CI [.043, .219], as did role sharing in marriage, $B = .097$, $\beta = .113$, $t = 2.595$, $p = .010$, 95% CI [.023, .171]. Gender and years in marriage were not significant predictors in the final model.

Multicollinearity diagnostics showed that tolerance values ranged from .440 to .972, while VIF values ranged from 1.029 to 2.272. These values were within acceptable limits, indicating that multicollinearity was not a serious concern. The supplementary hierarchical regression therefore supports the robustness of the main regression findings by showing that premarital counselling dimensions remained significant predictors of marital stability after controlling for gender and years in marriage.

5. Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the predictive influence of multi-dimensional premarital counselling on long-term marital stability among Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) couples in Kampala, Uganda. The study revealed that all four evaluated counselling domains, communication, conflict management, financial literacy, and role sharing, act as statistically significant independent predictors of marital endurance, resulting in the rejection of all four corresponding null hypotheses. Holistically, the data demonstrates that interpersonal skills serve as the strongest anchors of relational equilibrium, while structural and practical competencies provide the essential systemic boundaries necessary marriage stability.

This discussion is structured directly around the study's four guiding research questions. It begins by examining the first research question concerning the extent to which premarital communication training predicts marital stability, followed by an evaluation of the second research question on how conflict management training influences long-term marital endurance. The narrative then addresses the third research question by exploring the predictive impact of financial management training on economic and relational outcomes, before concluding its question-specific analysis with the fourth research question regarding how role-sharing preparation contributes to maintaining marriage stability. Finally, these individual findings are organised into a synthesis that outlines the strategic implications and actionable frameworks required for modern pastoral counselling and faith-based family ministry.

5.1. Premarital Communication Training and Marital Stability

Communication emerged as one of the strongest predictors of marital stability among SDA couples in Kampala. The correlation analysis revealed a strong positive association between communication training and marital stability ($r = .748$, $p < .010$; Table 3), while the regression models confirmed its independent contribution after accounting for other counselling dimensions and demographic characteristics ($\beta = .351$, $p < .001$; Table 4; $\beta = .358$, $p < .001$; Table 6). The stability of the regression coefficients across models indicates that communication training contributes uniquely to marital stability rather than merely reflecting the influence of gender, years in marriage, or other counselling domains.

From a Family Systems Theory perspective, communication functions as the principal feedback mechanism through which spouses regulate their relationship. Specifically, it operates as a homeostatic control loop: continuous exchanges of information, emotions, and expectations

act as negative feedback loops that detect early relational deviations and tension. By correcting these deviations before they trigger systemic runaway, where minor misunderstandings spiral into chronic behavioural dysfunction, effective communication allows couples to adaptively recalibrate and maintain systemic equilibrium. The strong predictive effect observed in this study suggests that communication skills acquired during premarital counselling continue to influence marital functioning long after the wedding.

The findings are consistent with previous studies showing that communication competence enhances intimacy, satisfaction, and marital adjustment (Ahmad & Chowdhury, 2022; Gichuri et al., 2024). Crucially, these findings extend Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) by positioning psychological flexibility not merely as a descriptive trait, but as an empirical mediator through which communication training impacts marital outcomes. Communication training provides the structural skills that allow spouses to willingly tolerate immediate emotional discomfort and suppress impulsive, defensive reactions. This psychological flexibility serves as the psychological pathway enabling couples to remain open during sensitive disclosures, thereby translating raw communication training into long-term relational endurance. The evidence consequently supports the rejection of the first null hypothesis.

5.2. Premarital Conflict Management Training and Marital Stability

Though the bivariate relationship with marital stability was already strong ($r = .741$, $p < .01$; Table 3), its importance became even more apparent in the regression analyses, where it recorded the highest standardised coefficient $\beta = .378$ (Table 4) and remained the strongest predictor after controlling for gender and years in marriage ($\beta = .384$; Table 6). This pattern suggests that the long-term stability of marriage depends less on the avoidance of conflict and more on couples' ability to manage disagreements constructively when they inevitably arise.

Family Systems Theory explains this finding through the concept of systemic regulation. Conflict is a natural occurrence within family systems because spouses continuously negotiate individual needs, expectations, and responsibilities. When disagreements emerge, weak communication can trigger positive feedback loops that amplify hostility and destabilise the family unit. Constructive conflict-management training introduces regulatory mechanisms that disrupt these destructive amplification cycles (such as criticism-defensiveness-withdrawal cascades). By replacing volatile systemic disruptions with predictable, adaptive processes, conflict management restores homeostatic balance and reinforces the structural integrity of the couple subsystem.

These results provide further empirical support for ACT, validating psychological flexibility as a direct mediator of conflict outcomes. Rather than viewing conflict management as a static set of rules, the data suggests that training functions by increasing a spouse's capacity for cognitive diffusion and acceptance during heated arguments. This localised psychological flexibility enables partners to de-escalate tension by holding their immediate emotional impulses lightly, choosing instead to act deliberately on shared relational values. This explains why conflict-management training exerted the most prominent influence on marital stability among all the dimensions examined. The evidence therefore supports the rejection of the second null hypothesis, which states that an individual spouse's evaluation of premarital conflict management training significantly predicts their self-reported marital stability.

5.3. Premarital Financial Management Training and Marital Stability

Financial management was found to make a significant contribution to marital stability among the studied cohort. Although its predictive strength was lower than that of communication and conflict management, the relationship remained statistically significant in both the correlation and regression analyses (Tables 3 and 4). The persistence of this effect after controlling for other counselling dimensions indicates that financial preparedness contributes independently to marital stability rather than merely reflecting broader relationship quality. Consequently, the empirical evidence supports the rejection of the third null hypothesis.

From a Family Systems Theory perspective, these results indicate that financial management operates as a critical structural subsystem within the broader marital architecture. Money represents a primary transactional domain where systemic interdependence is structurally tested. When couples lack financial literacy, economic strain functions as a chronic environmental stressor that triggers positive feedback loops, ultimately destabilising the emotional equilibrium of the couple subsystem. This instability often manifests as systemic boundary violations, such as economic secrecy, misaligned domestic priorities, and defensive withdrawal. Conversely, premarital financial training establishes shared systemic

regulatory mechanisms. By standardising joint budgeting systems and transparent expenditures, couples erect strong internal structural boundaries that shield the relationship from the corrosive effects of economic uncertainty. This systemic alignment reduces chronic relational anxiety and maintains structural equilibrium, allowing the family system to adaptively navigate the harsh economic pressures common within the Ugandan socioeconomic context.

Furthermore, interpreting these findings through the lens of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) suggests that financial management training provides the concrete behavioural domain through which psychological flexibility is operationalised. While financial literacy teaches the mechanics of budgeting, the successful execution of these tools under economic strain requires individual partners to practice cognitive diffusion and acceptance. When financial scarcity or unexpected expenses occur, partners lacking psychological flexibility often default to impulsive, defensive reactions rooted in financial anxiety or personal pride. Financial management preparation works by increasing a spouse's capacity to willingly tolerate immediate financial discomfort and accept external economic limitations without projecting blame onto their partner. Values clarification allows couples to shift from self-centred consumption to value-driven, committed actions, such as shared financial stewardship and collaborative goal setting. In faith-based environments like the SDA church in Uganda, aligning financial decisions with deeply held spiritual and relational values serves as the core psychological pathway through which raw financial training is translated into long-term relational endurance.

5.4. Premarital Role Sharing Preparation and Marital Stability

Preparation regarding role sharing also significantly predicted marital stability, although it recorded the smallest standardised coefficient among the four counselling dimensions (Tables 4 and 6). Despite its comparatively weaker effect size, the continued significance of role sharing indicates that clear expectations regarding responsibilities and decision-making contribute meaningfully to long-term marital functioning.

Family Systems Theory explains this relationship through the concept of boundary regulation. Family systems operate through distinct interpersonal boundaries that define who performs specific tasks and how authority is distributed. Premarital role-sharing preparation acts as an explicit boundary-setting mechanism, establishing clear, mutually agreed-upon systemic parameters before the onset of domestic life. By proactively defining these internal boundaries, couples minimise role ambiguity and prevent systemic friction caused by overlapping or mismatched expectations. The relevance of this finding is particularly evident within the Ugandan context, where traditional gender norms increasingly interact with contemporary expectations regarding shared domestic and economic responsibilities. Previous studies similarly emphasised the importance of role clarity, flexibility, and mutual respect in fostering marital adjustment and satisfaction (Pirsaghi et al., 2017; Wahhaj, 2018). The significance of role sharing in the present study suggests that marital stability is strengthened when couples enter marriage with negotiated rather than assumed expectations concerning their respective roles and responsibilities. The fourth null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

5.5. Synthesis and Implications for Pastoral Counselling

When evaluated holistically, the empirical and theoretical findings of this study reveal a critical imbalance in contemporary faith-based interventions, carrying profound implications for pastoral care. While current premarital practices among SDA pastors in Kampala successfully foster high interactional competence through emotional and communication training, they frequently neglect the instrumental subsystems, namely financial management and role-sharing boundaries, that are equally vital to sustaining a resilient family system. To bridge this gap between spiritual intent and structural execution, faith-based institutions must transition away from brief, unstructured pre-wedding sessions. Instead, the evidence demands an integrated approach that weaves evidence-based psychological strategies directly into the church's spiritual mandates. By explicitly utilising communication and conflict training as practical vehicles to build psychological flexibility, and by standardising curricula to cover the grey areas of budgeting and domestic labour, pastors can equip couples with a balanced set of functional competencies. Ultimately, ensuring long-term marital stability requires pastoral care to evolve beyond a single premarital milestone, replacing it with a continuous lifecycle of mentorship that extends support through the critical first, third, and up to the fifth years of marriage.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that while pastoral premarital counselling remains a pivotal structural determinant of marital stability among Seventh-day Adventist couples in Kampala, Uganda, its efficacy is fundamentally contingent upon its alignment with the multifaceted, pragmatic realities of temporary dyadic life. For example, severe financial anxiety and unresolved role conflicts act as psychological stressors that deplete a couple's cognitive bandwidth, directly eroding their capacity for emotional intimacy and systemic commitment. Viewed through the lens of Family Systems Theory, a marriage functions as an interdependent ecosystem where localised stressors destabilise the entire unit. The empirical observation of a moderate baseline of marital stability, characterised by pronounced satisfaction but comparatively lower levels of intimacy and commitment, underscores a critical pedagogical gap in existing ecclesiastical frameworks. Faith-based premarital interventions must transition from a didactic, information-centric paradigm toward an experiential, competency-based framework designed to establish self-regulating behavioural feedback loops. Furthermore, the data reveal that structured, standardised counselling protocols are positively correlated with optimised marital outcomes. This highlights an urgent institutional need to upgrade pastoral training curricula, formalise counselling modules, and synthesise secular behavioural relationship skills with theological tenets. Ultimately, because relational efficacy evolves across the family life cycle, premarital interventions must be supplemented by structured post-marital support systems to fortify initial skill acquisition and mitigate emergent marital stressors.

Conspicuously absent from the existing literature are empirical models evaluating the intersection of theological counselling frameworks and empirical relational outcomes within rapidly urbanising Sub-Saharan African contexts. This study offers a distinct, high-order scientific contribution by providing the first empirical evidence of how structured pastoral interventions act as a psychological buffer against culturally specific socioeconomic marital stressors. By moving beyond purely descriptive analysis to map these distinct psychological and theoretical pathways, this research provides an ecologically valid framework for sustaining longitudinal marital well-being in developing urban ecosystems.

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9. Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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