

The Influence of Christian Role Modeling on Extramarital Affairs among Members of Churches in Bondeni Sub-location, Nakuru County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to establish the influence of Christian role modeling in mitigating extramarital affairs among members of Churches in Bondeni Sub-location Nakuru County-Kenya. The study was anchored the Cognitive Behaviour Theory. Descriptive research design was utilized. The population comprised 3,100 members from 6 churches in the sub-location. Data was collected through questionnaires and interview guide. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to analyze data. SPSS was used as a tool. The results showed that there was a significant negative correlation between incidences of extramarital affairs and Christian role-modeling. In general, the results affirmed the Church as an effective custodian of moral fiber in society with significant effects on regulating the behaviour of the society towards upholding the sanctity of marriage as God instituted it.

Keywords: Christian role-modelling, Cognitive Behavior, Church, Extramarital Affairs

1. Introduction

The history of extramarital affairs dates back to Old Testament times as recorded in the Book of Genesis chapter 16 (NIV) about the story of Abraham and Hagar. Although it is not a new phenomenon, the prevalence and the chaos that extramarital affairs leave in its wake, makes its study a subject of enduring concern to psychologists. The term “extramarital affair,” lends itself to a wide variety of definitions. A narrow and more common definition of extramarital affair is the act of sexual intercourse with someone other than the spouse to whom one is married (Mbago & Sichona, 2017). Such a narrow definition leaves out other jealousy-arousing acts such as kissing and caressing.

More broadly, Duggal, Agrawal and Shah (2011) define extramarital affairs to include not just sexual intercourse but also intimate emotional act by one person within a marriage, where such an act occurs outside the marriage and constitutes a breach of trust and violation of the marriage vows. This is a more encompassing definition with the underlying phrase being “breach of trust.” Mobolaji (2015) expands the definition further by including the sharing of intimate thoughts with someone whom the perpetrator is not married to. This latter definition raises the bar of marital faithfulness even higher and is in line with Jesus.

Christ's teachings that should provide a litmus test of the Church's influence in mitigating extramarital affairs. In Matthew 5:27-28 (NIV), Jesus taught thus; "You have heard it said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman to lust at her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Although the verse suggests that men are the culprits on this matter, the Spirit of Jesus' teaching speaks to women as well.

Occurrences of extramarital affairs have been reported among professing Christians (Dollahite & Lambert, 2007). Orapeleng (2008) avers that, among adult Seventh Day Adventists in Botswana, extramarital affairs appeared to be extensive. A survey carried out by Orapeleng (2008) in Botswana revealed that 11.8 percent of married adults had at least one secret sexual partner. These statistics suggest that extramarital affairs are just as common among professing Christians as it is among nonbelievers.

The prevalence of extramarital affairs among Christians is an indictment to the Church and its role in mitigating extramarital affairs. This is because the Church is regarded as the custodian of moral fiber in society. Therefore, it should have an impact on the choices that its members make, including the choice to observe marital faithfulness and refrain from extramarital affairs. Also, it is the role of the Church to be the salt and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14, NIV). This implies that the Church should, among other aspects, assist to preserve good morals of a society by transforming the minds of its members to maintain sexual purity and marital faithfulness by keeping off from extramarital affairs. Extramarital affairs in a society have an undesirable negative impact on the harmony of the family. When the family is not stable, the Church's stability is also affected. The Church is in a suitable position to role-model marital purity in order to help individuals not to engage in extramarital affairs.

A recent report showed that married couples lead in new HIV infections in Kenya, with the prevalence rate at 44 percent being attributed to extramarital affairs (Kajilwa, 2016). Given the increasing incidences of extramarital affairs in modern day society and the common knowledge that 80 percent of Kenyans are Christians, the role of the Church is increasingly being subject to question. However, limited studies have examined the influence of the Church in mitigating the vice of extramarital affairs in the Kenyan society through rolemodelling. Much of the debate about the influence of the Church in mitigating the vice of extramarital affairs, among other immoral behaviours in society, is not supported by adequate scientific studies. It was, therefore, of great importance in this study to establish the influence of the Church in mitigating extramarital affairs by role-modelling marital purity. The current study attempted to close this knowledge gap based on a case study of Nakuru County, which was ranked among the top ten counties where extramarital affairs is potentially rife, as implied by the relatively high HIV prevalence in the county according to a report of the National AIDS and STI Control Programme (2016). The study sought to investigate the influence of Christian role modelling on extramarital affairs in Kenya.

2. Literature Review

Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT) was the main theoretical lens through which the study was approached. Originally developed by Beck in the 1970s to explain thinking patterns associated with depression (Wenzel, Brown, & Karlin, 2011), CBT assumes that, psychological wellness is linked to the functionality and adaptability of our behavioural inventories and thinking patterns, as well as our capacity for emotional self-regulation. That is, the way we behave involves our breadth of behavioural skills for meeting the demands of a range of situations, along with, how well we learn from consequences which can either be rewards or punishments. In terms of our thinking patterns, the theory holds that, people do not learn only as a result of consequences (reinforcement), they actively perceive themselves, their world and their future and the interpretations they make of it, mediate their response to situations (Newman, 2013).

Newman (2013) continues to argue that an environment rich in positive reinforcements, by people who are role models for bonding well with others and meeting life's responsibilities, help them have an increased chance of acquiring the range of constructive behaviours necessary to be successful at navigating

life's challenges. On the same note, he goes on to write, people who are more capable of seeing the positive, hopeful sides of them, others and the future - perhaps due to the influence of role models with positive outlooks - will be less vulnerable to maladies of emotional health. In this study, the theory was used to explain the Church's influence in modifying maladaptive thinking that predispose extramarital affairs through role-modeling.

The role of the Church as a custodian of morality is explicated within the broader debate on the role of religion in preserving the moral fiber of a people. Anderson (2013) examined the nexus between the Church and morality in Ghana and arrived to the conclusion that, religion determined morality of Ghanaians. This happens by censoring what goes into the mind and determining speech and behaviour in reaction to day-to-day life issues.

The argument put forward by Anderson (2013), however, is contradicted by the accounts made in other countries. For instance, citing the case of Nigeria, Adeyanju and Babalola (2017, p. 25) noted that "there seemed to be so much Church activities, conferences, conventions, retreats, crusades, pilgrimages, night vigils, picnics and evangelistic campaigns without many corresponding spirituality and moral growth in Nigeria." In his review of morality in Nigeria, Nwankwo (2015) was similarly appalled that despite a boom in Christian religion in Nigeria, through constant Church attendance and observance of Christian religious events, the moral fiber of the Nigerian society was under constant erosion. However, unlike Adeyanju and Babalola (2017), whose study focused on the Gospel and the impact on poverty on the practice of ideal Christianity in the country, Nwankwo (2015) proceeded to unravel the trends and arrived at a different conclusion that, religion is good by itself and is still the most reliable antidote to moral decay.

A similar study was undertaken by Ezenweke and Kanu (2012), who used the Catholic Church as a point of reference to examine the contribution of the Church in several areas of national development, including morality and its role in the conscience of the Nation. They firmly concluded that, the Church is the custodian of a society's moral conscience, through setting standards and preaching the virtues of character, honesty, modesty and integrity. Their findings support the position of many scholars that, the Church plays an influential role in shaping the moral conscience of a people.

Biggs (2014) describes role models as exceptional people we emulate because of their Christian morals and principles, with regards to marital faithfulness. According to Haylock, Cornelius, Malunga and Mbandazayo (2016), a role model is a catalyst for positive behaviour formation, through the role model's own attitudes, actions and practices. This is based on the underlying premise that fidelity in marriage is learned through observation and, further, that extramarital affair behaviours can be unlearned when positive alternatives are modeled.

Brooks and Monaco (2013) modeled the probability of engaging in extramarital sex and found that, religious individuals are less likely to engage in extramarital sex. Conversely, low religious involvement subtracts an influential context for instilling positive marital attitudes and behaviours (Berk, 2014). Both discourses by Berk (2014) and Brooks and Monaco (2013) are, by extension, a classic illustration of the significant influence the Church plays in mitigating extramarital sex through role modeling.

Wilcox and Wolfinger (2016) further expounds on the perspectives of Berk (2014) by arguing that, frequent Church attendance brings members into contact with happily married monogamous couples, thereby, further, instilling the importance of fidelity to a good relationship. In their study, regular Church attendance was associated with fidelity. This led them to conclude that, an important reason why the Church plays an important role in decreasing extramarital affairs is, because it exposes members to models of healthy relationships.

According to Goddard (2010), among the body of Christ, are role models and couples with many years of experience who serve as mentors for married members. These have a vast repository of knowledge and deep insights into the institution of marriage, to help them navigate the risk factors that predispose extramarital affairs. The author asserts that, sometimes, people are dissuaded from extramarital relationships just by the comfort of knowing that they are not the only couple facing marital difficulties. Through

fellowship with other married couples, members of the Church derive the benefit of shared knowledge and ideas pertaining to situations that they go through in their marriage.

Phelps (2013) avers that, God's Word has always placed a high requirement of integrity upon those who lead in spiritual endeavour. The pastor and his wife, along with other church leaders, become the role model couples for the Church. This is not only an expectation from the Church, it is an obligation required of the office of a spiritual leader. Those who lead in the Church are exhorted to have an ideal marriage and role model for married couples – setting a good example for the Church and society to emulate (Strong, 2010). As Benoit (2010) asserts, the marriage of the pastor can be a source of example to the Church and society on relationships and love - having a strong marriage is a tool for ministering to other marriages. By implication, through this kind of role modeling, extramarital affairs, among members of the Church, may be prevented. Can these assumptions survive empirical examination? This is the question that the current study sought to answer.

Research Methodology

Descriptive survey design was adopted. Six churches namely Africa Inland Church (AIC), Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA), The Chosen Christian Internal Church (CCIC), Salvation Army (SA), Kingdom Seekers Fellowship Church (KSFC) and Africa Gospel Church were (AGC) selected. The selected Churches had a total of 3,100 members. A sample of 310 respondents comprising of pastors and church members was used. The data analysis entailed first entering the data into computer software for analysis. The use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 20) was made for this purpose. The data was coded and entered into this software where the data was analyzed. Qualitative data was analyzed through thematic technique.

Results and Discussions

Respondents were asked about their salvation status. Table 5 shows that 97% of the respondents were born again while 3% said they were not born again. This implies that most of the respondents were born again Christians.

Table 1 Respondents' salvation status

Salvation status	Frequency	Percent
Born again	174	97.0%
Not born again	5	3.0%
Total	179	100.0%

The study sought to determine whether respondents' spouse also attended Church. Table 6 shows that 83.9% of the respondents said "yes" whereas 16.1% said "no". This implies that most of the respondents worshipped in the same Church.

Table 2: Church attendance by spouse

Does your spouse attend Church?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	150	83.9%
No	29	16.1%
Total	179	100.0%

Role played in Church

The distribution of respondents by role they played in Church is presented in Figure 1. As per the figure, 56% of the respondents were Church members while 44% were leaders. The results indicate that there was adequate representation of both Church members and their leaders.

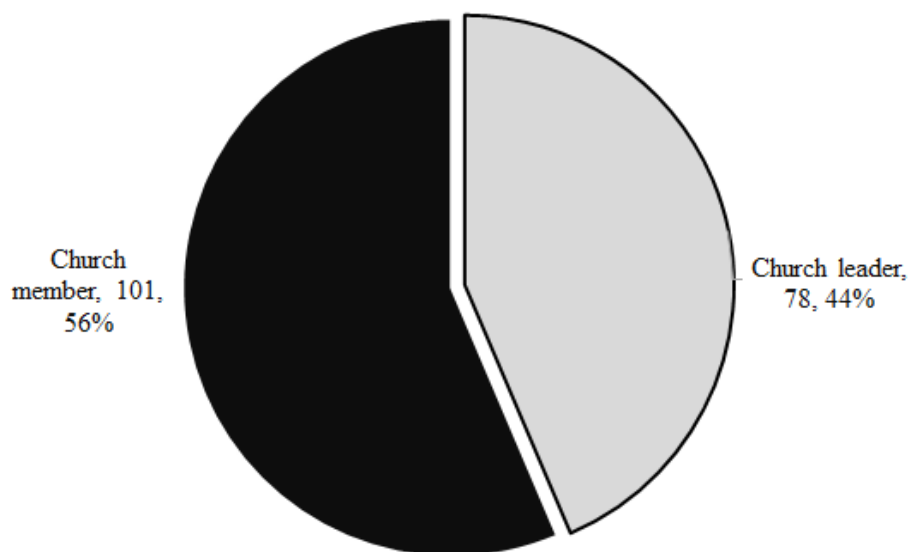


Figure 1: Role played in Church

Respondents were asked to indicate their type of marriage. Figure 7 shows that 51% did a Christian Church wedding whereas 49% did not. The finding shown in figure 2 suggests that about half of the respondents did not wed in Church.

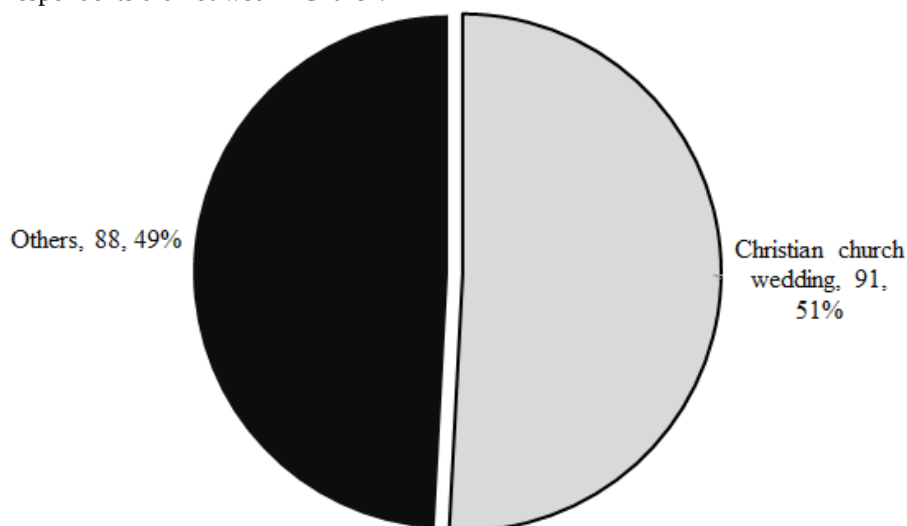


Figure 2: Type of marriage

The study sought to establish the number of years that respondents had been married. Figure 3 shows that the average number of years respondents had been married was about 18½ years, with the numbers varying from this average by about 12 years ($M=18.6$, $SD=12.3$). The results revealed that the minimum number of years of marriage was 1 while the maximum was 60. The finding implies that most of the respondents had been married for more than 10 years.

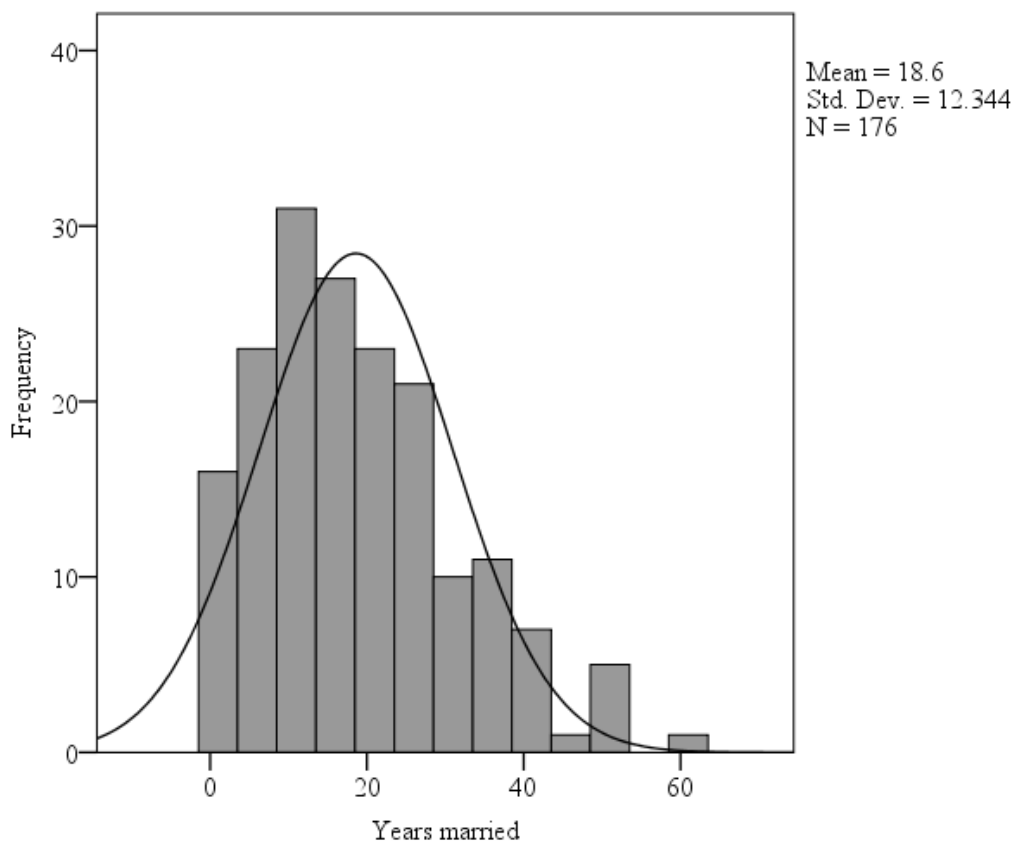


Figure 3: Distribution of respondents by number of years married

Respondents were asked whether there had been incidences of extramarital affairs in the course of their marriage. Figure 4 shows that 24% of the respondents reported incidences of extramarital affairs in the course of their marriage while 76% did not. The numbers suggest that the incidences of extramarital affairs among respondents were few. However, it can be argued that the numbers are still high among members of the Body of Christ. This level of prevalence is also consistent with numbers reported within American marriages where Marin et al. (2014) reported an estimated range of between 20 percent and 40 percent but higher than those reported by Nowak et al. (2014) in UK at 14 percent or in India by Raghunath and Truscott (2015) at 15 percent. However, it is relatively lower than the numbers reported by Kioko (2015) in Nairobi at 40 to 60 percent. The result implies that extramarital affairs were indeed pervasive among Christians. The findings on extramarital affairs were corroborated by findings of in-depth interviews with the Pastors of the five Churches, whereby three Pastors from three different Churches confirmed that they had handled cases of extramarital affairs among members of their flock.

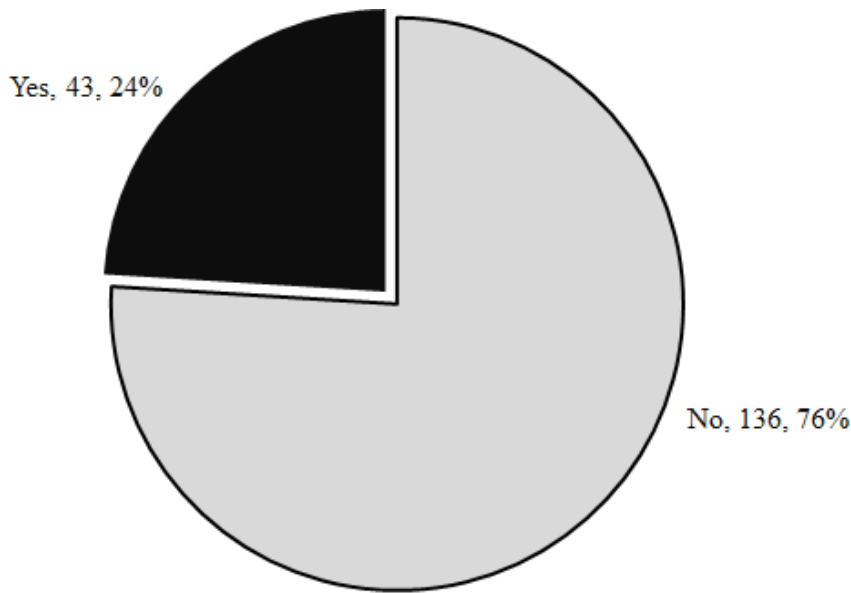


Figure4: Incidences of extramarital affairs in the course of marriage

Out of the 43 respondents who reported incidences of extramarital affairs in the course of their marriage, the study sought to establish the different types of extramarital affairs occurring. Figure 5 shows that, emotional attachment was the most prevalent type of extramarital affair, as identified by 60% (26) of the respondents, followed by sexual intercourse as reported by 42% (18) of the respondents. The figure shows that 23% (10) of the respondents mentioned caressing while 9% (4) of the respondents identified kissing.

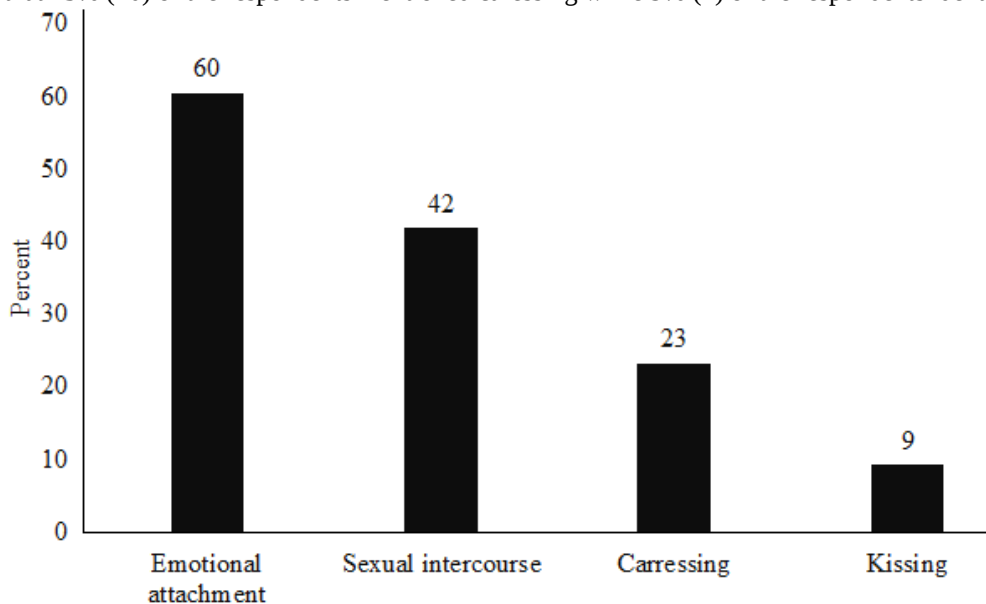


Figure 5: Type of extramarital affairs

The influence of various dimensions of role-modelling in the Church towards mitigating the vice of extramarital affairs. Table 3 presents the frequencies and percentages on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. As per the table, 45.3 % and 27.7 % of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, that the marriage of their pastors and other Church leaders set a good example of how they should conduct themselves as a Christian spouse. However, 12.6% of the respondents were neutral, 7.5% of the respondents disagreed and 6.9% of the respondents strongly disagreed.

Concerning the statement that in Church, there are many happily married Christian spouses who are models of healthy marital relationship free from extra-marital affairs, 40.9% and 22.6% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed, respectively. However, 22.6% of the respondents were neutral, 10.1% of the respondents disagreed and 3.8% strongly disagreed.

On the statement that through fellowship with other Christian spouses, respondents learnt that their marriage was not the only one facing difficulty, 50.3% of the respondents agreed and 35.2% of the respondents strongly agreed. Some 9.4% of the respondents were however neutral whereas 3.8% and 1.3% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively.

Table3: Influence of role-modelling in mitigating extramarital affairs

Influence of role-models		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
The marriage of our pastors and other Church leaders have set a good example of how I should conduct myself as a Christian spouse	F	12	14	23	80	50	179
	%	6.9%	7.5%	12.6%	45.3%	27.7%	100.0%
In Church, there are many happily married Christian spouses who are models of healthy marital relationship free from extra-marital affairs.	F	7	18	41	73	40	179
	%	3.8%	10.1%	22.6%	40.9%	22.6%	100.0%
Through fellowship with other Christian spouses, I have learnt that my marriage is not the only one facing difficulty.	F	2	7	17	90	63	179
	%	1.3%	3.8%	9.4%	50.3%	35.2%	100.0%
In our Church, young spouses have an opportunity to be mentored by elderly spouses whose marriages are successful	F	4	6	17	42	31	179
	%	3.8%	5.7%	17.1%	41.8%	31.6%	100.0%
Testimonies given in Church about the dangers of extramarital affairs help me avoid the vice.	F	6	9	27	95	42	179
	%	3.1%	5.0%	15.1%	52.8%	23.9%	100.0%

The views of the respondents were also sought with regards to whether in respondents' Church, young spouses have an opportunity to be mentored by elderly spouses whose marriages are successful. Table 3 shows that 41.8% of the respondents agreed and 31.6% strongly agreed. However, 17.1% of the respondents were neutral and 5.7% and 3.8% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively.

The study further sought to establish whether testimonies given in Church about the dangers of extramarital affairs help them avoid the vice, 52.8% and 23.9% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed, respectively. However, 15.1% of the respondents were neutral, 5.0% disagreed and another 3.1% strongly

disagreed. Thus, most of the respondents were in agreement that testimonies given in church helped them avoid the vice. This is resonant to the idea of pre-marital counseling, discussed by Sauerheber and Bitter (2013), as a preventive measure which couples learn how to work through relationship problems that predispose extramarital affairs later in the marriage.

Correlation analysis was performed to establish the significance of role-modelling in mitigating extramarital affairs. Table 4 shows that the relationship between incidences of extramarital affairs and Christian role-modeling was negative and statistically significant ($r=-.565$, $p<.01$). This implies that, incidences of extramarital affairs reduced with increase in Christian role-modelling. This is consistent with the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5:13-14 that the Church is the salt and the light of the world. It affirms the conclusion by Nwankwo (2015) that religion is good by itself and is still the most reliable antidote to moral decay.

Table 4: Correlation extramarital affairs with Christian role-modelling

Spearman's Rho		1	2
1. Incidences of extramarital affairs	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	
	N	157	
2. Christian role-modelling	Correlation Coefficient	-.565**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	157	160

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Conclusion

The influence of Christian role modelling on extramarital affairs in Kenya was significant. The study findings have positive implications on the Church. The results affirm the Church as an effective custodian of moral fiber in society with significant impact on regulating the behaviour of the society towards upholding the sanctity of marriages as God instituted it. Through good role-modelling, the Church indeed helps preserve good morals of a society by transforming the minds of its members keep off from extramarital affairs. The study findings have underscored the need for Christian role-modelling in the society. By setting a good example as a Christian leader, married individuals learn how to conduct themselves as a Christian spouse by emulating the leader. The study has, thus, affirmed the significance of having models of healthy marital relationships free of extramarital affairs. Through fellowship with such role-models, spouses learn that their marriage is not the only one facing difficulty and are thus encouraged to resolve issues while maintaining marital faithfulness. Role models also act as mentors to young couples. Therefore, church leaders and members whose marriages set a good example to others should be identified and called upon to mentor couples and share their experiences on the strategies they used to preserve marital faithfulness.

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