

Does Devoting to Prayer Contribute towards Longevity in marriage? A Phenomenological Qualitative Study on the Lived Experiences of Born-Again Anglican Christians in Ankole Diocese.

*Fred Sheldon Mwesigwa¹, Donath Asiimire¹,
Johnson Atwiine¹, Betrum Namanya¹, Medard Rugyendo²

¹Bishop Stuart University, ²Kabale University.

ABSTRACT

This paper studies devotion to prayer and longevity in marriage among born again Anglican Christians in Ankole diocese. This study was purely qualitative in nature in which a Phenomenological approach was used. In-depth Interviews were conducted with 12 born-again Anglican Christians (married for 50 years and above and had been in salvation for 20 years at the time of data collection), 2 parish priests and 1 archdeacon. The aim of this study was to investigate how lived experiences of devoting to prayer among the born again Anglican Christians contribute to longevity in marriage. Using content analysis, data was analysed, coded and findings were presented under themes and sub themes. The results reveal that devotion to prayer among the born-

Mwesigwa Fred (✉)

ORCID: 0009-0009-0157-9484

E-mail: smwesigwafred@gmail.com

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again studied helps them to navigate marriage challenges in a healthy way. Deeper investigations show that self-reflection through prayer, one is able to deal with difficult issues. Finally, more investigations reveal that regular prayers, keeps couples connected spiritually and one is able to deal with marital stress, just in case. The study concludes that longevity in marriage among born-again Anglican Christians in Ankole diocese who are married for fifty years and above is harmonious partly due to the role played by devotion to prayer. The study recommends regular prayers among married couples if long-lasting marriages are to be harmonious.

Keywords: *Lived experiences, devotion to prayer, Born-Again, Anglican Christians and Longevity in marriage.*

INTRODUCTION

The motivation for studying the effect of devotion to prayer on marital longevity stems from a growing interest in understanding the factors that contribute to the stability and satisfaction in marriages. Marital longevity is a significant aspect of social stability and personal well-being, and identifying elements that support enduring relationships is essential for both academic research and practical applications in marital counselling and therapy.

Shared religious practices such as prayer play a crucial role in enhancing marital satisfaction and stability. Research suggests that couples who engage in regular prayer together often report higher levels of marital satisfaction and lower rates of conflict and divorce (Lambert & Dollahite, 2010; Mahoney et al., 1999). Prayer is often associated with psychological and emotional benefits, such as increased feelings of peace, reduced anxiety, and a stronger sense of purpose and meaning in life (Koenig, 2012). These benefits can contribute to a more harmonious and resilient marital relationship, providing couples with the emotional tools necessary to navigate challenges and maintain a long-term commitment.

Devotion to prayer can enhance communication and intimacy between partners. Prayer often involves expressing gratitude, seeking

guidance, and sharing personal concerns, which can deepen emotional intimacy and foster a sense of unity (Butler et al., 2002). By facilitating open and honest communication, prayer can help couples build a stronger and more trusting relationship. Participation in communal prayer and religious activities can offer couples additional resources, guidance, and encouragement from their faith community, which can be instrumental in sustaining their marriage (Ellison et al., 2011). Prayer can serve as a coping mechanism during times of stress and adversity. By turning to prayer, couples may find solace and strength, enabling them to manage external pressures and internal conflicts more effectively (Pargament et al., 1998).

While there is substantial evidence linking religious practices to marital satisfaction and stability, there is a need for more focused research on the specific effect of prayer towards longevity in marriage. This study filled the gap by exploring the lived experience of “Born again” Anglican Christians. The focus was put on how devotion to prayer contribute to the endurance of marriages.

Purpose of the study

The main goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of “Born again” Anglican Christians towards longevity in marriage with special attention to the role of devotion to prayer. This aimed at contributing towards sustainable marriages for sustainable socioeconomic development.

Study’s objective

The specific objective of the study was to “examine how devoting to prayer among the “born-again” Anglican Christians contribute to longevity in marriage in Ankole Diocese.”

Research Questions

How does devoting to prayer among the “born-again” Anglican Christians contribute to longevity in marriage in Ankole Diocese?

Related Empirical Literature

Lister et al., (2019) examine the Influence of Prayer and Family Worship on Relationship Functioning among Married Adults in the Caribbean and Latin American. Data was gathered from 3997 Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) adults in the Caribbean and Latin America. Hierarchical multiple regression (HMR) analyses were conducted to evaluate the associations between religious practices (personal prayer, family worship, church attendance, and bible study) and relationship outcomes (relationship satisfaction, emotional atonement, conflict resolution, beliefs in traditional roles) independent of gender and level of education.

Their results suggest that married adults who spend more time in habitual prayer and at least weekly family worship experience higher levels of relationship satisfaction, emotional atonement and satisfaction with easier conflicts resolved. Additionally, they show that married adults who were more likely to have a daily prayer life also reported having more egalitarian beliefs about roles and responsibilities in their relationships. Their findings highlight the significant influence prayer and family worship have on marital relationship satisfaction and functioning.

Moore, Chaney & Skipper (2021) studied “Put God above All [and He] Will Glorify Your Marriage: Relational Spirituality in Black Couples”. Their study examined the influence of religion on relational spirituality among 33 Black married couples. They note that previous research has largely relied on samples of White middle-class Americans to assess aspects of relational spirituality through prayer within marriages. In contrast, their study uses in-depth qualitative interviews with socioeconomically diverse black married couples to determine how religion, and prayers, inform perceptions of relational spirituality among an under-examined population.

Findings show that Black married couples employ mechanisms of relational spirituality in several ways. Specifically, Black married couples utilize relational spirituality for maintaining and transforming their marriage through (a) Putting God First believing in prayer; (b) Studying and Applying the Word of God; and (c) Giving Their Life Over to God. Implications of findings from this study suggest that

relational spirituality through prayer may foster increased marital satisfaction, quality, and commitment, thereby serving as a potential buffer against divorce for Black couples.

Bhattacharyya, K. K. (2020) did a study about “The sacred relationship between marriage, spirituality and healthy ageing in Hinduism”. He shows that Marriage is perhaps the most important foundation in human society.

In Hinduism, the foundation for marriage is friendship, which is the understanding and the commitment between spouses. Arranged marriage tradition is still considered as the societal norm in India, and is regarded as an event for life. The relationship based on a strong bond with each other helps the couple to maintain other social relationships in and outside their extended multigenerational family and helps spouses to have good physical and mental health in their future life. He shows that spirituality contributes to their longevity and promotes healthy ageing. Marriage, in Hinduism, is also considered as the relationship of souls which extends beyond a single life through incarnations.

Approach and Methodology

Study Area

The study was done in Ankole Diocese which is found in the Ankole sub-region in South Western Uganda. Ankole was among the first regions to experience the Christian revival movement with different spiritual ideologies. Mbarara which later became Ankole Diocese is well known for the East African Revival Movement that ushered in a new spiritual experience to awaken the church in 1963.

The East African Revival Movement, is an evangelical spiritual awakening movement that has become synonymous with the Anglican Church of Uganda, simply described as Okulokoka, Luganda for getting saved, was birthed in Gahini Rwanda around 1931 and spread to Kigezi in 1935 and Ankole in 1936. This study considered Kinoni Archdeaconry because of having the highest number of “born-again” Anglican Christians who had been married for fifty years and above at the time of data collection.

Design and Sampling

This is a Phenomenological qualitative study. A phenomenological approach is a research design used in understanding and generating knowledge about first-person events, or the lived experiences of the population under study. The approach was appropriate in studying long-lived marriage experiences among the “born-again” Anglican Christians. There were 33 “born-again” Anglican Christians that had been married for fifty years and above in Kinoni archdeaconry at the point of data collection.

The sample size was arrived at by listing separately the targeted population. After listing those that were married for fifty years and above, the research team went on to identify those that were born-again for twenty years and above from the same list. The final list generated was randomised using Excel to arrive at the sample size. A sample size of 12 “born again” Anglican couples was used. While sampling is key to determining the sample size, the actual sample size for the study was determined at the point of saturation.

Tools and Methods

Semi-structured interview guide was designed for easy collection of data from the respondents. The interviews involved 12 “born-again” Anglican Christians who had been married for fifty years and above but also should have been saved for twenty years and above at the time of the interviews. Their interview guide comprised of questions relating to how devotion to prayer through Jesus Christ, contribute towards harmony in long-lasting marriage. The key informants in this study involved 1 Parish priest and 1 Archdeacon from Kinoni archdeaconry.

Data Analysis

After conducting the interviews, the collected audio recordings were first transcribed into Runyankole- Rukiga (this is because the two languages go hand in hand) the local language, and translated into English by two research assistants. The research team reviewed each other’s work to ensure good quality of the transcriptions and translations of the data. The transcripts were entered into NVivo 12.0

and coded. Data analysis was an iterative process using content analysis. The research team compared their codes, identified inconsistencies, and discussed until a consensus was reached. When coding was complete, the team identified the themes. The results were presented objective by objective.

Operational Definitions

To provide distinctiveness regarding what is being investigated in this study, the fundamental terms used in this research will now be operationally defined. These terms include:

Born-again

The born-again are distinguished by a public confession of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and normally read the Bible every day with a Bible study guide known as Kishumuuruzo. They often attend regular fellowships and/or evangelistic crusades and conventions. For this study, the “born-again” Anglicans are the East African Revival Movement Christians whose popular theme is the greeting Tukurendereza (a Luganda word meaning “we praise you, Jesus”). They respect the core values of East African Revival fellowship including the repentance of sins. For this study, the “born-again” were operationalized as; (a) evidenced by the believer devotion to prayer and faith in Jesus Christ. This is because believers/” born-again” are considered to be motivated by the triune God to glorify and enjoy Him forever.

Longevity in Marriage

Research varies on the criterion for what determines longevity in marriage. Karimi, Bakhtiyari, and Arani (2019) considered a long-term marriage as one that has lasted at least 20 years. Other studies interviewed marriages of 45 years Pnina (2009) and Piechota, Ali, Tomlinson, and Monin (2022), 40 years Dickson et al. (2002), and 30 years or more Robinson and Blanton (1993) and Weidmann, Ledermann, and Grob (2017). The Long marriages so far were enjoyed by Karam Chand and Kartari Chand in Bradford in the United Kingdom who were married for 90 years; K. Philipose Thomas, Sosamma

Thomas in Kerala in India who were married for 88 years, Herbert Fisher and Zelmyra²

Fisher in USA who were married for 86 years (Lauer & Lauer, 1986). In Uganda, one Ruyaga and his wife Joy who live in Bwizibwera in Mbarara district have been married for 76 years <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/lifestyle/heart-to-heart/ruyaga-s-76-year-relationship-is-testimony-marriage-is-doable-4495626>.

However, there is scanty African literature on longevity in marriage. The descriptive phrase longevity in marriage is operationalized in this study to mean couples who have been married for 50 years and above. Currently it is the only African study to concentrate on longevity in marriage and one which has considered many years as far as longevity in marriage is concerned; given what other studies have done.

Findings

In this section, we present the analysis that was carried out to achieve the study objectives. We explored the lived experiences of the “born-again” Anglican Christians (usually termed as the East African Revival Brethren) that had been saved for twenty years and who were at the same time married for fifty years and above at the time of data collection.

² Daily Guide: A Bible study guide with daily scriptures, exposition and prayers.

Table 1.1: Showing summary of finding on the role of devoting to Prayer towards Longevity in marriage

Research Question	Theme	Sub Theme
How does devoting to prayer among “Born again” Anglican Christians contribute towards Longevity in marriage in Ankole Diocese?	Prayer and navigating marriage challenges in a health way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflection and keeping a couple connected • Dealing with difficult times/dealing with marital stress

Source: Field Data, 2023

Devotion to Prayer in Faith and Navigating Marriage Challenges in a Healthy Way

Dealing with difficult times/ Dealing with marital stress

Several responses from the born-again members showed a correlation between prayer and overcoming marriage challenges. One of the born-again females said,

*“..... sometimes during prayers, I used to realise that I am the one in wrong and without anyone asking me, I used to ask for forgiveness from my husband.....and without settling your disputes, you cannot be at peace.....” **EARB-I***

One of the born-again married women also said,

*“.....one time we went for overnight prayers...I had fasted for two weeks praying to God to give me a child after being married for fifteen years.... few days after the overnight prayers I got pregnant...and now I have six children. My husband was already stressed and marriage was almost failing.....” **EARB-G***

The findings were corroborated by the Archdeacon who asserted that; “.....some come here crying with marriage problems.... both men and women but when you pray with them, they go back home

peaceful and, in most cases, they come back with testimonies of victory...so surely prayer is a very important tool in marriage.....”

ARCD-A

From the findings, this study analyses that nothing in the lives of the born-again married couples is hopeless, they believe Jesus laid His life for them, offering them forgiveness, freedom and eternity with Him. They believe that Jesus Christ sees their suffering and knows the hidden places in their hearts and their marriages that need to be renewed, healed, and redeemed. Prayer helps them to trust that Jesus Christ has a purpose beyond what they can see and that there is nothing impossible with Him. Through prayers, they learn to lay down what they think is best and to submit their marriage desires to God. God through prayers gives them grace and forgiveness when they live in fear instead of faith.

Self-reflection and keeping the couple connected

A born-again married man who had unnatural feelings said;

“.....like I told you, prayer acts like a mirror.... when one is praying, he/she is able to see where things have gone wrong or right..... through prayer I kept seeing myself in problems because of the bestiality I was involved in....(as if almost getting emotional) ...I could not share it with anyone but every time I prayed I had the conviction that what I was doing was wrong.....I used not to like my wife and yet I was born-again.....” EARB-J

Another married woman said;

“.....we pray every time we are faced with whatever problems...for example when we were still paying school fees, when our children were still young they used to be stubborn but we could pray and God used to answer our prayers.....I and my husband kept close because of that....”

EARB-C

A married woman further stressed the importance of prayer,

“.....now all our children have married and we are here alone but we used to pray as a family before going to bed and everyone had a turn.....but still when everyone went to bed I and my husband prayed alone in our bedroom.....it kept improving our relationship because those were the moments, we reflected on some of the challenges in our

marital relationship.....now we are weak sometimes I fail to pray.....”

EARB-B

The findings portray that as the “born-again” Christians married for fifty years and above devote themselves to prayer, they come before God as a couple and as a team reminding themselves that they are on the same side. Team players have common goals and direction. Couples praying together reinforce those goals and that connection. When they offer prayers either as an individual or couple to God, they are naturally aligning their hearts, and aim at one shared hope and outcome. This leads to physical and spiritual ties that bind them and are not easily broken, there by sustaining their marriages.

Discussions of Findings

This section provides discussion on the lived experience of the “born again” Anglican Christians and longevity in Christian marriage. This paper concentrated on the role of devoting to prayer among “Born again” Anglican Christians towards longevity in marriage. The discussion was done in comparison with the related empirical literature as presented in the previous section.

During interviews, it was confirmed that prayers to God through Jesus Christ and faith among the “born-again” Anglican Christians that have been married for fifty years and above, is one of the ways how spouses cope with marital challenges. They further show that through prayer to God through Jesus Christ their marriages are renewed, healed, and redeemed. Prayer helps them to trust that Jesus Christ has a purpose beyond what they can see and that there is nothing impossible with God. Through prayers, they learn to lay down what they think is best and to submit their marriage desires to God leading to unity in marriage. The results are in agreement with what Lister et al. (2019) found out in a study conducted in America about the influence of prayer and family worship on relationship functioning among married adults.

Their results suggest that married adults who spend more time in habitual prayer and at least weekly family worship, experience higher levels of relationship satisfaction, emotional compensation and satisfaction with how conflicts were resolved. Their findings further

highlight a significant influence prayer and family worship have on relationship satisfaction and functioning.

This is further in line with what Adamczyk and Pietrzak (2022) found out when they conducted a study in Poland about “Prayer for a Partner and Relationship Outcomes”. The study utilized a cross-sectional and longitudinal design and examined 412 Polish adults aged 18–75 ($M = 35.10$, $SD = 9.50$) at Time 1 and 190 participants after a four-month interval. Their results suggest that the effects of praying for a partner may differ depending on relationship outcomes and that prayer may play a positive function with respect to relationship satisfaction in marital relationships. It is to this end that this study accentuates that devotion to prayer in faith among the “born-again” Anglican Christians has meaningfully contributed to peaceful and long-lasting marriages especially those that have been married for fifty years and above. Longevity in marriage means a long-life span, a key statistical indicator for development in any given country.

More to the above, further findings revealed that through prayers the “born-again” Anglican Christians are able to reinforce those goals and connect with God direct. Offering their prayers to God as a couple naturally aligns their hearts and as couples they live with shared hope. Prayer leads to physical and spiritual ties that bind the two thereby sustaining their marriage. Rukirande et al (2005) points out that prayer is one of the greatest weapons of overcoming challenging moments in life.

Correspondingly, Moore et al. (2021) in a study “Put God above all and He will glorify your marriage” among Black Americans brings to light that several enduring Black couples are as a result of being consistent in prayers to God which is a noteworthy role of relational spirituality in building familial bonds that are not easily broken. Relatedly, is the study that had been done by Mahoney and Cano (2014) when they conducted about “Introduction to the Special Section on Religion and Spirituality in Family Life” in USA. Their findings suggest 3 constructs that appear to enhance married heterosexuals’ relationship dynamics: petitionary prayer for partner, spiritual intimacy, and the sanctification of marriage.

In addition, religious/spiritual coping was shown to have promise as a construct relevant to couples' functioning. Further findings from their study suggest that relational spirituality through prayers to God may foster increased marital satisfaction, quality, and commitment, thereby serving as a potential buffer against divorce for Black couples. In agreement with the findings and the literature reviewed, this study therefore, proposes selfless devotion to prayer for Self-reflection and to keep Christian marrieds connected together which is the case among the "born-again" Anglican Christians that have been married for fifty years and above. Togetherness in a marriage is key to child up bringing and support which strategically reflects sustainability of a nation contributing to sustainable development.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, this study concludes that being "born-again" means a change of heart; from indifference or hostility toward God to a love for Him and doing His will. Through devoting to prayer, findings showed that "born-again" live harmoniously by loving and forgiving each other as well as renewing their relationship with God. Finally, this study concludes that long-lasting marriages among Anglican Christian marriage to be harmonious, couples need devote to prayer to God regularly since He is the Author of Christian Marriage.

Recommendations

The study recommends regular prayers among married couples if long-lasting marriages are to be harmonious.

Considering the spiritual aspect and observing marriage rites is key to improving marriage relationship among Anglican Christians.

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