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Harnessing Mothers' Union Activities as a Means to Enhance Church Marriages

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Church marriage plays a central role in spiritual, social, and family life, offering moral guidance, relational mentorship, and community support. The Mothers' Union (MU) emerged in this historical context as a movement to strengthen Christian marriage and family life. While economic factors such as the high cost of church weddings are often cited, deep-rooted cultural beliefs surrounding clan rituals, ancestral approval, and customary obligations continue to shape marital legitimacy, making traditional marriage more socially authoritative in many communities. The Mothers' Union represents one of the most enduring faith-based women's movements within Christian institutions, particularly within Anglican traditions, where it functions as both a spiritual fellowship and a structured social support system. Church marriage is a Christian marital union solemnised within a church setting according to established religious rites and formally sanctioned by denominational authority. Counselling wedded couples is the most important and most tricky challenge affecting mothers' unions in Uganda and possibly beyond because of several factors, namely masterminded by the social media and modernisation. Sensitisation programs should be organised from time to time among members of the mothers' union on how to cope with modernisation and the robust expansion of the social media among wedded couples.

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INTRODUCTION

Church marriage plays a central role in spiritual, social, and family life, offering moral guidance, relational mentorship, and community support. Within this context, the Mothers' Union provides a key platform for nurturing ethical values, strengthening family cohesion, and equipping members with practical and spiritual skills for marriage. Together, premarital counselling, the celebration of marriage, and ongoing marital counselling help prepare couples for marital challenges and promote long-term stability. Examining the relationship between Mothers' Union involvement and church marriage processes is therefore essential for understanding how spiritual mentorship and communal participation (Mwesigwa, Bogere, & Ogwal, 2022; Mwesigwa, 2021; Mwesigwa & Mubangizi, 2015) shape marital readiness and resilience.

The historical development of church marriage is deeply rooted in Christian traditions dating back to the early church, when marriage was gradually formalised as a sacrament and a communal institution. In medieval Europe, particularly from the 12th century onward, marriage ceremonies increasingly moved from private family arrangements to public rituals officiated in churches, signifying both religious blessing and social recognition (Witte, 2015). By the 16th and 17th centuries, church marriage had become the dominant form of legally and religiously recognised union in much of Europe, with the Church playing a central role in solemnising, recording, and regulating marital relationships (Hitchcock, 2020). This shift institutionalised marriage as both a sacramental act and a legally binding contract, influencing Christian communities globally through missionary expansion and colonial legal systems.

The Mothers' Union (MU) emerged in this historical context as a movement to strengthen

Christian marriage and family life. Founded in 1876 by Mary Sumner in the Church of England, the MU began as a small group focused on supporting mothers in Christian parenting and family formation. Over time, it grew into an influential laywomen's organisation with a global reach, playing a critical role in upholding church teaching on marriage, promoting premarital preparation, and fostering moral standards in family life (Mothers' Union, 2024). During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as the Anglican Church expanded through missionary activity in Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world, the MU became a key partner in spreading Christian ideals of marriage, often working alongside clergy to teach women and couples about the sanctity and responsibilities of church marriage (Stunt, 2022).

Internationally, MU branches adapted to local contexts while maintaining a consistent focus on marriage and family. In the United States, MU chapters helped integrate Christian marriage preparation into parish life through seminars, parenting courses, and community outreach (Browning, 2021). In the United Kingdom and Germany, MU worked within diocesan structures to provide lay support for clergy, especially in premarital instruction, advocacy for family stability, and pastoral care for couples. In India, MU partnered with local women's fellowships to promote vocational training and marriage preparation while addressing issues such as gender-based violence and dowry practices, blending traditional Anglican teachings with contextual family support programmes (Mothers' Union, 2024; Rao, 2019). These demonstrate how MU has historically functioned as both a spiritual and social agent, strengthening the institution of church marriage across cultures.

In Africa, the MU became a cornerstone of Anglican mission work. From the late 19th century,

MU groups were instrumental in promoting Christian family values among converts, encouraging church weddings, and offering moral education to young women preparing for marriage (Adebayo, 2018). The establishment of Mothers' Union branches in Uganda in the early 1900s coincided with the expansion of missionary churches and the gradual integration of Christian marriage practices with customary norms, particularly through education and community mobilisation (Nsubuga & Tumwine, 2020). MU Uganda has since celebrated over a century of activity, with programmes focused on premarital counselling, couple mentoring, women's economic empowerment, and advocacy for marital faithfulness (Mothers' Union Uganda, 2023). Through these initiatives, MU has played a transformative role in shaping attitudes toward church marriage, helping to shift marriage practices from purely customary arrangements to Christian sacramental unions recognised both legally and ecclesiastically.

In Uganda, church marriages are legally recognised and regulated alongside civil procedures. Churches, especially the Anglican, Catholic, and Pentecostal denominations, play a formal role in solemnising marriages and providing premarital instruction in accordance with the Marriage Act (Government of Uganda, 2021). MU activities are embedded within this legal and ecclesiastical framework, supporting parish clergy in preparing couples for church weddings and mobilising communities to value Christian marriage as a moral and social foundation.

Problem Statement

While economic factors such as the high cost of church weddings are often cited, deep-rooted cultural beliefs surrounding clan rituals, ancestral approval, and customary obligations continue to shape marital legitimacy, making traditional marriage more socially authoritative in many communities (Okello & Akena, 2023). Christian churches also lack context-sensitive strategies to effectively bridge these cultural-religious divides,

leading to normative ambiguity where church marriage is often perceived as optional or costly (Kagaba & Apio, 2024). This situation has serious implications for legal protection, inheritance rights, and spiritual formation, particularly for women and children in informal unions. The study aims to examine the relationship between mothers' union and church marriage in Uganda. Specifically, the researchers responded to three questions, namely; [a] What is the contribution of mothers' union in the premarital counselling of prospective wedded couples in the Anglican church? [b] What effect does mothers' union involvement have on the celebration of church marriage of prospective wedded couples in the Anglican church? And [c] How significant is mothers' union in the marital counselling of wedded couples in the Anglican church?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data Sourcing

This study espoused a systematic literature review using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff & Altman, 2009). The strengths of a Systematic literature review lie in its transparency, precision, replicability, and low risk of partiality, even if it can sometimes be ambiguous, especially if the information is not properly managed (Moosapour, Saeidifard, Aalaa, Soltani & Larijani, 2021). Also, the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses' methodology have been endorsed for being an organised procedure involving documentation, screening, suitability assessment, and enclosure to ease the effectual collection of relevant information (Ferguson, Olds, Curtis, Blake, Crozier, Dankiw, Dumuid, Kasai, O'Connor, Virgara & Maher, 2022; Zulfikar, Ryan, Berkery, Odonnell, Purtil, O'Malley, 2023).

Data Search

Data was mainly obtained from varied databases carefully chosen owing to their observed repute and

appropriateness, hence, a reliable systematic literature review. Whereas this study was envisioned to concentrate on current sources, no restrictions were identified concerning the time frame. However, the analysis capitalised on Open Access peer-reviewed journals that are available in English. Below is the search string used in the database.

("Mothers' Union*" OR "MU*" OR "Church Marriage*" OR "Issues of Church Marriage*") AND ("Uganda")

Data Screening

The dataset went through a concerted screening process that combined studying the topic, understanding the abstract, and probing the decisive issues. The process was meant to detach sources that did not relate well to the review questions. As a consequence, several articles were removed as the review process yielded the elimination of more articles. The residual articles were studied for consistency regarding the study questions.

Data Analysis

The reviewers took a joint coding process by means of a collective Excel worksheet. This technique demonstrates the evolving Thematic Analysis Framework (TAF) (Hawley, Boudrey, Howie, Liang, Attu, Santos & Baum, 2026; Mohd Noor, Cockburn, Foong, Thiam, Abdul Aziz, Sildva, Lin & Vadivelu, 2025), and its worth is in the attainment of useful deductions from the review. The dominant issues influencing data mining spun around evaluating the contribution of Mothers Unions on Church Marriages in Uganda with a goal of contributing to the policy and practice of Church Marriages in the Anglican community.

MOTHERS' UNION AND CHURCH MARRIAGE

Mothers' Union

The Mothers' Union (MU) represents one of the most enduring faith-based women's movements

within Christian institutions, particularly within Anglican traditions, where it functions as both a spiritual fellowship and a structured social support system (Olivier & Wodon, 2019; Tomalin, Haustein, & Kidy, 2019). Founded on Christian principles of service, compassion, and family stewardship, the organisation has evolved beyond its original devotional orientation to become a significant community development actor addressing social, moral, and welfare challenges at household and community levels (Tadros & Sabates-Wheeler, 2020; Wodon, 2021). Contemporary scholarship conceptualises the Mothers' Union as an institutionalised platform through which faith, gender roles, and social responsibility intersect, enabling women to collectively engage in moral formation, social advocacy, and grassroots development initiatives (Asuo, 2024; Bacia, 2025; Nanyanzi, 2023).

At the spiritual level, MU provides a structured environment for collective worship, prayer fellowship, and biblical instruction, which reinforces shared values such as mutual care, marital responsibility, and ethical living (Bompani & Brown, 2020; Haustein, 2021). These spiritual practices serve not only devotional purposes but also function as mechanisms of psychosocial support, helping members cope with family stress, economic hardship, and social uncertainty. Scholars increasingly argue that faith-based associations such as MU contribute to social capital formation by fostering trust, reciprocity, and collective identity among members, thereby strengthening communal bonds and enhancing cooperation in addressing local challenges (Tomalin, 2020; Jennings, 2021). Through regular meetings, counselling sessions, and outreach activities, members cultivate networks of solidarity that extend beyond church spaces into wider community life.

Socially, the Mothers' Union operates as a grassroots welfare institution that mobilises women to participate in charitable initiatives, caregiving, and community outreach (Olivier, Tsimpo, &

Gemignani, 2020; Wodon & de la Brière, 2021). Activities often include supporting vulnerable families, promoting girls' education, advocating against domestic violence, and assisting marginalised groups such as widows, orphans, and economically disadvantaged households. In this regard, MU functions as a bridge between formal religious institutions and everyday social realities, translating theological teachings into practical interventions that respond to community needs (Tadros, 2019; Le Roux & Bartelink, 2022). Its emphasis on gender equity and family wellbeing positions the organisation as an informal yet influential actor in promoting inclusive development and social justice within local contexts.

Economically and developmentally, MU groups frequently engage in income-generating activities, savings initiatives, and skills training programs that empower women financially while reinforcing collective responsibility (Deneulin & O'Connell, 2019; Wodon, 2021). These initiatives enhance household resilience and contribute to poverty reduction by enabling members to support family welfare and educational access (World Bank, 2020; UN Women, 2021). Researchers note that such faith-based empowerment approaches are particularly effective in rural and semi-urban settings where formal social protection systems may be limited, allowing MU to complement state and non-governmental development efforts (Tomalin et al., 2019; Olivier & Wodon, 2019).

A defining feature of the Mothers' Union is its emphasis on intergenerational mentoring and knowledge transmission (Haustein, 2021; Le Roux & Bartelink, 2022). Older and more experienced members play a crucial role in guiding younger women in marital relationships, parenting practices, spiritual discipline, and community engagement. This mentoring process strengthens cultural continuity while adapting traditional values to contemporary social realities. By nurturing leadership skills, moral responsibility, and

emotional support networks, MU contributes to the cultivation of socially responsible families and cohesive communities (Katongole, 2022; Mirembe, 2023).

Overall, the Mothers' Union can be understood as a hybrid institution that integrates spirituality, social welfare, and community development. Its dual identity as both a devotional community and an active social agency enables it to reinforce family stability, promote women's participation in community leadership, and enhance societal wellbeing (Tadros & Sabates-Wheeler, 2020; Wodon & de la Brière, 2021). Through sustained mentoring, advocacy, and collective service, MU continues to play a transformative role in strengthening social cohesion and community resilience, particularly in contexts where faith institutions remain central to everyday social organisation.

Church Marriage

Church marriage is a Christian marital union solemnised within a church setting according to established religious rites and formally sanctioned by denominational authority (Lehrer & Son, 2019). While it possesses legal recognition in many contexts, its deeper meaning lies in its theological and spiritual foundation, where marriage is understood as a sacred covenant grounded in divine purpose rather than merely a civil agreement (Komuhangi, 2025). Within Christian doctrine, marriage symbolises a lifelong commitment made before God, the faith community, and families, reflecting ideals of love, sacrifice, fidelity, and mutual responsibility (Moeti, Madigele & Moeti, 2024). Consequently, church marriage is viewed not simply as a private relationship between two individuals but as a spiritually accountable union embedded within a wider moral and communal framework.

Theologically, church marriage is rooted in biblical teachings that emphasise companionship, unity, and shared spiritual growth (Nanyanzi, 2023). It is often

framed as a vocation through which couples practice Christian virtues such as forgiveness, patience, stewardship, and service. Scholars argue that this sacred framing distinguishes church marriage from secular unions by placing spiritual formation at the centre of marital life. Couples are encouraged to pursue shared discipleship through prayer, worship participation, and adherence to Christian ethical principles, thereby strengthening both marital bonds and individual faith development (Katongole, 2022). In this sense, marriage becomes a pathway for spiritual maturity and moral accountability.

Institutionally, church marriage involves structured preparation processes designed to equip couples with relational, emotional, and spiritual competencies (Willoughby & James, 2021). Premarital counselling programs commonly address communication skills, conflict management, financial stewardship, parenting expectations, and faith-based decision-making (Stanley, Rhoades, & Whitton, 2020). These preparatory practices reflect the church's pastoral responsibility to promote marital stability and prevent family breakdown. Beyond the wedding ceremony itself, many denominations provide continuous pastoral care through counselling, mentorship by experienced couples, and marriage enrichment programs, reinforcing long-term commitment and resilience within the relationship.

Socially, church marriage carries strong normative expectations shaped by religious teachings and community values (Edgell & Docka-Filipek, 2020). The congregation serves as a witnessing community that affirms the union and provides moral support, encouragement, and accountability. This communal recognition strengthens social legitimacy while fostering a sense of belonging and shared responsibility for sustaining family life. Scholars observe that such communal involvement contributes to relational stability by creating supportive networks that help couples navigate economic pressures, parenting challenges, and

interpersonal conflicts. Thus, church marriage functions as a mechanism for promoting social cohesion and reinforcing shared moral standards within faith communities (Mahoney, 2021).

Furthermore, church marriage plays an important role in shaping family structures and intergenerational continuity (Dollahite, Marks, & Dalton, 2019). By emphasising fidelity, mutual respect, and cooperative parenting, it contributes to stable household environments that support child development and socialisation into ethical and spiritual values. The integration of spiritual teachings with everyday family practices enables couples to align domestic life with broader religious and cultural expectations, strengthening both familial and community wellbeing (King & Boyd, 2020).

Therefore, church marriage can be understood as both a spiritual institution and a social contract that integrates theological meaning, institutional guidance, and communal participation (Tadros & Sabates-Wheeler, 2020). Its dual character allows it to serve not only as a sacred covenant between spouses and God but also as a socially regulated framework that promotes moral responsibility, relational stability, and collective wellbeing. Through spiritual commitment, pastoral support, and community accountability, church marriage continues to function as a foundational institution shaping family life and social order within Christian societies (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2022).

THE CONTRIBUTION OF MOTHERS' UNION IN CHURCH MARRIAGES

Provision of Premarital Counselling to Prospective Couples

Kabasinguzi (2024) examined the effect of mothers' union on premarital counselling models and marital stability in Bukoto-Nakawa Division. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach to assess how different premarital counselling approaches (emotionally-focused, cognitive-behavioural, and relationship skills training) affect later marital

stability. The study combined a structured survey of married couples with in-depth interviews of counsellors and clergy, and used regression analysis to quantify associations and thematic analysis for qualitative data. Findings showed that all forms of premarital counselling were positively associated with indicators of marital stability (communication, conflict resolution, commitment), with emotionally-focused counselling producing the strongest effect. The study's gap and an important limitation for the study is that it does not identify the counselling actor (i.e., whether counselling was delivered by Mothers' Union members, clergy, trained lay counsellors, or external professionals), so the specific contribution of MU could not be assessed.

Matsepe (2024) assessed the contribution of mothers' union to premarital counselling based on a case study of a United Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) congregation in Pretoria. Through in-depth interviews with 18 participants, including married, separated, and divorced individuals, the study identified key premarital preparation needs such as conflict management, financial planning, intimacy, and extended-family tensions. The study proposed a culturally relevant pastoral premarital care model. While highly informative for African Christian counselling contexts, the study was carried out in a different geographical context. Hence, its findings cannot be used to explain the current study.

Watenga (2023) investigated the role of mothers' union on the relationship between premarital counselling and marital stability among couples in Kahawa West Ward, Nairobi, Kenya, using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design involving 259 couples and service providers. The findings indicated a significant positive correlation. According to the findings, couples who received premarital counselling reported greater marital stability, improved communication, and stronger commitment. Nonetheless, the study focused on church-provided counselling in general, without specifically addressing Mothers' Union's

involvement (RSIS International), hence presenting a study gap.

Hesbon, Ayako, & Ichuloi (2020) examined the role of mothers' union on premarital counselling programs and their influence on Christian family stability in Kisumu Central, Kenya. Utilising semi-structured questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups with 462 respondents drawn from local churches, the study concluded that premarital counselling significantly contributes to family stability. However, similar to previous studies, it treated counselling broadly as a church activity and did not consider Mothers' Union as a specific provider of these services.

Involvement and Celebration of Church Marriages

Beja, Muoki, and Chidongo (2018) examined the contribution of the Anglican Church of Kenya Mothers' Union involvement to marriage celebration in St. Thomas Parish, Kilifi County. Using a descriptive survey design involving 40 MU members, 5 clergy, and 5 lay leaders through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups, they found that MU supports vulnerable families and participates actively in church activities. However, the study does not explore whether MU influences engaged couples to opt for church weddings or how it contributes to the celebration of such marriages.

Kairu (2023) examined the contribution of mothers' union involvement to marriage celebration in Gatundu Deanery. The study particularly explored how Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Gatundu Deanery, Nairobi, promote marriage and family life in light of *Amoris Laetitia*. The study adopted a case study design and employed a qualitative approach. According to the findings of the study, mothers' union plays a significant role in marriage celebration. The study concluded that pastoral formation in SCCs strengthens marriage preparation. Nevertheless, the study does not specifically examine mothers' union activities or

link them to the uptake of church marriage among couples.

Kiambi, Mwita, & Kinoti (2025) studied the influence of mothers' union involvement on Christian wedding ceremonies and marital stability in the Methodist Church, Nairobi Synod. Through a mixed-method design involving 194 couples, they found that formal Christian wedding rituals spearheaded by mothers' union strongly correlate with marital stability. While this research underscores the importance of church weddings, it does not investigate the involvement of Mothers' Union or similar lay-women's organisations in influencing couples' decisions to marry in the church.

Matendechere, Kinuthia, & Wamalwa (2025) examined the contribution of mothers' union involvement in the organisation of marriage celebration in Kenya. The study focused on extramarital sexual relations and marital stability in the Anglican Diocese of Butere, Kenya. Using qualitative interviews, the study revealed that mothers' union involvement contributes to mitigating extramarital behaviours and promoting marital stability. However, it does not reference Mothers' Union or its role in counselling couples or encouraging formal church marriages.

African Gender and Religion (2024), using a qualitative method, studied the influence of mothers' union involvement on marriage celebration in Zambia. The study focused on how members contribute to an effective marriage celebration. Using Photo-VOICE, key informant interviews, and focus-group discussions, the authors demonstrated MU's role in promoting successful celebration, family care and Christian values. However, the study did not examine MU's involvement in preparing couples for church marriage ceremonies or influencing their decision to marry in church.

Provision of Counselling Services to Wedded Couples

Watenga (2023) assessed the effect of mothers' union on premarital counselling and marital stability among couples in Kahawa West, Nairobi, Kenya. The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design surveying 259 couples and interviewing service providers to evaluate whether premarital counselling predicts marital stability. Quantitative analysis (correlations and multivariate controls) and qualitative interviews showed a significant positive relationship: couples who received structured premarital counselling reported higher marital satisfaction, better communication, and stronger commitment. The methodological strength was the large sample and triangulation with providers; the research gap for mothers' union research is explicit. The study aggregated counselling sources under "church counselling" and did not disaggregate lay groups such as Mothers' Union as a distinct provider, leaving unanswered how mothers' union-led counselling compares to clergy-led or professional counselling.

Hesbon, Ayako and Ichuloi (2020) examined the contribution of mothers' union to premarital counselling programs and Christian family stability in Kisumu Central, Kenya. Using a cross-sectional survey with 462 respondents from church communities, backed by interviews and focus groups, this study tested associations between exposure to premarital programs and family stability measures. Statistical analyses found that structured premarital programs were significantly associated with lower reported conflict and higher measures of family cohesion. The authors conclude that church-based counselling is an effective preventive strategy. The research gap relative to MU is that the programmes were described at the institutional (church) level and did not document whether Mothers' Union or similar lay-women's organisations delivered those services, nor did they track long-term outcomes specifically for couples counselled by MU.

Moeti, Madigele & Moeti (2024) studied the contribution of mothers' union on premarital counselling and its efficacy in Botswana. The study employed a qualitative approach using interviews to collect data from pastors and church leaders across several denominations to explore how premarital counselling is practised and perceived. Thematic analysis revealed that pastors believe counselling is critical for marital success but highlighted inconsistencies in training, lack of standardised content, and variable use of lay groups. The study's findings point to the positive perceived effect of counselling on couple readiness and conflict prevention. However, the study presented a methodological gap in terms of research approach. However, this study will bridge the gap by using a mixed approach.

Nyamahunge and Kiyangi (2025) assessed the role of mothers' union in emotional engagement counselling of wedded couples in Kampala, Uganda. Using a cross-sectional quantitative design with validated measures of marital satisfaction and stability, the authors evaluated the effect of emotional-engagement style counselling provided in selected churches. Results indicated a modest but statistically significant positive effect on marital satisfaction and reduced conflict frequency. As with the other studies, the important gap is that counselling providers were described generically as "church counselling teams" Mothers' Union was not isolated as a discrete provider, so the unique contribution of MU to married couples' outcomes remains unmeasured.

The literature reveals that premarital counselling, church marriage participation, and marital counselling within Christian settings contribute positively to marital stability, improved communication, commitment, and family cohesion. Studies on premarital counselling consistently show that structured preparation equips couples with relational and conflict-management skills, although most research treats counselling broadly as a church activity without clearly identifying the specific role

of Mothers' Union as a service provider. Similarly, literature on Mothers' Union involvement in marriage celebration highlights its participation in church and family support activities but provides limited evidence on whether such involvement influences couples' decisions to undertake church marriage or shapes the preparation and celebration process. Research on marital counselling among wedded couples further confirms that church-based counselling enhances marital satisfaction and reduces conflict; however, counselling providers are often aggregated under general church structures, leaving the unique contribution of Mothers' Union insufficiently examined. Across the three thematic areas, existing studies are largely concentrated outside Uganda, frequently rely on single-method or descriptive designs, and rarely examine Mothers' Union interventions as distinct mechanisms influencing marital preparation, marriage uptake, and post-marital stability, thereby indicating the need for context-specific and methodologically integrated investigation.

Many of the studies prove that premarital counselling positively influences marital stability, communication, and commitment; however, important empirical, methodological, and contextual gaps remain. Empirically, existing findings largely measure the effectiveness of counselling outcomes without isolating the specific contribution of Mothers' Union as a counselling provider. Studies such as Kabasinguzi (2024), Watenga (2023), and Hesbon, Ayako, and Ichuloi (2020) aggregated counselling under general church structures, leaving unanswered whether MU-led counselling produces distinct outcomes compared to clergy-led or professional counselling. Methodologically, a study such as Matsepe (2024) relied on a small qualitative case study, limiting generalizability, while other studies emphasised outcome correlations without examining counselling processes and mentoring dynamics. Contextually, most evidence originates from Kenya and South Africa, creating limited applicability to

Ugandan Anglican settings where MU structures and cultural expectations differ.

DISCUSSION

This review was built on the belief that whilst economic factors continue to shape marital legitimacy, making traditional marriage more socially authoritative in several communities, church marriages have taken centre-stage (Okello & Akena, 2023). However, those Christian churches face shortages in context-sensitive strategies to permit them to effectively bridge these cultural-religious divides, leading to normative ambiguity where church marriages are perceived as optional (Kagaba & Apio, 2024). Given the implications of the status-quo in terms of legal protection, inheritance rights, and spiritual formation, particularly for women and children in informal unions, the authors examined the relationship between Mothers' Union activities and Church Marriage in Uganda. Specifically, the reviewers responded to three questions, namely; [a] What is the contribution of mothers' union in the premarital counselling of prospective wedded couples in the Anglican church? [b] What effect does mothers' union involvement have on the celebration of church marriage of prospective wedded couples in the Anglican church? And [c] How significant is mothers' union in the marital counselling of wedded couples in the Anglican church?

Each of the three questions was answered on the basis of previous works, even if there are discrepancies with those published works. However, a number of discrepancies abide in much of the literature. For instance, regarding the role of Mothers' Unions in the provision of counselling services, a study by Kabasinguzi (2024) revealed a positive association between all forms of premarital counselling and marital stability in terms of communication, conflict resolution, and commitment. While emotionally-focused counselling was seen to be yielding the strongest effect, a study by Green and Miller (2013) revealed how high-risk couples, in Canada, were less likely

to participate in premarital counselling, rendering premarital programs to fail to address the unique needs of high-risk and lower-income couples. Also, the available conventional teaching methods utilised in premarital programs, such as didactic instruction, have often been inappropriate for the literacy levels and learning styles prevalent amongst higher-risk populations, and as such, programs could not be effective if they are inaccessible and ineffective for such couples. These circumstances tend to demand that premarital preparation be further scrutinised because of the mixed results and the question of generalizability.

Correspondingly, regarding the involvement of Mothers' Unions in the celebration of church marriages, a study by Beja, Muoki, and Chidongo (2018) revealed that Mothers' Unions supported vulnerable families and participated actively in church activities. However, the study does not explore whether Mothers' Unions influence engaged couples to opt for church weddings or how it contributes to the celebration of such marriages. Similarly, on the aspect of provision of counselling services to wedded couples, a study by Watenga (2023) revealed a significant positive relationship between couples who received structured premarital counselling and higher marital satisfaction, better communication, and stronger commitment. Nonetheless, fails to address the concern of how mothers' union-led counselling compares to clergy-led or professional counselling. The authors propose to address the above discrepancies through early counselling as an early warning mechanism.

CONCLUSION

Mothers' unions remain pivotal in church marriages, before the marriage, during the wedding and during the marriage itself. Through the provision of key services, namely, the provision of premarital counselling to prospective couples, involvement and celebration of church marriage, as well as counselling of wedded couples. Nonetheless, the review has demonstrated that counselling wedded couples is the most important

and most tricky challenge affecting mothers' unions in Uganda and possibly beyond because of several factors, namely masterminded by the social media and modernisation.

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Recommendations

From the above review, it is recommended that:

- Sensitisation programs should be organised from time to time among members of the mothers' union on how to cope with modernisation and the robust expansion of the social media among wedded couples.
- Adoption of more liberal ideas as opposed to the traditional ways of doing things is key to an evolving marriage life.
- Issues of church marriage need to be handled by every stakeholder, including the fathers' union, the clergy and the church elders.

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