INVOLVEMENT OF OKLAHOMA CLERGY IN PROVIDING MARRIAGE PREPARATION

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NOMENCLATURE

r_{XY}	Pearson product-moment correlation
α	Significance level for Type I error
M	mean

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Improving marital quality and stability has emerged as a major focus of contemporary family studies, and premarital education has been shown to be one of the most effective interventions available to accomplish this goal. Further, religious clergy have been identified as strategic participants in the process of providing marriage preparation. However, there is reason to believe that clergy have not begun to reach their potential in this process. This study will look at original data to provide insights into current practices and attitudes of Oklahoma clergy related to marriage preparation, including their perceptions of constraints to clergy involvement in providing effective marriage preparation in Oklahoma.

Background of the Problem

Despite what Cherlin (2004, p. 7) calls the "deinstitutionalization of American marriage," the vast majority of Americans still rate "having a happy marriage" as one of their most important goals in life (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). In addition, most believe that marriage involves a lifelong commitment that should be ended only under extreme circumstances (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). However, couples still face nearly a 50% chance of divorce in the United States, and first marriages that end in divorce last an average of 8 years (Kreider, 2005).

These unfulfilled expectations are not without cost. A preliminary report from Utah State University (Schramm, 2003) estimates that the direct and indirect economic costs of divorce to the United States are $33.3 billion per year, not including personal economic costs such as legal fees, lost work productivity, and relocation expenses. The same report suggests that annual costs to the State of Oklahoma are more than $370 million. Schramm notes that the figures do not include the costs from the break-up of cohabiting unions or from teen and unwed childbearing.

The 113 original signatories of the Statement of Principles (Institute for American Values, 2000), purporting to speak for the new Marriage Movement, listed a number of economic and social costs attributed to divorce and unwed childbearing:

> Higher rates of crime, drug abuse, education failure, chronic illness, child abuse, domestic violence, and poverty among both adults and children bring with them higher taxpayer costs in diverse forms: more welfare expenditure; increased remedial and special education expenses; higher day-care subsidies; additional child-support collection costs; a range of increased direct court administration costs incurred in regulating post-divorce or unwed families; higher foster care and child protection services; increased Medicaid and Medicare costs; increasingly expensive and harsh crime-control measures to compensate for formerly private regulation of adolescent and young-adult behaviors; and many other similar costs (p. 11).

The staggering costs of divorce and the powerful association of marriage with social good in America (Doherty et al., 2002; Fagan & Rector, 2000) have prompted state

governments to adopt efforts to strengthen marriages and families (Ooms, Bouchet, & Parke, 2004). There also has been a multi-disciplinary effort to strengthen marriages and prevent divorce (Fagan, 2001; Institute for American Values, 2000; Nock, Wright, & Sanchez, 1999; Ooms, 1998; Ooms et al., 2004). This effort is illustrated by the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI), a public/private partnership launched in 1999 in direct response to the economic consequences of divorce to the state (Johnson et al., 2002). Social costs are more difficult to calculate.

One focus of these marriage-strengthening efforts has been marriage preparation (Institute for American Values, 2004), an intervention that emphasizes prevention of marital distress. Murray (2005), addressing the responsibility of marriage and family therapists to include prevention interventions in their practice, noted that premarital counseling not only is cost-effective but also is more likely to produce significant, lasting improvements in relationship functioning. Bradbury and Karney (2004) also suggest that research findings are far more relevant to preventive interventions than to remedial interventions: "This is because interventions undertaken after the onset of marital distress must contend not only with the factors that led to the distress but also with the individual and interpersonal consequences that result from the distress" (p. 864).

Berger and Hannah (1999a), in the introduction to their presentation of major preventive approaches in couples therapy, address the value of an emphasis on prevention. Quoting L'Abate's brief summary of benefits—"prevention is cheaper, more innovative, easier, happier, and cleaner" (p. 8)—they suggest several rationales for focusing on preventive rather than remedial efforts: early destructive premarital conflict is a major risk factor for marital distress and dissolution; it is difficult to eradicate

destructive relationship patterns once they emerge; therapy has not been shown to produce reliable, significant change; couples' suffering and relationship deterioration can be prevented before they emerge; couples can be enabled to deal with relationship difficulties on their own; prevention can reach a far wider audience; preventive interventions are more economically viable.

Stanley (2001) suggests four arguments for plausible benefits of providing premarital education on a broad scale, the last of which is empirically based (p. 272):

1. It can foster deliberation by slowing couples down.
2. It can reinforce the value of marriage.
3. It can help couples learn about options if they need help later.
4. It can reduce the risk for subsequent marital distress or dissolution in some couples.

Recent meta-analyses of research evaluating the effectiveness of premarital education programs (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Reardon-Anderson, Stagner, Macomber, & Murray, 2005) confirm earlier findings that well-constructed programs can have a significant effect on behaviors related to marital satisfaction (Fagan, Patterson, & Rector, 2002; Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985). Giblin (1996), in a review of enrichment research of the 1990s, concluded that interventions for engaged couples, especially 6 or more months before the wedding, and newly-married couples in the first or second year of marriage may present the ideal opportunity for influencing marital systems.

Recognizing that most experimental studies of premarital education have relied on samples of mainly White, middle-class couples, one study (Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, in press) used a large random survey of Oklahoma and three neighboring

states to investigate the association between premarital education and several outcomes. The study found that participation in premarital education is associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction, higher levels of interpersonal commitment to spouses, and lower levels of destructive conflicts. In addition, premarital education was associated with a 31% decrease in the probability of divorce, even after controlling for characteristics that were correlated with both divorce and premarital education. The results also suggest that participating in premarital education generally is beneficial for a wide range of couples, with estimated effects robust across race, income, and education levels.

Not only is marriage education generally effective, but also the public seems to recognize its potential value. Large randomized telephone surveys in Oklahoma (Fournier & Roberts, 2003; Johnson et al., 2002) found that approximately two-thirds of Oklahoma residents would consider using relationship education, such as workshops or classes, to strengthen their relationships, with women slightly more interested than men (Fournier & Roberts, 2003; Johnson et al., 2002). The interest in relationship education classes is higher among those who have received premarital education (86%) than those who did not receive premarital education (68%). They found that the premarital stage is clearly the most socially acceptable time for couples to receive relationship education. Of those who have attended classes, over 70% report having had a very good to excellent experience, and almost 90% would recommend premarital education to engaged couples they know (Fournier & Roberts, 2003).

Marriage preparation began with a few college classes and with clergy and community counseling prior to World War II (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1987). In the most comprehensive survey to date of marriage education in the United States (Macomber,

Murray, & Stagner, 2005), researchers identified seven settings in which programs to strengthen and support healthy marriages take place: social service, public health, mental health, community centers, education, in-home, and religious. However, most premarital education historically has been provided within religious organizations (Fournier & Olson, 1986; Stanley, 2001). In Oklahoma, 93% of couples who have received marriage preparation did so within a religious setting (Stanley et al., in press), and in a Florida survey of registered premarital counseling providers, 81.5% of respondents identified their professional affiliation as clergy (Murray, 2005). In addition, there has been a renewed emphasis on the need for churches to provide effective marriage preparation (Institute for American Values, 2000; McManus, 1995; Scott et al., 2001; Stanley, 2001; Stanley et al., 2001).

Although there is a compelling rationale for the role religious leaders can play in prevention efforts through marriage preparation (Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, & Leber, 1995), there are questions about how available or effective current clergy-provided programs are (McManus, 1995; Stanley, 2001; Stanley et al., 2001). Very little data are available concerning either the content or format of clergy-provided education. Trathen (1995) indicates that fewer than 10% of churches provide premarital counseling that includes a skill-based approach, and a survey of 150 Assemblies of God pastors in Oklahoma found that only 18.6% required a waiting period before performing a wedding (Wilmoth, 2003).

A doctoral dissertation study (Liverpool, 2001) evaluated the effectiveness of a premarital counseling program developed by the researcher. The participants were predominantly Seventh Day Adventists of West Indian descent who resided in the

Greater Toronto area. The post facto comparison of the treatment group and control group indicated that the couples receiving premarital counseling scored significantly higher on marital satisfaction. A study in Cache County, Utah (Ramboz, 2003), however, found no correlation between naturally occurring marriage preparation and marital satisfaction. Both of the studies had small, unrepresentative samples.

Little research specifically deals with the question of constraints to the provision of premarital education programs by clergy. Inferences from related literature suggest that effectiveness is influenced not only by individual characteristics of the clergyperson but also by his relationships to the community in which he ministers, his sponsoring denomination, church congregations, and the couple receiving preparation.

Purpose of the Study

The OMI is one of the earliest and most ambitious endeavors to provide effective relationship education to couples before marriage. A chief strategy in its efforts to reduce divorce and strengthen marriages in the state is to train volunteer providers, including clergy, to present effective relationship education. In order to utilize resources most effectively in its effort to reduce divorce rates by a third in 10 years, it would be important to identify what sort of marriage preparation clergy provide currently and to determine what factors impede them in the provision of effective marriage preparation programs. The same information can inform decisions of policy-makers in other states. Another goal of the study is to learn about the process of marriage preparation and characteristics of clergypersons who provide these services.

Questions to Be Answered

Although clergy play a crucial role in marriage preparation for the vast majority

of American couples who receive preparation, almost nothing is known about the content of their educational curriculum, the process, their attitudes, or the outcomes. Because of the paucity of data related to this important topic, this study seeks to answer a broad range of questions in order to obtain a snapshot of the state of clergy-provided marriage preparation in Oklahoma. The following questions will be addressed:

- What are the demographic characteristics of clergy who provide marriage preparation?
- What are the structural/process components of clergy-provided marriage preparation? More specifically, what preparatory requirements do clergy set for couples whose wedding ceremonies they perform?
- What is the content of marriage preparation programs provided by Oklahoma clergy?
- How competent do clergy perceive themselves to be in delivering premarital education?
- How important do clergy consider items identified as risk factors for marital distress?
- What resources or tools do clergy know about and use in marriage preparation, including seminars/educational programs, inventories, videos, books, and referrals to other providers?
- What factors do clergy perceive to be hindrances to provision of effective marriage preparation?
- What are clergy attitudes toward the value and effectiveness of marriage preparation?

- How receptive are Oklahoma clergy to receiving additional training designed to increase the effectiveness of marriage preparation?
- How likely are Oklahoma clergy to endorse provisions of the "Oklahoma Marriage Covenant" disseminated by the OMI?
- What do clergy think about various questions specifically related to the OMI?

Theoretical Framework

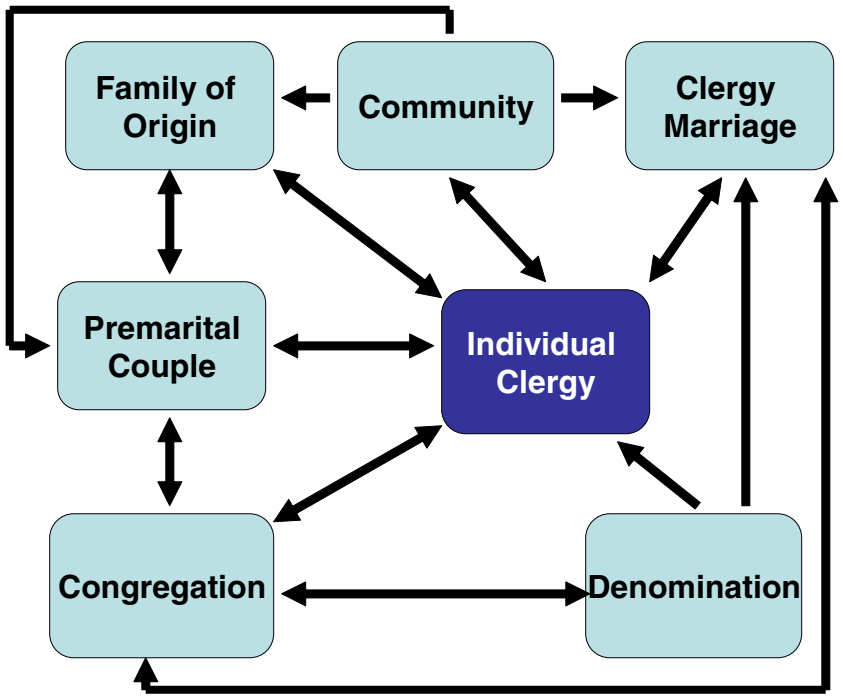
Three theoretical approaches are used to aid in organization and understanding of concepts addressed in this study. General systems theory will be used primarily as a heuristic to understand the context within which the clergyperson is involved in providing marriage preparation. Symbolic Interactionism will be used primarily to address the individual clergyperson's perception of roles and relationships. Concepts in Hill's Family Stress Theory will be adapted to illustrate the processes by which clergy utilize resources as they construe meaning to the event of providing marriage preparation.

Relevant principles from systems theory noted here are taken from Whitchurch and Constantine (1993) unless noted otherwise. A fundamental assumption of systems theory is the concept of nonsummativity, which asserts that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Self-reflexivity describes the characteristic of human systems that enables them to examine themselves and their behavior.

The concept of hierarchy refers to system levels. The focus of this study, the clergyperson, is conceptualized as an individual system embedded simultaneously within larger systems called suprasystems. Suprasystems of interest, based on the literature and on preliminary investigations, include the marriage preparation system, the premarital couple system, a community system, a denominational system, a congregational system,

a family-of-origin system, and the clergyperson's own marital system. Figure 1 presents a simplified heuristic diagram that shows expected relationships among these systems.

Figure 1: Systems Model of Constraints on Clergy Provision of Marriage Preparation



The concept of boundaries has to do with illustrating what elements are included and excluded from a particular system. The boundary also marks the point of contact between the system and its environment. Boundaries vary as to their relative amount of permeability, in regard both to how much information the system receives from outside as well as how information moves from the system into its environment. Boundary permeability is a particularly salient concept when considering how open or receptive an individual clergyperson might be to learn and apply new concepts or strategies to his provision of marriage preparation, particularly his willingness to receive additional training to learn new information or skills. The notion of feedback is relevant for how

clergy process information related to circumstances they perceive to be barriers to effective marriage preparation.

Constraint theory, which is within the systems framework, is derived from cybernetics (Breunlin, 1999), a term originally coined by mathematician Norbert Wiener to encompass all of control and communication theory. The notion of cybernetics has been adapted to explain relational processes such as regulation, adaptation, information processing and storage, and strategic behavior (Simon, Stierlin, & Wynne, 1985). Bateson's (2000) application of cybernetics to understanding and influencing complex human relationships included discussion of restraints (i.e., constraints or hindrances) on behaviors.

As systems theory suggests, clergypersons are involved in various kinds of interactions with other members of the systems of which they are a part. The theoretical framework of Symbolic Interactionism provides a mechanism for understanding how the clergyperson attaches meaning to those interactions and how his identity as a "marriage preparer" is constructed within the role of clergy. Definitions and explanations in this discussion of Symbolic Interactionism are taken primarily from LaRossa and Reitzes (1993). The concept of role describes shared norms for individuals who occupy specific social positions, which enable both the role occupant and those with whom they interact to anticipate future behaviors, thus maintaining regularity in social interactions. When viewed in terms of boundaries, roles are porous and flexible, and their content can be negotiated, particularly in informal roles. Although this study does not provide the in-depth data necessary for understanding individual role-construction, the concept helps to explain how different clergypersons attach different meanings to what would appear to be

the same role and helps to explain how meanings can change.

Closely associated with the idea of role is the concept of identity, which refers to self-meaning in a role. Thus, within the role of clergy, one individual may view himself as a clergyperson primarily in terms of being a teacher while another may view himself primarily in terms of being a leader or counselor. Identities generally are organized hierarchically by salience, which is the probability that a particular identity will be invoked in given situations. Symbolic Interactionism thus provides insight for considering the relative importance a specific clergyperson imputes to the marriage preparation process.

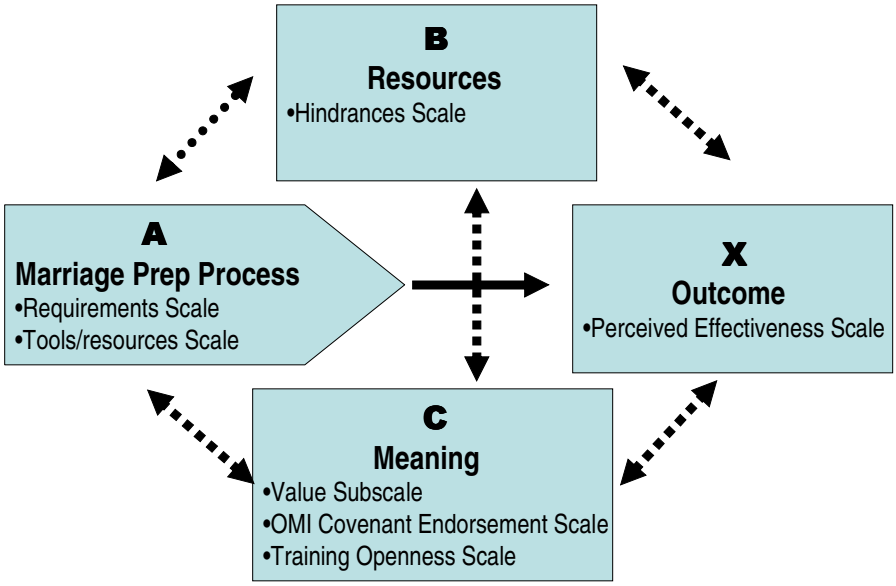
LaRossa and Reitzes (1993, pp. 143-144) enumerate several assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism that are relevant for this study:

- *Meaning arises in the process of interaction between people.*
- *Self concepts, once developed, provide an important motive for behavior.*
- *Individuals and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes.*

A theoretical model of the marriage preparation process would be helpful for understanding relationships among variables and for formulating research questions. The author suggests a model adapted from Hill's classic ABC-X model of family stress. Hill formulated his model as follows: "*A* (the event) → *interacting* with *B* (the family's crisis-meeting resources) → *interacting* with *C* (the definition the family make of the event) → *produces X* (the crisis) (Hill, 1951). Later scholars have added to Hill's theory to emphasize concepts such as the pile-up of stressors, family vulnerability, family type, or contextual factors (Boss, 2002; McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989), but the elements of

Hill's foundational model help to illustrate clergy involvement in marriage preparation. In this adaptation for marriage preparation, *A* (the marriage preparation event) interacting with *B* (resources available to the clergy) interacting with *C* (the meaning the clergyperson ascribes to the event) produces *X* (the quality of marriage preparation).

Figure 2: ABC-X Model of Marriage Preparation



Discussion of Terms Related to Clergy Involvement in Marriage Preparation

In addition to the theory-related terms already discussed, definitions and explanations are provided for several other terms used in the study.

Clergy. This study focuses on persons ordained for service by a Christian organization or congregation. These providers, with backgrounds in theology and family ministry, are trained to use an approach grounded in a particular set of Christian beliefs. Limiting the population to Christian clergy was necessary for practical and conceptual reasons. The number of non-Christian groups in Oklahoma constitutes such a small proportion of the state's population that analysis of the data would be statistically

misleading. Concepts such as the meaning of marriage, the role and identity of clergy, and the process of marriage preparation vary significantly among religious traditions. While a study of how clergy in other religions would be valuable, an exploratory study such as this could not do justice to such a broad, complex topic. Because clergy are overwhelmingly though not exclusively male, masculine pronouns will be used in this study as a matter of convenience.

Hindrances. A hindrance, used interchangeably with constraint or barrier, is an obstacle that impedes solution of a problem. For this study, the concepts of hindrance and resource are complementary (e.g., support from a clergyperson's denomination is considered a resource, and lack of denominational support is considered a hindrance). The theory of constraints, which looks at how human systems are prevented from solving problems, is grounded in the cybernetic principle of negative explanation (Bateson, 2000). From a therapeutic perspective, Breunlin (1999) suggests that removing obstacles is the most efficient way to reach problem resolution. This study assumes that a valid approach to improving the effectiveness of clergy in providing marriage preparation is to identify and remove hindrances.

Perceived effectiveness. This concept refers to the perception by the clergyperson that he is competent in providing marriage preparation and is satisfied with how thoroughly he deals with relevant content areas. This construct is used in place of the effectiveness of marriage preparation, which is beyond the scope of this study.

Marriage preparation. This is the primary term used in this study to refer to interventions designed to improve the likelihood of marital satisfaction and stability. Several other labels are used in the literature to identify such premarital programs,

including premarital education, premarital counseling, premarital therapy, and premarital educative counseling (Carroll & Doherty, 2003) and will be used interchangeably on occasion. Chronologically, these interventions occur proximate to a couple's wedding, either before or after. The comprehensive framework for marriage education proposed by Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, and Willoughby (2004) suggests that content, intensity, and methodology are components of marriage education crucial for decision-making for marriage educators. Although clergy are increasing involved with "remarital" as well as premarital counseling (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997), the study does not distinguish between these aspects of marriage preparation.

Active church membership. The Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB) suggests that one of the most difficult methodological questions is how to determine the size of a local congregation (2002). This survey asks subjects to estimate "how many people (all ages) are active members or participants of your congregation."

Denomination. Refers to an organization that is part of a larger religious tradition, "with well-elaborated sets of creeds, teachings, rituals, and authority structures" (Steensland, Park, Regnerus, Robinson, Wilcox, & Woodberry, 2000, p. 293). Some local congregations are not officially affiliated with a denomination and often call themselves "non-denominational," "interdenominational," or "independent." Other groups (e.g., Churches of Christ) emphasize they are not a denomination but can be identified by a common name, organizational principles, and doctrinal beliefs.

Relationship status. Refers to whether the clergyperson is married or single.

Relationship history. Refers to whether the clergyperson is in his first marriage, a

second or subsequent marriage, never married, widowed, or previously married.

Senior pastor. Refers to a clergyperson who has the primary leadership position in a local congregation.

Associate pastor. Refers to a clergyperson who serves in a support role in the church, ordinarily in a position administratively subordinate to the senior pastor.

Lay individual/couple. Refers to persons who are not ordained ministers.

PREP. Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) is one of several relationship education curricula referred to in the survey questionnaire. It is particularly relevant to this study because delivery of PREP was chosen to be the primary strategy of the OMI. PREP is a cognitive-behavioral model for intervention founded by Howard J. Markman in 1977, with substantial subsequent refinement (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2001; Stanley, Markman, & Jenkins, 2004). It also has a version (C-PREP) adapted for Christian audiences (Stanley, Trathen, & McCain, 2000b; Stanley, Trathen, McCain, & Bryan, 1998).

Mainline/Evangelical/Roman Catholic. Refers to the three dominant categories of Christian churches in the State of Oklahoma, as identified by the ASARB (2002). Classification of subjects into one of these categories was based on a process followed by this report (Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2002; Steensland et al., 2000). Steensland et al. (2000) divide Americans, when they identify a religious affiliation, into six categories: evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, Black Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and other. They argue that two religious traditions dominate White Protestantism: mainline Protestantism and evangelical Protestantism. They briefly characterize the two traditions as follows:

> Mainline denominations have typically emphasized an accommodating stance toward modernity, a proactive view on issues of social and economic justice, and pluralism in their tolerance of varied individual beliefs. Evangelical denominations have typically sought more separation from the broader culture, emphasized missionary activity and individual conversion, and taught strict adherence to particular religious beliefs (pp. 293-294).

Steensland et al. (2000) also distinguish between Black and White Protestant traditions. The historically Black denominations did not participate in the study conducted by ASARB, and reliable figures are difficult to obtain. Because they tend to be conservative on social and family issues (Steensland et al., 2000), Black Protestant churches, when identified, were included among evangelical Protestants for this study. Roman Catholics make up approximately 8% of Oklahomans who identify a religious affiliation. When combined, the several groups classified as "other" comprise fewer than 2% of the Oklahomans identifying with a religion. Those who identified themselves as nondenominational, interdenominational, or independent were classified with evangelical Protestants in line with the findings of Steensland et al. (2000).

The following terms were themes of distinct sections of the survey questionnaire and are discussed to clarify how they are used in the context of this study:

Requirements. Refers to the components of marriage preparation that clergy include in the education they provide. Specific components identified include setting a minimum waiting period from the time the couple contacts the clergy until the wedding;

administering a couple inventory; meetings with the pastor; group educational classes or programs; assigning a mentor or sponsor couple; assigning homework; requiring church membership; requiring premarital sexual abstinence; scheduling educational sessions after the wedding.

Content. Refers to subject matter addressed in marriage preparation. The following 18 items were selected from the literature: the wedding ceremony, realistic expectations, role perceptions, children/parenting, career, personality/temperament, relationship to God, communication, conflict resolution, problem-solving, family of origin, finances/budgeting, in-law relationships, friends, sexual relations, family planning, spiritual dimensions, and legal issues. The survey seeks to learn how satisfied clergy are with how thoroughly they deal with each issue in the marriage preparation they provide.

Risk factors. Refers to conditions clergy believe are related to a higher likelihood of marital distress. Items include having divorced parents, lack of support from parents, young age at marriage, limited income, limited education, dissimilarity of values and beliefs, cohabitation, premarital sex, dissimilar personal characteristics (race, socioeconomic status, intelligence, age, religion, etc.), premarital pregnancy and childbirth, poor communication skills, unrealistic expectations, poor conflict resolution skills, short length of acquaintance, past experience with physical abuse, past experience with sexual abuse, past experience with emotional or verbal abuse, and substance abuse by either partner.

Tools/resources. Within the context of the questionnaire, refers specifically to seminars/educational programs, inventories, videos, books and workbooks, and referrals to programs or counseling services provided by others.

Hindrances. Refers to constraints that make it difficult for clergy to provide effective marriage preparation.

OMI. A state-funded partnership among government, faith, business, service provision, and educational sectors to reduce the rate of divorce and encourage healthy relationships in the State of Oklahoma.

Statement of Hypotheses

Responses to items related to the topics outlined above should provide data that will make it possible to test several hypotheses of interest. As stated above, the focus of this study, the clergyperson, is conceptualized as an individual system embedded simultaneously within larger systems called suprasystems. Suprasystems of interest include the marriage preparation system, the premarital couple system, the family-of-origin system, a community system, a denominational system, a congregational system, and the clergyperson's own marital system.

The first eight-part hypothesis investigates the association of perceived competence in providing marriage preparation with hindrances related to the interaction of these systems.

1a. Perceived effectiveness in marriage preparation will be related to the overall level of perceived hindrances.

1b. Perceived effectiveness in marriage preparation will be related to the level of perceived hindrances associated with the premarital couple.

1c. Perceived effectiveness in marriage preparation will be related to the level of perceived community hindrances.

1d. Perceived effectiveness in marriage preparation will be related to the level of perceived denominational hindrances.

1e. Perceived effectiveness in marriage preparation will be related to the level of perceived congregational hindrances.

1f. Perceived effectiveness in marriage preparation will be related to the perception that problems in the clergyperson's marriage are a hindrance to effective marriage preparation.

1g. Perceived effectiveness in marriage preparation will be related to the degree to which the clergy believe that parents of the premarital couple make the process more difficult.

1h. Perceived effectiveness in marriage preparation will be related to the factors associated with the individual clergyperson.

The second hypothesis is designed to test whether the influence of inadequate time or money depends on other factors, specifically the size of the congregation and the attitude of the congregation toward marriage preparation.

2. The influence of having enough time and money on effective marriage preparation will depend on the size of the congregation and the attitude of the congregation toward marriage preparation.

The third hypothesis will compare the possibility that clergy would be more likely to attend a 1-day seminar to learn how to use premarital assessments than to attend a 3-day seminar to be trained to present PREP workshops.

3. Clergypersons will be more likely to attend a seminar to learn about

premarital assessments than to attend a seminar to learn how to teach one of the versions of PREP.

The fourth hypothesis is designed to do preliminary testing of the ABC-X Model of Marriage Preparation. It explores whether or not the relationship between the process of marriage preparation and the outcome is affected by hindrances and meaning attached to the process.

4. The correlation between Process (A) and Outcome (X) will decrease when controlling for Hindrances (B) and Meaning (C).

In addition to these hypotheses, there are two research questions. The first question explores the relationship between individual hindrances and the clergyperson's perception of effectiveness in marriage preparation.

1. How do individual items measuring hindrances help to predict perceived effectiveness in marriage preparation?

The final question addresses the identification of individuals who are likely to receive training to increase their skills in providing marriage preparation. It asks, "Is it possible to use demographic variables to predict which clergy would be most likely to attend PREP training?"

Justification for the Study

Scholarship Implications

This study can add to the body of scholarly information regarding prevention of marital distress and dissolution. First, the results provide needed baseline data for current marriage preparation programs. Although clergy provide most premarital education in the United States, scholars know very little about the attitudes of clergy toward marriage

preparation, the content or structure of the education they provide, or whether clergy consider their programs to be effective.

Second, efforts to construct a model of clergy-provided marriage preparation can lay the foundation for mid-range theoretical construction. The model can help to consolidate data from this and other studies into meaningful conceptual categories for future research.

Practical Application

This study has several potential practical applications. First, the results may identify constraints to providing effective marriage preparation. Entities such as the OMI or religious denominations could use this information to devise strategies for reducing these barriers, thus potentially benefiting the clergy, the couples receiving marriage preparation, their children, and the larger community.

Second, the results might be able to identify demographic characteristics of clergy most likely to receive and utilize training in delivery of PREP or other relationship education programs. The OMI or other agencies potentially could use this information to devise a focused strategy to recruit clergy for training, thus maximizing marketing resources.

Third, clergy could use the results to identify their own constraints and resources. This information could empower them to reframe their understanding of the marriage preparation process, renegotiate their identities as "marriage preparers," maximize their resources, and reduce the power of constraints.

Scope and Limitations

Conclusions from this study may be limited to populations similar to the sample

studied. The subjects were clergy associated with Christian churches in the State of Oklahoma. Excluding other faith groups eliminates a statistically insignificant but conceptually important body of information. Although major Christian groups are represented in Oklahoma, it is likely that the distribution will differ from other locations in the United States. Likewise, it is reasonable to assume that demographic and cultural differences between "Bible belt" Oklahoma and other locations would limit generalization to all populations.

The use of a mailed survey imposes several limitations on the study. These limitations, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4, include a lower response rate, biases inherent in self-report instruments, the inability to clarify questions, and the uncertainty about who actually responds.

Summary and Overview of Remaining Chapters

This chapter included an introduction to this study, background of the problem, a statement of the problem situation, the purpose of the study, questions to be answered, discussion of theoretical frameworks, definition of terms, hypotheses, justification for the study, and limitations. Chapters 2 and 3 will review literature from relevant research. Chapter 4 will present the methodology, including research design, pilot studies, selection of subjects, instrumentation, data collection and recording, statistical analysis, methodological assumptions, and limitations. Chapter 5 will present the results of the statistical analysis, and Chapter 6 will discuss the conclusions and recommendations for application and further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE RELATED TO THE HISTORY, PROCESS, AND CONTENT OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Overview

The review of literature will explore research that might inform an understanding of clergy-provided marriage preparation programs. Findings will be organized under the following topics: the historical role of clergy in marriage preparation, the content of marriage preparation, and the process of marriage preparation, which are covered in this chapter, and hindrances to effective marriage preparation, which are addressed in Chapter 3.

The comprehensive framework for marriage education proposed by Hawkins et al. (2004) suggests that content, intensity, and methodology are components of marriage education crucial for decision-making for marriage educators. The organization of this review will adapt this perspective, combining what Hawkins et al. term intensity and methodology into a broader concept labeled process.

The History of Marriage Preparation

Marriage preparation began with a few college classes and with clergy and community counseling prior to World War II, with courses in marriage and family preparation now provided at most colleges and in many secondary schools. The first such college course, titled "Preparation for Marriage and Family Living," was offered at

Boston University in 1924 by Ernest R. Groves. A similar course was offered at Teachers College, Columbia University, in 1929 (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1987). A subsequent text by Groves (1937) provides insight into content of early marriage preparation. Most of the book deals with health and heredity issues, particularly the physical examination. The final brief chapter covers all the following topics: the wedding, finances, religious understanding, legal qualifications for marriage, and the value of preparation. Most of this final chapter relates to financial matters, including dual careers, budgeting, insurance, credit, saving, installment buying, and debts.

According to Stahmann and Hiebert (1997), early writers saw premarital counseling mainly as an educational and informational service. However, among many clergy there also was a counseling perspective, and they often used a psychoanalytic model that focused on personality development of the individuals. For example, J. K. Morris (1960) suggested that premarital counseling should include at least eight sessions, an initial interview with the couple together, at least three personal interviews with each partner, and a final meeting with the couple together. He posited that couples coming for premarital counseling fall into four groups: (1) emotionally mature couples, (2) the mismatched, (3) the physically sick or handicapped, and (4) the neurotic or psychotic. Clergy were encouraged to refer difficult cases such as psychoses to professional counselors.

Four decades ago Rutledge (1966) perceived a broad "awakening to the tremendous need and challenge of preparation for marriage" (1966, p. xiii) among family life educators, ministers, marriage counselors, and others. He also predicted that divorce laws would be loosened and marriage laws tightened, perhaps even requiring premarital

counseling. Although Rutledge's vision for marriage preparation has not yet reached the level he anticipated, over the past several decades a number of significant events have helped to elevate the process to increased status. In 1976, the Roman Catholic Marriage Encounter Program, which began in Spain in 1962, reached the United States. Subsequently, several Jewish and Protestant versions of the program were developed. David and Vera Mace, who began retreats for Quakers in 1972, have been credited with bringing marriage preparation and enrichment to prominence. Mace challenged marriage counselors to focus their energies on marriage preparation and enrichment instead of maintaining a remedial orientation (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). The Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (ACME), which the Maces founded in 1973, continues their work today, and many other organizations and affiliations have begun over the past few decades.

Perhaps the most visible demonstration of the growing prominence of marriage preparation has been the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, founded in 1996 by Diane Sollee, a marriage and family therapist who spent 10 years on staff with the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. The coalition "serves as an information exchange and clearinghouse to help couples locate marriage and relationship courses; to help mental health professionals, clergy and lay educators locate training programs and resources; to connect those with an interest in the continuing development of the field; to support community initiatives, legislation and research; and to promote the effectiveness of the courses and increase their availability in the community" (SmartMarriages, 2005). The 2004 SmartMarriages Conference drew more than 1,800 scholars, clergy, therapists, government bureaucrats, and other interested persons from

around the globe (Institute for American Values, 2004).

A somewhat amorphous Marriage Movement illustrates the vitality of interest in marriage preparation and enrichment. An initial Statement of Principles (Institute for American Values, 2000), signed by 113 scholars and practitioners, spoke for what the signatories perceived to be a new grass-roots movement to strengthen marriage. A subsequent paper (Institute for American Values, 2004) noted apparent successes in achieving their goals, based on promising demographic news about marriage. They suggested, "It also seems plausible that the mushrooming number of marriage support programs in our society, offering skills-based marriage education to couples who want to improve their relationships, are contributing to stronger marriages and fewer divorces" (p. 3).

Although the Marriage Movement illustrates a growing interest in premarital counseling among scholars and therapists, clergy continue to provide most formal marriage preparation. For example, in Oklahoma approximately 93% of individuals who reported having received premarital education did so within a religious setting (Stanley et al., in press). In a Florida survey of registered premarital counseling providers, 81.5% of respondents identified their professional affiliation as clergy, in contrast to the 3.4% who identified their primary professional affiliation as a marriage and family therapist (Murray, 2005). In addition, there has been a renewed emphasis on the need for churches to provide effective marriage preparation (Institute for American Values, 2000; McManus, 1995; Scott et al., 2001; Stanley, 2001; Stanley et al., 2001).

Several factors make religious leaders particularly well suited to provide marriage preparation for many couples: they tend to have access to couples, a belief in the value of

marriage, a strong tradition of education, and an institutional base of operations, including facilities (Stanley et al., 1995). It frequently has been noted that clergy occupy a strategic position in providing premarital education, whether by providing the program directly or by serving as gatekeepers whereby couples are referred to other providers (Fournier & Roberts, 2003; Institute for American Values, 2000; Stanley, 2001; Stanley et al., 2001; McManus, 1995; Fournier & Olson, 1986). In response to this belief in the salience of clergy interventions, groups of clergy in at least 183 cities and towns in 40 states have established community marriage policies setting minimum standards for marriage preparation (Birch, Weed, & Olsen, 2004; McManus, 1995; About Marriage Savers, 2003). An evaluation of these programs suggests that counties with a Community Marriage Policy have a decline in the divorce rate nearly twice that of control counties (Birch et al., 2004).

One dimension of clergy potential is accessibility to couples that plan to marry. Although anecdotal evidence indicates a trend toward more civil unions (Payne County, OK, 2003; Grossman & Yoo, 2003), as many as 80% (Latimer & McManus, 2005; Stanley et al., 2001; Trathen, 1995) of first marriages occur in religious organizations.

Fournier and Olson (1986) also suggest that the power to set policies regarding permission to be married in a church provides clergy with a potentially captive audience: "Considering that few couples voluntarily seek premarital counseling, religious policymaking has greatly increased the opportunities to develop and evaluate programs that can make an impact on young couples" (p. 198). They further note that this level of influence with engaged couples is no longer available once the couple is married.

The potential of clergy influence also may be increased by the determination to do

a good job (Fournier & Olson, 1986), based on moral imperatives implicit in Christian theology. However, the potential can be realized only as "long as clergy continue to accept responsibility for the preparation of couples they marry" (p. 199).

Clergy also have a perspective that potentially provides advantages over other professional counseling or education: "Marriage skills help committed couples negotiate their way to more satisfying relationships. But they cannot tell couples as persuasively why marriage matters. Clergy are thus often in a unique position to offer struggling couples new hope and new reasons to resolve their marital problems" (Institute for American Values, 2000, p. 21).

An investigation of service delivery and evaluation design options of programs intended to strengthen and support healthy marriage (Macomber et al., 2005) noted some of the opportunities for capitalizing on assets of faith communities. They suggested that clergy can set a tone about the importance of marriage, and churches can require couples that want to marry in the church to attend premarital classes.

Hawkins et al. (2004) suggest that there are at least four particular benefits of providing marriage education in a religious setting. First, it is easier to invite and recruit participants into religious settings when they already are associated with the faith community. Second, participants probably are familiar with the instructor and other individuals and likely are comfortable in this setting. Third, after formal participation in marriage education, participants are more likely to maintain involvement with the faith community, which can serve as a support system helping to maintain effects. Fourth, religious settings can comfortably include the important ethical and moral domain in the curricula. They suggest that a religious setting may be the most effective venue for those

who profess a faith, associate with a religious community, and view marriage as having deep spiritual meaning.

Stahmann and Hiebert (1997), who endorse the growing emphasis on preventive premarital education among therapists, suggest at least two reasons why clergy will continue to provide the majority of marriage preparation: (1) the great demand for treating relationship and mental health problems makes it unlikely that the typical marriage and family therapist will be able to move out of traditional therapeutic or remedial services and (2) many mental health professionals, including marriage and family therapists, have difficulty transitioning from a framework that is exclusively therapeutic to one that combines educational and therapeutic emphases.

The spiritual or religious nature of marriage for many couples creates a problem for some therapists. Aten and Hernandez (2004) observed that few supervisees in therapeutic training receive proper training and supervision necessary to address religion competently in therapy. Although they suggested a model to promote supervisee competence in this area, clergy still are at a decided advantage in addressing spiritual and religious issues in marriage preparation (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997).

Although clergy have advantages for providing marriage preparation to some populations, their influence is not uniform. One study found that individuals with greater family-related risk for divorce rated parents and ministers as lower sources of quality marriage information, and they were less interested in attending programs recommended by parents or ministers, held in a religious setting, or led by clergy (Duncan & Wood, 2003). Those whose parents were divorced had less optimism about marriage for themselves. Although they reported at least as much motivation to participate in

marriage preparation, their reduced optimism regarding their own marriages negatively affected their motivation.

In addition to their opportunities for providing premarital education, there is reason to believe that clergy have the ability to provide the training effectively. Stanley et al. (2001) determined that clergy and lay religious leaders were as effective in the short run as university staff in presenting PREP, a program designed to prevent marital distress and divorce. A 5-year follow-up found that 82% of trained clergy continued to use at least parts of the program, especially those parts dealing with communication and conflict (Markman et al., 2004). Wilmoth (2003) also found that a large majority of clergy indicated an interest in attending a 3-hour seminar to learn how to provide more effective marriage preparation, with 44.2% saying they probably would attend and 32.6% saying they would make it a high priority.

Although clergy have an unparalleled opportunity to provide marriage preparation, there are questions about the current availability or effectiveness of clergy-provided programs (Stanley, 2001; Stanley et al., 2001; McManus, 1995). Although there is a compelling rationale for the role religious leaders can play in prevention efforts (Stanley et al., 1995), Trathen (1995) indicates that less than half of religious organizations currently provide premarital services of any consequence. A survey of Assemblies of God pastors in Oklahoma found that only 18.6% required a waiting period before performing a wedding; 30.2% administered any kind of premarital couple inventory; and 27.9% provided any training in conflict resolution or communication skills (Wilmoth, 2003).

In P. O. Sullivan's (2000) study, clergy were asked to indicate how many training

classes or seminars they had completed in preparation for providing premarital counseling. More than a fifth had not received any formal training in premarital education, and 31% had completed one class or seminar. Not quite half (48%) had completed two or more classes or seminars. The results were similar for training in marital counseling. More than two-thirds reported that personal experience was their primary source of knowledge for premarital counseling. One of the most striking findings related to training was that none of the clergy who reported using an established counseling program had been trained to use the program, while none of the clergy trained in the approaches was using them. Similar findings emerged for the training and use of premarital assessment measures.

Religious organizations provide the vast majority of premarital education in Oklahoma, but many couples still are not receiving adequate marriage preparation. A survey in Oklahoma discovered that only 32% of currently married persons had any premarital preparation and even fewer divorced persons (18%) had any premarital preparation (Johnson et al., 2002).

The Process of Marriage Preparation

Murray (2005) suggested that curriculum, dosage, format, and approach are four important aspects to understand when implementing interventions. The comprehensive framework for marriage education proposed by Hawkins et al. (2004) presents a slightly different model, suggesting that content, intensity, and methodology are components of marriage education crucial for decision-making. This review of the literature will consider two aspects of marriage preparation: content (analogous to Murray's curriculum) and process, which includes dosage, format, and approach (as suggested by

Murray) and intensity and methodology (as suggested by Hawkins et al., 2004). Clergy often select various aspects of the process as requirements for couples whose weddings they perform.

Models of Clergy-provided Marriage Preparation

An early manual on premarital counseling (Rutledge, 1966) advocated group counseling for most engaged couples. A model format would have included 16 sessions covering the following eight topics: engagement, love, and sex; the parental home; our new family begins; work and finances; children; a family faith; special preparation, such as premarital medical examination; and the wedding and honeymoon.

Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) provide a design for conjoint couple premarital and remarital counseling. The model, which ordinarily would encompass several sessions, includes the following parts: (1) *Introduction*, during which the counselor becomes acquainted with the couple and discusses goals and expectations. Downes (2003) suggests that the first priority for the premarital counselor is to establish the "joining" process, to create a tone of safety within which to explore and nurture their relationship. (2) *Dynamic Relationship History*. (3) *Family-of-Origin Exploration.* (4) *Parents Attend a Session (Optional)*, where they are invited to say good-bye to their children, welcome the new couple into the family, and pass on familial wisdom. The benefit of this component is reinforced by Wilson et al. (1997), whose findings led them to suggest that "interventions prepared for the broader family system and its problems will assist with improvements in marital adjustment more than will interventions centered on individual problems" (p. 303). (5) *Premarital Inventory.* This part usually begins during the first session so that the counselor can use information from the inventory throughout the

sessions for feedback, discussion, and skill building. (6) *Wedding Preparation.* The clergy counselor explains the theology and mechanics of the wedding. (7) *Postwedding Session (Bonus).* Six months after the wedding, the counselor can meet with the couple to support the premarital counseling.

In a reflection on research with engaged couples, Fournier (1999) made the following observations and recommendations regarding the components of marriage preparation:

- Active participation of the couple in the preparation program is superior to passive participation.
- Programs should increase the probability of a couple's seeking help with their marriage at a later time if they are having serious difficulties.
- A prime opportunity for marriage education is 6 to 9 months after the wedding.
- Couples pay better attention when programs start with an assessment of unique couple strengths and potential problems that is compelling, that is, that are comprehensive and offer at least one major surprise that the couple agrees could be a problem for them in the future.
- Programs must have a component of skill building focused on active communication and problem solving. Avoiding problems rather than constructively resolving them builds resentment, dissatisfaction, and defensiveness.

Fournier and Olson (1986) also recommended that premarital programs should avoid lectures; begin 6 to 12 months before the wedding; and prime couples so that they will

participate in marital programs before and after the wedding.

Current Marriage Preparation Practices among Clergy

Although clergy historically have provided most marriage preparation, data are sparse concerning either the content or format of marriage preparation programs provided by clergy. However, a few surveys of clergy provide limited information.

Wright (1976, as cited in Trathen, 1995) surveyed 400 churches regarding their premarital counseling programs. Clergy reported they supplemented their premarital programs with a variety of family life education materials. The length of these programs averaged three sessions. Clergy also considered themselves to be trained but still inadequate in their knowledge of the field.

Graduate students who were enrolled in a seminary course, "Premarital and Marital Therapy," conducted a telephone survey of 122 evangelical Protestant churches in the Denver area to investigate what sort of premarital preparation was provided (Trathen, 1995). The survey consisted of 29 questions related to premarital counseling, with a focus on communication and conflict-resolution skills. Seventy-two percent of respondents reported that all couples seeking to be married in their church are required to receive some sort of premarital counseling. The content of marriage preparation was information-based in 87% of the churches and skills-based in 10%. Seventy percent of the churches provided one to five sessions per couple, with most respondents suggesting that four to seven sessions are optimal.

Wilmoth (2003) conducted a mailed survey of Assemblies of God pastors in Oklahoma. Almost all (93%) of the respondents indicated that counseling with the pastor was required, with the mean number of sessions required 2.4. Less frequently required

components of marriage preparation included a waiting period, 18.6%; inventory, 30.2%; interactional skills training, 27.9%; a group class, 2.3%; and meeting with a mentor couple, 7%. The majority (60.5%) indicated they assigned at least some homework to couples.

A study of the effectiveness of premarital education in Cache County, Utah (Ramboz, 2003), found that little formal premarital education took place. A heuristic model of marriage preparation in the county presented the profile of a couple who used no inventories and who spent 1 hour covering four topics, with the information provided by a clergyperson not trained in marriage preparation.

Buikema's (2001) qualitative study on the preparation of pastors in premarital counseling included a question about the subject's current practices. There was overlap in the processes, but he found no set pattern among the pastors in their approaches to marriage preparation. Some variations seemed to depend on the size of the congregation and the length of time the pastor had been in ministry.

P. O. Sullivan's (2000) study of churches in Southern California indicated that premarital counseling was mandatory in 95% of the congregations surveyed. Even more of the clergy believe premarital counseling should be mandatory.

Preferences of Participants

Silliman, Schumm, and Jurich (1992) suggested that one reason so few couples seek formal marriage preparation might be that programs typically are structured by providers rather than clients. To determine what potential clients might desire in a program, the researchers conducted a survey of 185 unmarried young adults at a Midwestern university. The resulting model suggested several characteristics that would

increase participation: it should be voluntary; advertising will be most effective with engaged or cohabiting couples; a couple-therapist format is preferred over small groups; the therapist facilitates rather than advises, using interactive methods, rather than lectures, to focus on self- and other-awareness and to practice interpersonal skill-building; should include a variety of providers; and should be conducted by a practitioner who has traits such as warmth and respect.

Later reviews on practice issues (Silliman & Schumm, 2000) included recommendations that providers carefully target and integrate assessment into the process; conduct training 6 to 12 months before marriage and, where possible, offer postmarital interventions; target a few interactive skills with intensive training; and offer 12-24 hours of services. In addition, they suggested that religious-based programs might offer and test effects of faith-based foundations and social support networks.

In a survey of couples married 1 to 8 years, clergy were rated as most helpful among possible marriage preparation providers, followed closely by lay couples. The next most helpful were parish/church staff and counselors, with financial planners rated noticeably lower than the other four options. Respondents who reported the highest overall perceived value of marriage preparation were those who received preparation from a combination of clergy, parish/church staff, and lay couples (Williams, Riley, Risch, & VanDyke, 1999).

Respondents in a survey of married couples (Williams et al., 1999) rated the helpfulness of specific components of their marriage preparation process. Discussion time with the partner received the highest helpfulness rating, followed by use of a premarital assessment. The components rated next highest were lectures by presenters

and written materials for study, followed by discussion time and role play with other couples.

Duncan and Wood (2003) found that college students had different perceptions of marriage preparation and attitudes toward marriage depending on family-related risk factors such as having parents who divorced. However, they found similar patterns of preferences for particular elements of marriage preparation, regardless of family-related risk factors.

In light of the higher incidence of divorce among African Americans, it is important to consider perceptions of marriage preparation programs among Black young adults. In a study of college students examining racial and gender effects on perceptions of marriage preparation programs (Duncan, Box, & Silliman, 1996), Blacks reported a greater need for marriage preparation than Whites. However, findings suggest that programs will reach more Black young adults if they demand fewer hours and weeks and if the programs are located near the participants' homes.

Potential Components of Marriage Preparation

Timing and Dosage

Hawkins et al. (2004) suggest that a dosage of marriage education can be either too large or too small and that there is a need to discover what level of treatment produces meaningful learning without exceeding available resources. Although the literature provides some information regarding dosage of marriage preparation provided by clergy, the data are limited regarding what dosage clergy tend to provide and even less clear about what intensity is most effective.

Murray (2005) noted that providers of marriage education often experience

competing pressures regarding intervention dosage. She found that program dosage varies, generally ranging from 2 hours to multiple days. In determining the dosage, providers consider such factors as cost, couple schedules, child care issues, and client willingness to come to longer programs. One provider reported that couples always wanted more class time at the conclusion of a 4-hour intervention, but she was certain no one would come to a longer intervention.

Many providers believe the length and intensity of interventions are key predictors for long-term behavioral change, while the couple may be unable or unwilling to set aside time for the intervention. For example, engaged couples may be preoccupied with planning weddings. According to Murray (2005), in program evaluations, providers often hear that the classes are too long in duration, and some say it is easier to recruit for shorter classes. One provider recalled that local clergy diverted engaged couples to another local provider with a shorter intervention. In addition, providers using widely known curricula sometimes omitted whole sections to reduce dosage and accommodate clients. The ramifications of low dosage are not clear.

Post hoc analyses of data from a survey of couples married 1 to 8 years revealed that respondents who had attended four or more sessions rated their marriage preparation significantly higher than those who had attended zero or one session. Also, couples who had attended eight to nine sessions reported the highest perceived value of their preparation, which they rated significantly higher than those who had attended two or three sessions. The analysis of data suggested that 10 or more sessions did not increase the perceived value of marriage preparation and may even be counterproductive (Williams et al., 1999).

Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) assume that counseling is more beneficial if it begins several months before the wedding. They recommend that clergy provide at least five to seven 2-hour sessions, one more than non-clergy because of the need to include theological and wedding material. This dosage, they suggest, should be modified for couples who have been together more than 3 years and whose families of origin involve complexities such as a variety of marriages or many children, which should be determined in the first session. They also suggest that the counselor articulate, in the first session, the number of sessions and the general purpose of each, reminding the couple that the plan may be revised as needed. Counseling should be spread across a long enough time span that the partners can experience the process and integrate the information.

P. O. Sullivan (2000) found that clergy most frequently provided four to six sessions of counseling, with a range of 30 to 90 minutes. The most frequent responses for span of counseling were 3 months (65%), 1 month (23%), and 6 months (12%). Among participants in Buikema's (2001) qualitative study, those that talked about the length and number of sessions suggested they conduct at least 4 and as many as 10 sessions.

A large random survey of Oklahoma and three neighboring states (Stanley et al., in press) asked how many hours participants spent in premarital education. The mode was 2 hours, the median was 8 hours, and the longest reported was 40 hours. The number of hours spent in marriage preparation was positively and significantly associated with marital satisfaction; satisfaction increased gradually from 1 to 20 hours and changed little thereafter. Marital conflict was significantly and negatively correlated with the number

of hours, declining continuously as premarital education increased from 1 to 10 hours, with little change with more hours.

Follow-up sessions after the wedding have been recommended as an important component of marriage preparation (Fournier, 1999; Giblin, 1996; Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997), and some providers have expressed an interest in providing booster sessions to refresh couples' skills (Murray, 2005). However, very few clergy seem to have a formal plan for providing such services (Wilmoth, 2003), and most contacts seem to be random encounters or social events sponsored by the church or program provider (Murray, 2005).

Format

Murray (2005) notes that marriage preparation and marriage education programs employ diverse formats, depending on the curriculum; the provider's background, philosophy, and approach; clients' needs (or provider's perception of client needs); and what the setting can accommodate. Formats include one-on-one, classrooms, and support groups.

Stahmann and Hiebert (1997), noting a move from a medical to a relationship model among pastoral counselors, suggest several ways in which a conjoint format is more productive than a concurrent format:

> First, the conjoint format implicitly suggests to couples that the counselor values not only the individual persons, but also the relationship. Second, the format allows the counselor to see how the couple interacts and to observe the relationship. Third, by seeing both people together, the counselor heightens the bilateralism of the relationship. …Fourth, using

> the conjoint couple format also underscores that the counselor does not want to be the keeper of secrets (p. 49).

A group of engaged couples surveyed by mail (Williams, 1992) were asked about which formats they would prefer for marriage preparation. The favorites were counseling with a minister, weekend retreats, meeting with a married couple, and small group discussions. Counseling by a therapist was the most popular format among the slightly religious/not religious participants but was the least popular among the very religious.

Couples married 1 to 8 years (Williams et al., 1999) rated private sessions with clergy or parish/church staff and weekend programs with other couples as the two most helpful formats. Private sessions with a sponsor or mentor couple also were highly regarded. Less popular formats included sessions with a large or small group of couples and private couple sessions with a professional marriage educator (Williams et al., 1999).

A study of the impact of co-therapy teams on client outcomes in the context of marriage and family therapy (Hendrix, Fournier, & Briggs, 2001) is consistent with evaluations of marriage preparation in religious settings. This study of 33 student therapists, 402 client systems, and 3 supervisors examined the efficacy of using student co-therapy teams in clinical training. The outcomes using co-therapy were at least as effective as treatment using one therapist. The benefit clients identified most often was that two therapists could model behaviors. An additional benefit was that the unique strengths and experience of each therapist provided a broader repertoire of possibilities for enriching the client's therapy experience. A main disadvantage for clients was when clashes between therapists surfaced during sessions. A team approach often is recommended for marriage preparation (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997), and participants in

remarital programs have responded positively to using experts to address different issues in marriage preparation (Williams et al., 1999).

Inventories

Use of a premarital assessment has been recommended (Halford, 2004; Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997; Fournier & Olson, 1986). Larson et al. (1995), in an analysis of premarital questionnaires, suggested that an adequate premarital assessment questionnaire should (1) be designed primarily or exclusively for assessing the premarital relationship; (2) collect comprehensive data that are relevant to the counseling or educational process; (3) be easy to administer and widely applicable; (4) be easy to interpret; and (5) be reliable and valid. Their analysis concluded that the most psychometrically sound instruments are PREPARE (The PREmarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation), the PREP-M (PREParation for Marriage), and FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study), and the best instruments for premarital counseling are PREPARE, FOCCUS, and the PMIP (Premarital Inventory Profile). A more recent review of premarital assessment questionnaires affirmed that professionals can confidently use RELATE (RELATionship Evaluation), FOCCUS, and PREPARE in premarital assessment and counseling (Larson, Newell, Topham, & Nichols, 2002).

Early research cited by Fournier and Olson (1986) demonstrated the effectiveness of a premarital inventory in facilitating couple dialogue. Using PREPARE with one feedback session was almost as effective as using PREPARE in combination with four intensive premarital counseling sessions by a trained marriage counselor. In addition,

using PREPARE was more effective than traditional sessions with clergy or group sessions offered to premarital couples.

More recently, the effectiveness of the PREPARE Program, in which couples (n = 59) received an average of four feedback sessions after completing the inventory, was compared with a control group (n = 48) and with couples (n = 27) who took the inventory but had no feedback (Knutson & Olson, 2003). Both PREPARE groups significantly increased scores on the Couple Satisfaction Scale, while there was no change in the control group. Additionally, both PREPARE groups also made gains in several relationship skills and relationship areas. Of the highest risk couples, 83% moved to a more positive couple type.

P. O. Sullivan (2000) found that half of the respondents reported using some kind of premarital assessment. However, of the three most frequently used instruments, the study found that only PREPARE, used by 18% of respondents, highlights strength and growth areas and has research to support its validity and reliability. However, P. O. Sullivan (2000) reported that most of the clergy seemed interested in learning more about these inventories.

Supplemental Resources

Assemblies of God pastors in Oklahoma (Wilmoth, 2003) were asked about supplemental resources they use in marriage preparation. Videos are used by 32.6%, workbooks by 37.2%, other marriage-related books by 55.8%, and the Bible by 90.7%. Although videos are used frequently, a survey of couples married 1 to 8 years (Williams et al., 1999) found that videos were perceived as among the least helpful components of

marriage preparation. However, written materials for study were rated as more helpful than videos.

Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) suggest that the counselor who wants to use resources such as books, pamphlets, and other material should devote time and attention to selecting suitable material. In addition, the counselor must determine whether the couple will have to purchase the materials or whether the institution will supply them at no charge.

Referring couples to professional therapists has long been practiced by clergy, especially when situations arise beyond the clergy's expertise (Morris, J. K., 1960). P. O. Sullivan (2000) found that about half of the clergy respondents indicated they would be interested in referring to a counseling center for premarital counseling. The most frequent concerns about referral were belief that the church should provide those services (27%) and concerns about the counselor's doctrinal beliefs toward marriage (15%).

One goal of the Marriage Movement (Institute for American Values, 2004) is to provide committee-sponsored relationship education, and a number of communities have initiated such cooperative endeavors (Doherty & Anderson, 2004). Such programs are a potential resource to which clergy could refer couples as part of marriage preparation.

Marriage Mentors

The long-standing use of mentor couples has received new attention (Institute for American Values, 2000; McManus, 1995; Fournier & Olson, 1986). "The Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles" (2000) encouraged clergy and faith communities to develop lay marriage mentoring ministries, suggesting that mentor couples can play a role that no professional can: "people who have been there can provide daily support,

skills, tips, and, above all, inspiration: the difficult faith that success is possible" (p. 21). Fournier and Olson (1986) pointed out the particular potential for benefit in the first year of marriage.

A textbook on marriage enrichment suggests several ways in which mentor couples can be part of a marriage preparation program:

> Trained mentor couples make many of the benefits of ME [marriage enrichment] available to couples at any time, tailored to the couples' specific needs. Mentor couples can provide a mobile couple enrichment network capable of reaching virtually all couples in a community. Through the outreach of mentor couples, marriage resources can be made available to those who otherwise would never hear of them. Mentor couples can link couples in need to therapy services and support networks. Informal mentor and support networks have long existed through relatives, neighbors, and religious and other community groups. Programs using carefully trained mentor couples are very recent but they are an exciting wave of the future for enabling hundreds of thousands of healthy couples to offer support, encouragement, mentoring, modeling, and other networking to all types of couples (Hunt, Hof, & DeMaria, 1998, p. 188).

Although there is anecdotal evidence and intuitive expectations for the effectiveness of mentoring, the process has not been tested empirically (Doherty & Anderson, 2004).

One study looked at the effect of marriage mentoring when used in conjunction with a specific premarital program (Sandstrom, 2004). Overall the study found that

marriage mentoring was most helpful to couples identified as Vitalized and Traditional (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996) in making expectations more realistic and in providing support that gave the couple more confidence in starting marriage. The benefits seemed to be related to the number of meetings between mentor and mentored couples. Some long-term effects of mentoring related to in-laws, understanding family-of-origin influence, and spiritual benefits. Different types of couples might benefit in different ways. For example, help with communication skills seemed particularly beneficial for Traditional couples. The study also suggested that the mentoring should develop the mentor-mentored relationship before discussing inventory results and should continue after the marriage has begun.

The OMI has attempted to encourage training for mentor couples, but activities have been limited by budgetary constraints (S. Cox, personal communication, May 16, 2005) and by the perceptions that responses had been inadequate (S. Crawley, personal communication, May 16, 2005). According to information gathered by the OMI's faith coordinator, about 600 pastors were introduced to a mentoring model at two luncheons in May 2001 (S. Crawley, personal communication, May 16, 2005). The author's recollection of the luncheon he attended is that the speakers addressed more general marriage preparation and enrichment themes and encouraged participants to purchase their books and videos, discussing mentor training only in response to questions from the audience. In 2004, the OMI conducted a weekend training event focused on developing mentoring programs. Of the 33 congregations represented, only 4 had begun mentoring programs a year later. The OMI determined that mentor training did not merit a high priority until there could be an expectation of higher demand and intentional involvement

of participants (S. Crawley, personal communication, May 16, 2005).

Skills Training

Several formal marriage preparation or enrichment programs emphasize development of interactional skills, particularly communication. Some of the most widely disseminated include the Relationship Enhancement program (RE), PREP, and the Couples Communication Program (CCP) (Halford, 2004). A meta-analysis of studies evaluating the Couple Communication program (Butler & Wampler, 1999) suggests that positive couple benefits can be anticipated, particularly in terms of observational measures. The authors caution that deteriorating effects coupled with heightened awareness may be more problematic than beneficial. Although few studies have compared skills training approaches, meta-analysis by Carroll and Doherty (2003) suggests that the effect sizes for short-term efficacy are similar across the approaches. The only program with follow-up assessments of more than 12 months is PREP (e.g., Hahlweg, Markman, Thurmaier, Engl, & Eckert, 1998). Selection effects made definitive interpretation difficult, but the studies showed that PREP was associated with improved maintenance of relationship satisfaction. The only randomized control trial found that the benefits of skills training were evident only in couples classified as high risk for future marital problems (Halford, 2004).

Halford (2004) suggests three strengths of the skills training approach: training is focused on variables that predict relationship outcome; there is substantial evidence that skills training changes targeted relationship skills; and standardized training programs have been developed. However, Halford (2004) suggests that the skills training approach is not equally relevant for every couple.

Assessments

Bradbury's (1995) article on assessing the four fundamental domains of marriage is addressed to clinicians, but some of the observations are relevant for clergy providing marriage preparation. Bradbury noted that standardized assessments are essential in clinical activities with couples and are able to provide information about a couple beyond what can be obtained through interviews. However, he also observed that standardized assessment is not routine practice for the majority of marital and family therapists. He suggested several reasons for this infrequent use of available instruments, including the belief by practitioners that such procedures would not enhance the quality of their interventions. Another possible explanation for the failure to use assessments is that so many instruments are available that practitioners cannot evaluate their appropriateness for their own use. If Bradbury's observations about professional therapists are true, it is reasonable to assume that clergy also would be slow to use assessments because of doubts about the usefulness of the procedure or because of their uncertainty about which instrument would be most helpful in marriage preparation.

Early analysis of PREPARE suggested that scores from the inventory would predict with 80-90% accuracy which couples would separate or divorce within 3 years of taking the inventory (Fowers & Olson, 1986). The external validity of the premarital typology based on PREPARE (Fowers & Olson, 1992) received clear support in a study examining the relationship between the four couple types and marital outcomes (Fowers et al., 1996). The four couple types differed in the predicted manner in their marital outcomes. The study also found that the couple types differed in the likelihood that they had canceled their marriages. Conflicted couples, which made up about 40% of the

couples that canceled their marriages, were more than three times as likely as Vitalized couples to have canceled marriage plans. The authors suggest that these findings provide indirect evidence that taking PREPARE may contribute to helping high-risk couples reconsider their marriage plans as a result of identifying relationship difficulties. Similarly, Williams and Jurich (1995) found that FOCCUS successfully predicted the future marital success of most couples.

Halford (2004) suggests strengths and weaknesses of using the inventory-based approach to relationship education. The first strength is that the most widely used inventories all assess factors relevant to relationship outcomes, predicting the trajectory of relationship satisfaction in the early years of marriage. Second, the instruments give couples the opportunity to assess their risk and resilience profiles. Third, those who use these inventories receive structured training. As a weakness, she cited the lack of published systematic evaluation of long-term benefits of programs based on the inventories. A second weakness is the exclusive reliance on potentially inaccurate self-report assessment.

Homework

Wilmoth (2003) found that the majority (60.5%) of Assemblies of God ministers indicated they assigned some homework to couples, with 39.5% assigning no homework, 37.2% assigning 1 hour or less, and 23.3% assigning 2 to 3 hours. L'Abate (1999) has made homework an essential element of his structured enrichment and distant writing programs. Clients cannot enter into a therapeutic contract with him unless they agree in writing to complete 1 hour of written homework assignments for every hour of therapy. Assignments are tailored for the specific needs of each couple.

Prohibition of Premarital Sex and Cohabitation as Requirements

Some churches and Community Marriage Policies discourage or ostensibly prohibit premarital sexual relationships before marriage. These policies are problematic considering the percentage of individuals that have been sexually active before marriage and considering that more than half of couples already have cohabited before marriage (Smock, 2000). Hawkins et al. (2004) suggest that premarital educators, including clergy, should be proactive about reaching cohabiting couples: "It is important for these religious institutions to involve rather than shun cohabiting couples who may need their services more than couples who do not cohabit before marriage" (p. 44). They note that cohabitation may build more realistic notions of everyday life together but is unlikely to teach effectively the information and skills necessary for a healthy marriage. They suggest that religious organizations require premarital education for cohabiting couples that get married, de-emphasizing issues such as sexuality with which the couples may be more familiar.

Oklahoma Marriage Initiative

One component of the OMI is an Oklahoma Marriage Policy that pastors are encouraged to sign in which they agree to a minimum standard of marriage preparation (Oklahoma Marriage Policy, 2000). A survey of Assemblies of God pastors in Oklahoma (Wilmoth, 2003) included three questions that measured the willingness of pastors to sign such a document.

The first question (Wilmoth, 2003) asked the respondents to indicate to what degree they could agree to the following statement, which is found in the Oklahoma Marriage Policy: "*I believe that marriage is a covenant intended by God to be a lifelong*

relationship between a man and a woman. I promise to God, to my family, and my community to encourage couples to remain steadfast in unconditional love, reconciliation, and sexual purity, while purposefully growing in their covenant marriage relation." The sample responded as follows: totally disagree, 25.6%; agree more than disagree, 2.3 %; totally agree, 72.1%.

A second item (Wilmoth, 2003) explained that the OMI has requested ministers to sign a commitment to set marital preparation requirements for couples they marry. Fourteen percent of the respondents said they would not be likely to sign such a document, 58.1% said they probably would be willing to sign, and 27.9% said they already had signed.

The Oklahoma Marriage Covenant includes a commitment to require four specific components as part of marriage preparation: (1) I will request a preparation period of 4 to 6 months of all couples asking me to preside over their wedding ceremony. (2) I will conduct four to six marital preparation sessions with each couple during the preparation period. (3) I will use the preparation period to encourage the spiritual formation of the couple. (4) I will encourage the training of mentoring couples to assist young couples during the crucial first years of marriage. The questionnaire (Wilmoth, 2003) asked the respondents to indicate which of these statements they would be able to agree to. The willingness to request a 4- to 6-month preparation period was indicated by 37.2%; 69.8 % said they would conduct four to six marital preparation sessions; 88.4% would use the preparation period to encourage spiritual formation; and 44.2% expressed willingness to encourage the training of mentoring couples.

The Content of Marriage Preparation

A number of formal relationship curricula propose both format and content for marriage preparation or enrichment. Williams (2003) identified and discussed six preventive programs used in premarital counseling that are among the best known in the marriage and family field: Relationship Enhancement, developed by Guerney et al. (Cavedo & Guerney, 1999); Couple Communication, developed by Miller, Nunnally, and Wackman (S. Miller & Sherrard, 1999); PREP, developed by Markman et al. (Stanley, Blumberg, & Markman, 1999); Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS), developed by Lori Gordon (Gordon & Durana, 1999); PREPARE/ENRICH, developed by Olson, Fournier, and Druckman (Olson & Olson, 1999); and ACME-style marriage enrichment, begun by Mace and Mace (Dyer & Dyer, 1999). Williams (2003) suggested that many of these programs have been influenced by cognitive-behavioral, communication, and social learning theories and that some (e.g., PREP and PREPARE/ENRICH) have been heavily informed by research. Berger and Hannah (1999b) present these programs and several others in a book-length treatment.

Murray (2005) observed that premarital and marital educational programs can be characterized by their wide use of "hybrid" curricula. Providers may use some of the programs referred to above but adapt the curricula to meet specific needs of the population, shortening the length, changing the order of components, changing the language, or adding material, either their own or elements from other curricula.

Research has provided the basis for recommending content for effective marriage preparation based on risk and protective factors for marital distress and divorce and on empirical evaluations of premarital education programs (Adler-Baeder, Higginbotham, &

Lamke, 2004; Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Fournier & Olson, 1986; Larson & Holman, 1994; Larson et al., 2002; Russell & Lyster, 1992; Williams et al., 1999). Hawkins et al. (2004) have built on this research to propose a comprehensive framework for marriage education that has direct application to the content clergy include in the marriage preparation they provide. This framework suggests that three subdivisions of content should be included in marriage education: relationship skills; awareness/knowledge/attitudes; and motivations/virtues. They suggest that marriage education typically has emphasized skills and has included to a lesser extent components such as awareness, knowledge, and attitudes. They concur with Fowers (2000) that marital education is incomplete without attention to important virtues such as generosity, justice, and loyalty. Spokesmen for the Marriage Movement have suggested that clergy are in a strategic position to address these topics (Institute for American Values, 2000). Although it is possible to specify important areas of content in marriage preparation, little is known about how clergy address these topics.

Content Considerations Based on Risk Factors

A common basis for relationship curriculum development is addressing factors that have been associated with marital quality and stability. For example, a decade review of research on the nature and determinants of marital satisfaction (Bradbury et al., 2000) confirmed a complex array of determinants but particularly noted processes related to communication, conflict resolution, social support, dual careers, children, life stressors and transitions, and family background as being factors that are related to marital satisfaction.

Halford, Markman, Kline, and Stanley (2003) extended a model proposed by

Karney and Bradbury, suggesting four broad categories that influence the trajectory of relationship satisfaction. They include couple interaction, life events, enduring individual characteristics, and contextual variables.

Markman et al. (2001) speak of static factors and dynamic factors. Static factors are those with little possbility of being changed, particularly after a marriage has begun. These factors include some personality factors, parental divorce, religious dissimilarity, young age at marriage, and economic status. Dynamic factors, which are characterized more by the potential for change, include interaction danger signs, communication ability, conflict management, physical aggression, dysfunctional attitudes, and commitment and motivation (Markman et al., 2001).

An example of how these ideas can be translated into public policy is the Florida Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act. This legislation, which was implemented to prevent marital distress and divorce, provides for a discount on the marriage license fee and a waiver of waiting periods for couples who attend premarital counseling with a provider registered in the county in which they will marry. An approved premarital counseling program must address the following four topics: communication skills, conflict resolution skills, finances, and parenting (Murray, 2005).

Contemporary discussions of factors associated with risk and protective factors in marriage generally can be traced to the work of Robert Lewis and Graham Spanier (Lewis & Spanier, 1979; Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Their seminal theory identified premarital predictors of marital quality and stability. They identified four categories of variables as influencing the later quality and stability of marriage: premarital homogamy (similarity in social and demographic factors such as racial background, socioeconomic

background, religious denominational affiliation, intelligence level, age, and social status); premarital resources (interpersonal skill functioning, emotional health, self-concept, educational level, age at first marriage, social class, degree of acquaintance between the partners before marriage, and physical health); parental models (marital quality in the family of origin, level of happiness in childhood, and relationships between the individual and parents); and support from significant others (parental approval of the future mate, person's liking for the future in-laws, and support of significant friends for the proposed marriage).

Besides these 4 categories, Lewis and Spanier (1979) identified 4 other variables as influencing marital quality and stability. These related to conventionality, the consistency between premarital sexual behavior and the individuals' value systems, premarital pregnancy, and the independence of motivation from problematic circumstantial factors.

Using an ecological or ecosystemic perspective, Larson and Holman (1994) compiled a comprehensive review of premarital predictors of marital quality and stability that is particularly useful for this study. Their choice of a theoretical framework was based on two primary reasons: 1) they did not consider environmental factors to be determinants of the couple system so much as influences that imposed constraints or provided opportunities for the system; 2) they recognized that effects probably are neither linear nor unidirectional and that no one factor can explain later outcomes. They not only drew conclusions about the significance of various predictors but also made specific recommendations to practitioners. The factors were organized into three categories, from least to most predictive: background and contextual factors, individual characteristics,

and dyadic processes. This outline will be used to organize the review of literature in this chapter related to content considerations.

Background and Contextual Factors

Larson and Holman (1994) divided the literature related to background and contextual factors into three smaller groupings. These include family-of-origin effects, sociocultural factors, and current contexts.

Family of origin. Family-of-origin effects, in Larson and Holman's (1994) taxonomy, include parental divorce, parental mental illness, family dysfunction, and support from parents and in-laws. Numerous studies have found significant relationships between parental divorce and such relationship characteristics as commitment (e.g., Amato, 1996; Jacquet & Surra, 2001).

A survey of couples who had participated in marriage preparation programs in the Vancouver, B.C., area were asked to rate program content (Russell & Lyster, 1992). Gaining an understanding of how family-of-origin issues influenced the present relationship was the highest rated content area.

Larson, Benson, Wilson, and Medora (1998), using Bowenian family systems theory, found that fusion and triangulation in a late adolescent's family of origin were related to negative opinions and feelings about marriage. However, these factors did not have a significant effect on the waiting period for marriage or on perceived readiness for marriage.

Friedman (1985) posits that the failure of premarital counseling to affect the divorce rate may be the result of focusing on a couple's *relationship* rather than their families of origin. He suggests that each partner work up a genogram of his or her family

of origin, interviewing their parents and other family members to gain necessary information.

Important findings emerged in Wamboldt and Reiss's (1989) study examining the roles of family-of-origin environmental characteristics and couple consensus-building in the development of premarital couples. Family-of-origin environment was strongly correlated with current level of relationship satisfaction, with the couple's ability to reach consensus concerning important interpersonal relationships seeming to be an important mediator between family-of-origin and satisfaction. Overall, the study showed strong support for the importance of examining family-of-origin characteristics and consensus-building process as determinants of the fate of intimate relationships.

Based on the theories of Murray Bowen, Downes (2003) recommends attending to nine key areas related to the couple's families of origin. Those areas include symptoms; family myths and secrets; scapegoats and superheroes, mandates and missions; losses and replacements; emotional cutoffs and fusion; conflict; sibling position; degree of differentiation; and triangles.

Bradbury and Karney (2004) advocate considering specialized strategies to recruit couples at risk for adverse outcomes into appropriate interventions. Criteria for selection could include factors such as divorce and conflict in the family of origin.

Holman and Linford (2001) suggest a model of how premarital factors relate to marital quality. The model depicts influences emanating from family-of-origin factors and mediated by social connections, individual characteristics, and couple interactional processes. Based on available research, they hypothesize that early marital quality is

related to such family-of-origin factors as family structure, demographics, and processes, and that these processes probably are moderated by gender.

Sabatelli and Bartle-Haring (2003) tested a model that examined the relationship between individuals' family-of-origin experience and patterns of marital adjustment. Making the couple the unit of analysis, they explored how each partner's family-of-origin experience uniquely influences each partner's experience of the marriage. Marital adjustment was strongly influenced by the family-of-origin experience of both the husband and the wife. However, it seems that wives' family-of-origin experiences relate more strongly to both their own accounts and their husbands' accounts of their marriages.

Wamboldt and Reiss (1989, cited in Holman & Linford, 2001) suggest two distinct but complementary explanations for why family-of-origin factors continue to influence the marital relationship. They are the traditional socialization model and a social constructivist model that incorporates a developmental and systemic perspective.

Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) suggest that Americans who adapt to marital life best seem to have two characteristics: (1) they have been able to "leave home" psychologically, no longer asking their parents to take responsibility for their lives; (2) they have lived alone after leaving home and before entering marriage, being able to survive both emotionally and financially, thus establishing their own psychological identity. Besides helping couples to assess the degree of separation between each person and the family of origin, Stahman and Hiebert (1997) suggest that the counselor should stress the impact of parental modeling.

Sociocultural factors. Of the sociocultural factors—age at marriage, education, income and occupation, social class, and race— Larson and Holman's (1994) review

found that all but age at marriage were relatively weak predictors. However, Kposowa (1998) found that nearly 70% of African American women are predicted to be divorced by the end of 25 years of marriage, more than twice the divorce probability for White women (33%) in the same period.

The importance of age was verified by Wilson et al. (1997), who found that husbands' dyadic adjustment was predicted by age at marriage. Regarding implications for the premarital counselor, they suggested, "Although unlikely to dissuade young couples, it would be honest for premarital counselors to caution young couples to delay marriage until there is sufficient understanding of self and societal expectations and enough resources related to the proposed matrimony to unite these with one's partner" (p. 304).

Because the strong relationship between young age at marriage and marital instability consistently has been documented in the literature, Larson and Holman (1994) recommended that practitioners discourage teenage marriage. Although most of the sociocultural factors were found to be relatively weak predictors of marital quality or stability, they suggest discussing the ramifications of limited education and limited income on marriage and to discuss cultural and subcultural norms about marriage, specifically in regard to race-related issues.

One dimension of the influence of careers on marital stability is the relative earnings of the spouses. Analysis of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (Ono, 1998) revealed that the wife's earnings have a U-shaped relationship to the risk of marital dissolution of marriage, and impact of the husband's earnings varies with the wife's earnings. Weiss and Willis (1997) found that an unexpected increase in the husband's

earning capacity reduced the likelihood of divorce, while unexpected increase in the wife's earning capacity raises the divorce hazard. They also found that the presence of children and high levels of property stabilize the marriage.

Current contexts. Current contexts include support from friends and internal and external pressures. The approval and positive perceptions of friends (Larson & Holman, 1994) are predictive of marital quality and stability. Larson and Homan suggest that the couple should be encouraged to seek the support of friends or to try to understand the friends' concerns if support is lacking. Also, they posit that the practitioner should teach skills such as stress management, effective coping, and mature decision-making when internal and external pressures are present in the current context. Internal pressures may include factors such as pressure from the family of origin, and external pressures may include job/career circumstances, political circumstances (e.g., war), or economic circumstances.

Individual Traits and Behavior

Individual traits and behavior include emotional health, self-esteem, neurotic behavior, and depression; conventionality; and physical health. Personality traits have long been considered predictors of marital success. Larson and Holman (1994) recommend an initial assessment and referral for personal therapy when there are indications of problems with emotional health, self-esteem, neurotic behavior, or depression. They emphasize that only licensed mental health professionals should diagnose psychological disorders, which suggests the need for clergy to have knowledge about when and to whom to refer individuals who have problems beyond their expertise. They suggest assessing interpersonal skills (especially sociability), conventionality, and

physical health. When interpersonal skills are lacking, individuals can be referred for therapy or skills training. The practitioner can discuss the possible ramifications of unconventionality on marriage and can refer health-related issues to health professionals.

Kessler, Walters, and Forthofer (1998) found that prior psychiatric disorders were associated with a substantially higher rate of divorce. Wilson et al. (1997) found that the quality of marriage for both partners is influenced by wives' emotional health. They suggest the power of this factor is magnified by the socialization of women to feel responsible for the quality of the relationship, which may discourage wives from using the marriage as a buffer from emotional distress.

A study of personality and mate preferences (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997) found that the personality characteristics of a partner predicted marital and sexual dissatisfaction. The strongest association was when the partner was lower than desired on Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, and Intellect-Openness.

An individual trait that has been linked to decreased satisfaction in relationships is having unrealistic and overly romantic beliefs about marriage. An intervention among college students used social science research combined with applied teaching techniques to help the participants gain a more realistic perception of marriage (Sharp & Ganong, 2000). The group receiving the intervention significantly lowered their romantic beliefs from pre-test to post-test.

Dyadic Factors

The dyadic factors also were divided (Larson & Holman, 1994) into three subgroups. These are homogamy, interpersonal similarity, and interactional history and processes.

Homogamy. Homogamy refers to the tendency for an individual to choose a mate similar to oneself. Williams and Lawler (1998) conducted focus groups and interviews to explore ways in which interchurch couples struggle to gain acceptance. Participants shared many experiences of being hurt or not accepted, citing problems related to their families, clergy, and church members. They found that many couples eventually found acceptance from parents who originally were unsupportive of their marriage to someone from another church.

Although homogamy has been associated with marital satisfaction and stability, differences do not necessarily doom a marriage to failure. For example, a study of the influence of religious and ethnic differences on marital intimacy examined 25 Jewish (intramarried) couples and 25 couples with one Jewish partner (intermarried). The groups did not differ by level of intimacy, similarity of intimate experience, or mutual understanding. However, the couples appeared to arrive at similar levels of intimacy via divergent pathways: the intermarried couples found that negotiating their differences led to greater intimacy and understanding, while the intimacy of intramarried couples was rooted in their ethnic bond.

Interpersonal similarity. Similarity of attitudes, values, and beliefs are some of the interpersonal characteristics that relate to marital quality and stability. Though not identical, religious and spiritual issues are related to this category.

Analysis of panel data from the National Survey of Families and Households considered the relationship of religiosity and marital stability (Call & Heaton, 1997). The study found that no single dimension of the religious experience adequately describes the effect of religiosity on marital stability. The most powerful predictor of marital stability

was frequency of religious attendance. Couples who both attend church regularly had the lowest risk of divorce.

Roth (1988) investigated the relationship of spiritual well-being and marital adjustment. She found that spiritual well-being correlated significantly to marital adjustment. Those married over 40 years showed a lower correlation than those who had been married 10-40 years.

A study among rural, two-parent African American families found that religiosity was linked with higher levels of marital interaction quality and co-caregiver support (Brody, Stoneman, Flor, & McCrary, 1994). The authors concluded that the religious involvement of African Americans promotes responsive and supportive family relationships, which help the family cope with economic and social stressors in the rural South.

Lehrer and Chiswick (1993), using data from the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Households, found that religious compatibility at the time of marriage has a large influence on marital stability, rivaling the effect of age at marriage and dominating adverse effects of differences in religious backgrounds, at least for Protestants and Catholics. They also found stability to be remarkably similar across various types of homogamous unions, with the exceptions of Mormons, which were the most stable, and individuals with no religious identification, which were the least stable.

A pilot study (Burchard, Yarhouse, Kilian, Worthington, Berry, & Canter, 2003) compared the quality of life benefit between two marital enrichment programs, one a hope-focused treatment group and the other a forgiveness-focused group. Couples were randomly assigned to 1 of the 2 treatment groups or to a control group. The quality of

life measure improved significantly with the hope-focused group and approached significance in the forgiveness-based group.

According to Buikema's (2001) search of the literature, "All the books and programs on premarital counseling written from a Christian perspective begin by stressing the biblical and theological dimension of marriage" (p. 95). The importance of stressing the spiritual dimension of marriage was mentioned by respondents throughout his study.

Interactional history and processes. Interactional processes include communication, conflict management, and consensus building, and interactional history refers to acquaintance, premarital sex, cohabitation, and premarital pregnancy. In response to their review of the literature, Larson and Holman (1994) suggested a number of implications for practice related to predictive factors. For those whose parents had been divorced, they recommended that the practitioner assess the individual's reaction to the divorce; examine attitudes toward commitment and divorce; and expose the individuals to positive marriage models. In regard to both parental mental illness and family dysfunction, they suggest assessing the effect on the child and recommending personal or family therapy if necessary. If parents and in-laws do not support the marriage, the practitioner should encourage the couple to seek their support or to seek to understand their concerns.

Interactional processes include acquaintance, cohabitation, premarital sex, premarital pregnancy and childbirth, and communication skills. Larson and Holman (1994) admonish practitioners to assess the depth of the couple's acquaintance and encourage their seeking a deeper acquaintance as necessary. They also suggest it is

appropriate to discuss the potentially negative ramifications of cohabitation as a trial marriage or to discourage such cohabitation.

In light of research indicating a link between the incidence of premarital sexual intercourse and marital satisfaction and divorce, Larson and Holman (1994) also suggest discussing the ramifications or discouraging premarital sexual intercourse. They also suggest that practitioners encourage couples to avoid premarital pregnancy or, if pregnant and still wanting to marry, to encourage marrying before the birth of the child. In view of evidence linking communication processes with marital quality and stability, they also recommend assessing and teaching communication, conflict management, and consensus-building skills.

A longitudinal study examined the effects of premarital parenthood on meanings of marriage and the resulting effects of those meanings on the risk of divorce by the fourth year of marriage (Timmer & Orbuch, 2001). Consistent with earlier research, the study found a greater risk of divorce for premarital parents. However, parents who perceived practical advantages of marriage in their first year reduced their risk of divorce by 85%.

Teachman (2003) found that neither premarital sex nor premarital cohabitation among women predicted marital disruption when the relationship was limited to the woman's spouse. However, women have an increased risk of marital dissolution if they have had more than one intimate premarital relationship. Less education has been found to be related to a higher probability that a first union would be formed through cohabitation, and the odds of marrying first without cohabiting were greater for those with more education (Thornton, Axinn, & Teachman, 1995).

There is limited support for the notion that marital quality is higher when couples are similar in racial, socioeconomic, religious affiliation, intelligence, and age. There probably is stronger support for the influence of holding similar values, attitudes, beliefs, and sex role orientations. Larson and Holman (1994) suggest that practitioners assess the similarities in both of these domains and discuss the ramifications of dissimilarities on marriage.

Bradbury and Karney (2004) raised questions about the universal applicability of the dominant paradigm in couple research, that interactional processes account for most of the variance in determining marital outcomes and that modifying these processes is the surest means to stronger marriages. They suggest that it also is important to recognize the importance of individual strengths and vulnerabilities and of stressful events and contexts.

Substantial evidence demonstrates that communication processes among premarital and newlywed couples predict later martial quality or stability (Clements, Stanley, & Markman, 2004; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). However, not all populations benefit equally. For example, the communication skills in the PREP course seem to be more helpful for men than for women (Schilling, Baucom, Burnett, Allen, & Ragland, 2003).

Gottman and colleagues have suggested abandoning interventions that promote the active-listening model of conflict resolution, which they characterize as unrealistic and ineffective (Gottman, Carrere, Swanson, & Coan, 2000; Gottman et al., 1998). Leonard and Roberts (1998) suggested from their findings that highly satisfied couples often resolve conflicts without any specific verbal problem solving, using a process they

call behavioral accommodation. However, other researchers suggest that the active-listening model has been useful in reducing volatile interactions (Cole & Cole, 1999) and that data on skill retention generally has been very positive (Cole & Cole, 1999; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993; Stanley, Bradbury, & Markman, 2000a).

Trathen (1995) compared a skills-based marriage preparation curriculum (C-PREP) and an information-based curriculum among randomly assigned subjects in evangelical churches in the Denver area. Although the author reported that the study did not show that one program was better than the other, the participants rated the information-based program higher on all counts compared to the skills-based program. Long-term effects of the programs were not addressed in the study.

Communication also is frequently listed among topics that participants in marriage preparation programs find most useful. For example, in a large survey conducted in the Catholic Church, couples indicated the aspects of their premarital education they found most helpful (Williams et al., 1999). The study found that the aspects rated most helpful included providing time for couples to learn about each other and addressing communication.

Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) posit that information on sexuality is an important component of marriage preparation for several reasons. First, most couples expect the topic to be addressed. Second, they suggest numerous couples are not sexually active or educated because of their beliefs, values, or age at marriage. Third, regardless of previous sexual activity, many people are not well informed about sexual matters, and few discuss this information together as a couple in a sensitive manner.

Fournier and Olson (1986) concluded that all couples must resolve similar developmental tasks. Those include sexual relationship, communication, relations with relatives and friends, educational and work plans, finances, family planning, and roles.

Participant Preferences Related to Content

As noted in relation to process considerations, Silliman et al. (1992) have suggested more couples might seek formal marriage preparation if the programs were designed in response to client desires. The same principle no doubt applies to content of the program as well as process, which has led several researchers to explore this idea.

A group of engaged couples were surveyed by mail to determine what they believed were important topics to address in marriage preparation (Williams, 1992). In response to an open-ended question, communication (60%) and money/finances (50%) were the topics most frequently volunteered by respondents. Next in order of importance were conflict resolution/problem-solving, children, religion, careers, sex, and family/in-laws. Choosing from a list of 52 items, at least 75% chose the following six topics as important needs to be addressed: dealing with stress from work, the effect of children on marriage, how to keep romance alive in marriage, how to deal with anger or silence, how to resolve differences, and identifying trouble signs in marriage.

Russell and Lyster's (1992) survey asked couples to rate program content after participation in marriage preparation programs. After family-of-origin issues, the other topics, in order of satisfaction, were finances, communication, roles, conflict resolution, parenting, sexuality, family and friends, and spirituality.

Another exploratory study investigated the importance of program characteristics and topics to potential participants in premarital counseling (K. T. Sullivan & Anderson,

2002). Results indicated that the most important elements for couples are a professional, trustworthy leader, educational content, and topics such as communication, finances, problem solving, and having children. Women place a higher value than men do on discussion of insight-oriented topics such as family-of-origin and expectations, and they also are more likely to endorse topics of parenting skills and religion.

Nickols et al. (1986) found that using a sex knowledge inventory, developing self-disclosing skills, and expressing feelings received the highest rankings. The extent to which these findings can be generalized is unclear, because they are based on the unique design of each program and its providers.

Williams et al. (1999) examined how couples married 1 to 8 years perceived the helpfulness of their marriage preparation. The sample of 2,800, drawn from a large database of engaged couples who had taken the FOCCUS premarital inventory, was proportionately represented by geographical region and cohort of wedding year. Approximately three-quarters of respondents were Catholics. Approximately two-thirds (66.2%) of the respondents agreed that marriage preparation was a valuable experience, with the perception of value decreasing over time (Williams et al., 1999).

Williams et al. (1999) described the topics rated as most helpful as the *Five Cs:* communication, commitment, conflict resolution, children, and church (a composite of religion and values and marriage sacrament). The 18 topics investigated, ranked in order of perceived helpfulness, were communications, commitment, conflict resolution, religion and values, children, marriage sacrament, personality issues, roles in marriage, compatibility of background, extended family, friends, finances, leisure activities, family planning, balancing home and career, sex and intimacy, dual-career marriages, drugs and

alcohol. The perception of finances as being among the most unhelpful topics is in contrast to the findings of Russell and Lyster (1992), where satisfaction with finances was listed second behind family of origin.

Clergy Preferences Related to Content

Buikema's (2001) qualitative study of the preparation of pastors in premarital counseling explored what content the clergy thought pastors should be exposed to in marriage preparation training. Buikema culled 21 items suggested for inclusion in marriage preparation. The most frequently cited topic (10 of 12) was the biblical and theological basis for marriage, and suggested second most often (8 of 12) were communication and conflict resolution. Half of the subjects named financial matters, sex and intimacy, role-play, and use of premarital assessments. Other topics listed included relationship breakdown factors, expectations, relationship roles, personality issues, parenting skills, respect or honor, worldview, family of origin, time frame issues, commitment, domestic violence, in-laws, divorce/remarriage, the counselor's responsibility, and the professional counselor's role.

Respondents to a survey of Assemblies of God pastors in Oklahoma indicated which of 14 content areas they included in marriage preparation. The areas most frequently addressed were the wedding ceremony (90.7%), relationship to God (93%), spiritual dimensions of marriage (83.7%), communication (83.7%), finances (74.4%), expectations (72.1%), and sexual relations and family planning (72.1%). Fewer than half dealt with career (48.8%), personality/temperament type (48.8%), or family of origin (34.9%). In P. O. Sullivan's (2000) study, 24% of the clergy indicated they provided skills training and practice.

Summary

This chapter has described literature related to the history of marriage preparation and has discussed research and commentary related to process and content components of marriage preparation.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE RELATED TO POTENTIAL HINDRANCESS IN PROVISION OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Overview

As discussed in Chapter 1, constraint theory suggests that removing hindrances to provision of effective marriage education may be the most efficient approach to achieving more satisfactory outcomes. The Oklahoma help-seeking research (Fournier & Roberts, 2003), which complements the present study, identified 16 factors related to potential barriers keeping couples from attending relationship education programs. Those 16 factors were categorized as relational, internal, or external constraints.

Little research specifically addresses the question of what factors tend to enhance or constrain clergy provision of premarital education programs. Therefore the search of literature focused on two primary domains: clergy relationships with significant populations and therapy effectiveness. Seven broad areas of potential influence emerged from the review of literature, as illustrated in Figure 1: sponsoring denominations, church congregations, couples receiving preparation, families of origin, the communities, the clergyperson's own marital system, and individual characteristics of the clergyperson. Factors relating to these systems often are multidirectional and multilevel. For example, information pertaining to the congregational system or denominational system could have been reported in relation to the clergy marital system.

The Community System

Community influences on the provision of marriage preparation by clergy tend to be indirect, interacting with other systems to create an environment that enhances or constrains marriage preparation. Two domains where this interaction is manifest are community atmosphere and community programs.

Community Atmosphere

Spokesmen for the Marriage Movement (Institute for American Values, 2004) identified the need for community organizers who seek to unify communities around a shared vision and plan of action. One of the stated goals for community organizers is to use large public events to create media attention and seed cultural change. They also identify the need for culture changers who seek to shift cultural values in a pro-marriage direction: "They believe that the most important thing we need to change is our minds" (Institute for American Values, 2004, p. 7).

Murray (2005) describes the interaction between the community and providers and the tension that can result from the interplay of bottom-up and top-down forces: "Individuals and organizations may act on an environment in an attempt to order or change it, while the environment may also influence organizational decisions and priorities" (p. 17). She notes that environments help shape the way providers act and perceive the scope of their choices. For example, people would be expected to welcome and endorse marriage services more enthusiastically amidst large faith communities, conservative political affiliations, and political leaders sympathetic to the marriage movement. In such an atmosphere of perceived community support, Murray (2005) suggested that providers would be more likely to offer marriage or premarital services.

For example, in a state that enacted legislation reducing the marriage license fee for couples that received marriage preparation, the state extension system responded by developing a curriculum that fit the guidelines of the programs described in the legislation (Murray, 2005).

Community atmosphere also can have a constraining effect. Murray (2005) found, "In contrast, other providers saw the presence of universities, liberal political affiliations, and a lack of political will as indicators that marriage services would not be a priority or even be welcome, particularly if framed in a 'marriage-only' light or promoted by the government instead of community members" (p. 17).

Macomber et al. (2005) also noted that prevailing cultural attitudes that devalue prevention efforts could keep couples from participating in marital or premarital interventions. Potential benefits from a supportive environment include funding, integration into the community, and involvement with healthy marriage initiatives.

Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) note that communities have begun to place expectations on premarital counseling by clergy. They suggest that these expectations are complicated by the dual identity clergy carry as both pastor and civil agent, not only representing the denomination in enforcing religious values regarding marriage but also acting as an agent of the state to activate the marriage contract and legalize the union.

Community Programs

Doherty and Anderson (2004) present a historical description of community marriage initiatives that began in reaction to the perception that marriages and families were breaking down. Many of these programs have ties to Marriage Savers, founded in 1996 by Mike and Harriet McManus. This organization has two primary components:

developing Marriage Saver congregations and establishing Community Marriage Policies. The Community Marriage Policies usually involve local clergy developing a policy and holding a public ceremony in which they pledge in writing to implement at least five components to strengthen marriages (McManus, 2003):

1. Require rigorous marriage preparation of at least 4 months, during which couples take a premarital inventory and discuss the identified relational issues with trained mentor couples who also teach couple communication skills.
2. Renew existing marriages with an annual enrichment retreat.
3. Restore trouble marriages by training couples—whose marriages at one time had nearly failed—to mentor couples currently in crisis.
4. Reconcile the separated with a self-study course monitored by a same-gender support partner.
5. Revive stepfamilies by creating stepfamily support groups for parents in remarriages with children.

Although McManus cited anecdotal evidence of the success of Community Marriage Policies (McManus, 2003), empirical analysis of the program had not been done until recently. Birch et al. (2004) tested the hypothesis that divorce rates would decline more in communities that had adopted a Community Marriage Policy than in matched communities without a Community Marriage Policy. Using county-level data, the hypothesis was tested with statistical controls for key predictors of aggregate divorce rates and in the context of nationally declining divorce rates. The study found that divorce rates seem to decline more rapidly after implementation of a Community

Marriage Policy. The researchers noted that the importance of the findings was based more in the surprising presence of any effect rather than in the size of the difference:

> In reality, finding a significant program effect is surprising when the context of the program implementation is considered; volunteers implement the program, there is high turnover among those doing so, there is wide variation in the intensity of the program implementation, there is often a low proportion of signed congregations in the context of the larger county population, and this largely city-level intervention is only testable using the county statistics in which their results are embedded.
>
> Further, given the many factors that could affect divorce rate declines over the last decade, to test the effects of any specific intervention to reduce them is a challenge (Birch et al., 2004, p. 500).

Illustrating the interplay between community attitudes and community programs, McManus suggested that a significant reason for the apparent effectiveness of Community Marriage Policies is the publicity surrounding such an event and the resulting change in community attitudes toward marriage and divorce (M. J. McManus, personal communication, July 2000). Although this observation has not been validated empirically, it is reasonable to believe that community attitudes toward marriage (and marriage preparation) would have an indirect effect on the effectiveness of marriage preparation.

The Clergy Marital System

Clergy, their families, and their marriages are prone to vulnerabilities that might indirectly affect the ability of clergy to provide marriage preparation. Those factors

include sexual relationships, lack of time, and congregational intrusiveness.

Sexual Infidelity

Blackmon (1984, cited in Malony, 1988), in a survey of 300 active ministers from Presbyterian, United Methodist, Assemblies of God, and Episcopal churches in Southern California, found that "13% reported they had had sexual intercourse with a church member other than their spouse. This is almost double that which has been reported for other helping professionals suggesting that ministers are particularly vulnerable to this type of difficulty" (Malony, 1988, p. 167).

In a demographic summary of data on extra-marital sexual behavior in the ministry, Thoburn and Balswick (1998) concluded that pastors have the highest incidence of sexual contact among helping professionals, but not so high as reported by Blackmon. They also note that comparing the rates is difficult because it is harder to determine the boundaries between the pastor's professional and private life. Ordinarily, the extra-marital sexual relationship seems to result from emotional investment and long-term involvement in the lives of church members. More years in ministry and serving in a lower pastoral position are related to extra-marital sexual activity.

Thoburn and Balswick's (1994) review of Thoburn's 1991 study of male Protestant clergy suggested that three categories of factors help predict which pastors might be particularly vulnerable to sexual temptation: personal adjustment issues, marital adjustment issues, and attraction/arousal in the ministerial role. They suggest the following profile of the clergyperson at greatest risk:

> The profile of a pastor who is at risk for extramarital sexual activity seems to be a person who has low self-esteem coupled with an

> image consciousness. Such a person is likely to exhibit relatively low impulse control when it comes to sexually oriented thoughts or behaviors (short of infidelity itself), and there may be a compulsive aspect to this pastor's character that is displayed in overwork, overcommitment, and emotional overinvolvement in others' lives. This compulsive overinvolvement is in contrast to the pastor's relative lack of intimacy in and dissatisfaction with his marital life.
>
> When a pastor seeks to hide his real self or compensate for perceived inferiorities, when he becomes trapped in his congregation's expectations that he be more than he is, when he finds himself emotionally isolated and not communicating with wife or peers, then he is at high risk for sexual indiscretion (Thoburn & Balswick, 1994, p. 294).

More recently, Christianity Today International (LaRue, 2005, p. 294) conducted a mail and Internet survey of 680 pastors and 1,972 churchgoers in which a third of pastors believe their positions make them more vulnerable to sexual temptations than non-pastors. Seven in 10 clergy say someone other than their spouse has propositioned them to engage in sexual or romantic activity, about 8% of them experiencing this type of proposition multiple times a year. However, this report found that only 5% confessed to having committed adultery since becoming a pastor, in contrast to 15% of church attendees or the 13% of pastors in Blackburn's 1984 survey (Malony, 1988).

LaRue (2005) also found that three-fourths of pastors are very satisfied with their marriage, compared to less than half of married churchgoers. In addition, 71% of pastors are satisfied or very satisfied with their married sex life, compared to 53% of married

laity. The most common factors contributing to a lack of sexual satisfaction for pastors are schedules, children, and sexual inhibitions.

Ministry Stressors

Ministry-related factors can affect the clergy spouse more than the clergy himself, which has implications for the marriage relationship. In a study of the influences of social context and perceptions of work-related stressors on family functioning among clergy and spouses (Morris, M. L., & Blanton, 1998), both husbands and wives reported that intrusiveness, lack of social support, mobility, and time demands/expectations were stressors that impacted their competence in family functioning, but wives were more affected across several dimensions of family functioning. M. L. Morris and Blanton (1994b) address the effects of boundary ambiguity: "Clergy couples who are confronted by congregational intrusiveness must find a way to fulfill the contemporary marital functions of conjugal intimacy in a context in which they are sometimes seen as an extension of the church-family system. It is understandable that marital satisfaction is thus adversely affected by intrusiveness" (p. 193).

A study of factors affecting marital satisfaction in clergy families used a sample from the Church of the Nazarene (Pettitt, 1998). Four primary variables were found to have a significant relationship with marital satisfaction: openness to marital support, lack of privacy, social desirability, and role overload.

Beck (1997) found that time spent with spouse and family negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion. A lack of time with one's spouse could indirectly constrain a pastor's effectiveness in marriage preparation. It might be expected that there would be a relationship between lack of time and problems in the clergy marriage.

Clergy devote approximately 60 hours a week to their work (Beck, 1997), which is more than the average for all vocations (Crouter, Bumpus, Head, & McHale, 2001). Crouter et al. (2001) found that high levels of role overload consistently predicted less positive marital relationships. However, long hours were unrelated to spouses' love, perspective-taking, or conflict, even though less time was spent with the wife.

Hall (1997) reviewed the literature and summarized the numerous variables associated with marital adjustment for pastors:

> Problems in the following areas are associated with significantly lower marital adjustment among pastoral couples: husband/wife roles and status, couple communication, expression of affection, decision-making, sex relations in marriage, resolving conflict, separateness/togetherness, perceived stress from work and family combined, and perceived stress from family. … In addition, six stressors appear to be problematic to all clergy couples, regardless of their level of marital adjustment: financial stress, lack of family privacy, frequent moves, husband on call, husband busy serving others, and lack of ministry to clergy family. The most significant problem among divorced pastors that contributes to divorce appears to be their time commitment to work (p. 244).

Factor analysis of the Ministry Demands Inventory (Lee, 1999) found four types of congregational intrusiveness onto the clergy family: personal criticism, presumptive expectations, boundary ambiguity, and family criticism. Intrusive demands of the congregation are negatively associated with attitude and well-being.

Lee and Iverson-Gilbert (2002) used Hill's ABC-X model of family stress to

analyze the outcome of stress on clergy families. They found that perception variables were more consistently correlated with outcome than either demand or support.

Friedman (1985), using a family process model, suggests that of all work systems the church or synagogue is the one that functions most like a family:

> This is true in part because it is so difficult for clergy to distinguish home life from professional life (whether or not there is a parsonage and whether or not the spouse is deeply invested), and partly because the intensity with which some lay people become invested in their religious institutions makes the church or synagogue a prime arena for the displacement of important, unresolved family issues. Interlocking emotional triangles between personal family issues and congregational family issues are the natural consequence of such displacement (pp. 197-198).

Emphasizing that the clergy family is particularly vulnerable to home-work interaction because of the intense emotional interlock, he posited that significant changes in either system may be quicker to unbalance the other than would happen in less interlocking systems: issues in the clergy home affect the congregation, and issues in the congregation affect the clergy family and marriage.

The Congregational System

The congregation a pastor serves largely circumscribes his activities. Thus, it would be expected that the congregational system would influence clergy provision of marriage preparation in many ways. Although some research directly relates the congregational system to clergy involvement in marriage preparation, most of the

literature is indirectly related through factors such as boundary issues, congregational size, and constraints related to insufficient time and money.

Boundary Issues

Several studies identified boundary issues related to the church and clergy or to the church and clergy family. Specific boundary-related factors include intrusiveness (Morris, M. L., & Blanton, 1998); personal criticism, presumptive expectations, boundary ambiguity, and family criticism (Lee, 1999); inadequate personal boundaries (Foss, 2001); emotional triangles (Henry, Chertok, Keys, & Jegerski, 1991); conflict and exposure to crisis (McKown, 2001); and lack of privacy (Pettitt, 1998).

O'Brien (1998) described boundary-related phenomena in terms of dysfunctional behavioral patterns in congregations. He suggested that such patterns were associated with pastoral tenure. Similarly, Henry et al. (1991) suggested a model of congregational relationships that predicted emotional triangles, which in turn predicted stress symptoms.

Friedman (1985) was an innovator in using family process constructs to understand congregational dynamics: "The most familiar aspects of family life, such as fusion, sibling rivalry, interlocking triangles, playing off parents, sabotage of a well-defined leader, and problems of entering and leaving, are part and parcel of organizational life" (p. 202). He also compared long-standing characteristics of congregations to the intergenerational transmission of relationship dynamics in families. Even apparently unrelated events and relationships within a congregation will affect every aspect of the congregation, including the manner and effectiveness with which the clergyperson provides marriage preparation.

Building on Friedman's (1985) ideas, Henry et al. (1991) also used family process concepts to look at organizational and family systems factors in stress among ministers. The study found support for a model in which governing body density and history of conflict predicted emotional triangles, and emotional triangles predicted stress symptoms. The variable of governing body density came from Friedman's (1985) suggestion that churches in which members of the governing body are related by blood, marriage, or friendship would be more likely to involve the pastor in triangles. The relationship between emotional triangles and symptoms of stress were moderated by contact with the pastor's family of origin.

McKown (2001) found that the most frequent source of conflict for clergy is with individuals in relation to administrative role expectations. Based on the findings, the author inferred that "the administrative role in ministry is the least enjoyable, the most time consuming and conflicted role, and carries with it the most negative consequences when expectations exceed the everyday practice of it by the minister" (p. 86).

Foss (2001) suggested that vague job descriptions were a factor related to boundary problems. McKown (2001) found, "Conflict involving administrative role expectation was the highest rated of the five role expectations examined, replicating previous research, and was the highest rated of all the substantive conflict issues assessed" (p. 85). This form of conflict also was correlated with increased burnout, depression, and likelihood of leaving the ministry. A study looking at the dynamics of family systems characteristics of congregations suggested that dysfunctional behavioral patterns in churches influence pastoral turnover (O'Brien, 1998).

Role overload, role strain, and related stress indirectly influence the ability of clergy to provide effective marriage preparation. A survey of 300 active ministers from Presbyterian, United Methodist, Assemblies of God, and Episcopal churches in Southern California (Blackmon, 1984, cited in Malony, 1988) found that clergy reported a significant amount of differences between what they and their members expected them to be doing. When a congregation does not value marriage preparation, the minister must reconcile personal values and expectations with expectations of the (employing) congregation.

Using a sample of 198 Iowa clergy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Beck (1997) investigated the effects of the number of roles pastors engage in, time spent in those roles, and certain demographic variables on burnout and job satisfaction. Consistent with Malony's (1988) findings, pastors in the study appeared to be fairly satisfied with their work overall and did not suffer from high levels of burnout. Relationships of roles to burnout and job satisfaction depended on interaction among other variables.

Congregational Attitudes

Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) urge the pastor to ascertain the local congregation's traditions related to marriage preparation. In some congregations, marriage preparation is a long-established tradition, probably begun by earlier pastors. Other congregations, however, may expect only brief or superficial preparation or even none at all. These attitudes could influence the effectiveness of the clergy in providing marriage preparation.

Downes (2003) notes that clergy have an advantage in providing marriage

preparation when the local church has a formal policy regarding the requirements for weddings, including the number of counseling sessions and the minimum length of preparation. Respondents to Buikema's (2001) study suggested local congregations share the responsibility of equipping clergy for marriage preparation. While they viewed the seminary as responsible to provide the academic side of training, they suggested that the local church can offer the setting for the experiential side of training, particularly through required internships.

Congregational Size

One of the congregational characteristics assumed to affect effectiveness of marriage preparation is size of the congregation. Beck (1997) found that pastors who worked on multiple staffs were associated with enhanced personal achievement when compared to pastors who work alone. As expected, since multiple staffs ordinarily are characteristic of larger congregations, the size of the congregation also was associated with a sense of personal accomplishment. "If one is not in a multiple staff situation, and if one has no secretarial support, doing more or increased administrative work may result in diminished job satisfaction" (Beck, 1997, p. 111).

Financial Constraints

Generally, the size of the congregation should be related to the availability of funds for providing marriage preparation. Though prevention tends to be time and cost-effective (Murray, 2005; Fincham & Bradbury, 1990), funding has been identified as an issue in premarital programs (Murray, 2005).

Time Constraints

Assumed to be related to congregational size, time constraints are associated

with factors such as role overload and high congregational expectations (Pettitt, 1998). Time limitations also were identified as a component in marriage preparation programs: "Because of the amount of time given to other duties, pastors may not have time to devote six to eight sessions to each couple" (Barlow, 1999, p. 4). Thus dosage of marriage preparation interventions is constrained by time limitations imposed on the clergy as well as those related to engaged couples (Murray, 2005).

The Denominational System

The literature barely addresses the sponsoring denomination's relationship to the clergy's involvement in marriage preparation. However, other studies shed light on related factors. The most salient characteristics supported by the literature are the denominational view of marriage, denominational support such as training and networking, and denominationally-related quality of life factors.

Denominational View of Marriage

Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) suggest that the Christian religious traditions can be divided into two fairly distinct categories in reference to the role of the religious leader as a premarital counselor. Among denominations that view marriage as a sacrament, the pastor is a kind of guardian, responsible for admitting candidates into all of the sacraments, of which marriage is only one. In these denominations, canon law or constitutional statutes are explicit about both the nature of marriage and also the characteristics and nature of the candidates admitted to the sacrament of marriage. Non-sacramental denominations also generally value marriage and have explicit or implicit beliefs about the nature of Christian marriage and the appropriate preparation and characteristics of couples getting married.

Besides the sacramental and nonsacramental denominational expectations, Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) suggest that a pastoral counseling expectation cuts across all denominations. This expectation is made explicit through pastoral counseling courses in seminaries, where students are instructed to meet the counseling needs of parishioners. Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) also note that denominations encourage the idea that the pastor is to provide premarital counseling by publishing handbooks on premarital counseling and literature for couples to read in preparation for their marriage, implying that marriage preparation should be taken seriously by both clergy and premarital couples. The quality of seminary training and denominational curricula no doubt directly influence the effectiveness of marriage preparation.

The vast majority of Roman Catholic dioceses in the United States have adopted the "Common Marriage Policy," which provides for young couples a common set of expectations and a common culture about the elements of a thriving family. These expectations also provide a structure and expectations for Roman Catholic clergy. The common policy has five components: (1) a 6-month preparation period; (2) administration of a premarital inventory; (3) use of lay leaders and "sponsor couples" with engaged and newly married; (4) marriage instruction classes (usually weekend workshops or evenings for the engaged in the homes of sponsor couples); and (5) engagement ceremonies held before the entire congregation (Browning, 1998).

Denominational Support for Marriage Preparation

Barlow (1999) observed that denominations have expectations that clergy will provide premarital counseling but generally provide few guidelines and little training: "The requirements do not include particular issues to be discussed, how many sessions

are necessary, or any guidelines on how the counseling is to be done. This lack of specificity leads to premarital counseling that is inconsistent and not as effective as possible" (p. 4).

Respondents in Buikema's (2001) qualitative study identified their denomination-sponsored seminary as having a major responsibility for providing training to prepare couples for marriage. Fifty percent of the subjects said they left seminary with no training in premarital counseling and felt incompetent to provide marriage preparation as a result of non-existent or inadequate seminary training. Several other pastors reported having received some premarital counseling training, but Buikema inferred that the training was not extensive. Although the respondents believed that seminaries have a definite role to play in training candidates to provide marriage preparation, they also indicated the responsibility was shared by the churches, the denomination agencies, and the pastor. Respondents in Buikema's (2001) study also suggested that the denomination had a clear responsibility to provide continuing education for clergy to enhance their skills in marriage preparation.

Denominations also provide opportunities for networking with peers, which influences marriage preparation directly and indirectly. Networking through the denominational structure also provides built-in social support in that clergy are able to maintain contact with colleagues even when they relocate to another church (Frame, 1998; Frame & Shehan, 1994). Similarly, Knox et al. (2002), in a study of anxiety and depression among secular Roman Catholic priests, suggested, "Perhaps the potential for anxiety is held at bay when priests feel good about what they do, and enjoy relationships

with peers who are nurturing and supportive during the inevitable periods of stress and challenge" (p. 353).

Beyond the formal responsibility of the denomination as an agency for training clergy, respondents in Buikema's (2001) study suggested the value of learning from seasoned clergy. This teaching could take place on site or off site during seminary training, post-seminary in conjunction with the initial pastorate, or in a continuing education or seminar setting.

Denominationally Related Quality-of-life Factors

Denominations indirectly influence clergy involvement in marriage preparation through various characteristics that affect clergy quality of life. For example, one factor that varies among denominations is the frequency of relocations experienced (Frame, 1998; Frame & Sheehan, 1994; Morris, M. L., & Blanton, 1995).

An evaluation of denominational perceptions of stress and the provision of support services for clergy families found that a minority of denominations provide support services that help clergy manage ministry-related stress effectively (Morris, M. L., & Blanton, 1994a). Not surprisingly, most clergy and spouses perceived that sponsoring denominations were not providing support services they considered important for enhancing quality of life (Morris, M. L., & Blanton, 1995). A few clergy and spouses felt that some denominations respond more effectively than others to clergy family needs, which points to discrepancies among denominations in enhancing quality of life.

Mickey (1991) and Mickey et al. (1991) compared clergy from five conservative (call-oriented) denominations with those of members of liberal (profession-oriented) denominations regarding perceptions of self and family roles. Data show significant

differences between the groups. Circumstances that liberal clergy were more likely to consider problems were inadequate income, lack of family time, and the precedence of needs of the congregation over needs of the family. Fewer conservative clergy felt these factors were problems.

Knox et al. (2002) and Virginia (1998) studied secular and monastic clergy in the Roman Catholic Church and noted differences that highlight denominationally-related influences both within and among religious denominations. For example, secular clergy experienced greater emotional exhaustion than did monastic priests and also showed a much greater degree of depression. Knox et al. (2002) discovered, "Participants' responses in this study yielded a rate of depressed mood approximately seven times greater than that reported in the general population" (p. 352). This prevalence rate seemed unrelated to education, ethnicity, marital status or income. Virginia (1998) noted, "Ministry for the secular priest is one of multiple demands. Secular ministry places the parish priest on call at all hours of the day or night. Daily life tends to be one of flux, not the fixed routine, and at times can approach the chaotic" (p. 62).

The Premarital Couple System

Characteristics of the couple receiving marriage preparation seem to be essential for effective marriage preparation. These include their relationship with the clergy and their attitudes toward and expectations for marriage preparation.

Relationship with Clergy

Factors identified in the literature include responsiveness to the clergyperson's values (Hamblin et al., 1993). The couple's perception of their relationship with the clergy seems important, deduced from the findings of Conte, Buckley, Picard, and Karasu

(1994) that "the data provide clear-cut evidence that the patient's perception of the patient-therapist relationship is of essential importance to the outcome of long-term psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy" (p. 215).

Couple Factors

Literature cited in the previous chapter, which will not be repeated here, describes expectations and preferences among engaged couples regarding marriage preparation. Although the majority of couples indicate they see the value of such services, there are influences that may constrain their participation or their capacity to benefit from a premarital program.

Murray (2005) notes that cultural and family attitudes may discourage participation in marriage preparation. For example, couples or their families may view family matters as private concerns, as illustrated in the Oklahoma help-seeking study (Fournier & Roberts, 2003), in which 6 of 10 reported that their family always has solved problems without outside help. It would be of interest to determine how attitudes of parents influence the marriage preparation of engaged couples.

Also, premarital couples may not recognize the need for assistance if they do not perceive themselves to have problems, especially since many are in a "honeymoon" stage and do not understand the realities of marriage. In addition, couples may be so focused on the wedding that they have difficulty finding adequate time or devoting attention to marriage preparation. On the other hand, Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) suggest that the bliss of couples can be a positive influence in premarital counseling. Couples not only avoid negatives and focus on positives, but they generally are excitedly making plans for the future.

A study conducted to determine why couples choose to attend or not attend couple services such as marriage education (Fournier & Roberts, 2003) seems particularly pertinent to understanding why the premarital couple system could create barriers to effective marriage preparation. Factor analysis identified 16 salient factors, which were grouped into three broad categories: relational, internal, and external.

Themes of relational factors, accounting for more than a third of the variance, were Problem Solving, which included conflict resolution skill, ability to find solutions, ability to recognize conflicts, and stress; Safety, which dealt with physical or verbal threats or violence in a relationship; and Partner Consensus, disagreement over whether to participate in classes or services. A significant relationship constraint expressed by almost 60% of participants was that they could easily disagree with the partner about whether to attend relationship education. About 1 in 4 reported safety issues, and 1 in 5 reported a lack of problem-solving skills.

Internal themes were Trust, including trust versus mistrust of others, feeling supported by others, and openness to others; Religion, conceptualized as both internal and external, including personal relation with God and religiosity; Temperament, which assessed being relaxed versus anxious and calm versus angry; Self-conscious, worry about what others think; Concern for Image, pressure to look good, including concern about what others might think if they needed marriage education classes; Judgmental, thinking less of someone who attended marriage education; and Pessimistic, wondering what was wrong with the relationship of a couple who attended marriage education. Nearly 4 in 10 said they would feel bad if they thought they needed relationship

education, about the same proportion that said they feel pressure to make sure their relationship looks good to others.

External themes were Religion, including attending religious services; Shame, that is, fear of disapproval by family, friends, or clergy and the idea that the family must solve its own problems; Responsibilities, including arranging care for children or elders, which leave too little time or energy to attend classes; Financial, not having enough money to secure marriage education and meet other obligations; Social Support, feeling supported by friends in needing to attend classes or services; Social Environment, including use of alcohol or drugs by friends; and Family Demands, as measured by the number of children. Nearly half of respondents, even more so males, identified the cost as a major constraint keeping them from attending a program, and a similar number said time is a major problem. About 6 of 10 reported that their family always has solved their own problems without outside help. Religious factors were prominent in the sample, about 90% of whom considered themselves moderately or very religious. For example, respondents were much more likely to attend programs sponsored by a church (68%) or private practitioner (61%) than by a public sponsor (33%). In addition, nearly one in four were uncertain that clergy would encourage couples to attend relationship education.

The Individual Clergy System

Aspects of the methodology dimension addressed by Hawkins et al. (2004) include the instructor, learning styles, and maintenance. The discussion in the framework related to the instructor focuses on factors such as gender, ethnicity, and religion that affect the ability of the educator to connect with learners. Other characteristics of the instructor also are important, such as his level of formal training and his attitude toward

marriage preparation. Little or no data are available that reveal relevant instructor characteristics of clergy. Neither do we know how clergy use various methodologies to accommodate diverse learning styles nor what sort of maintenance strategy they follow.

Several factors related to characteristics of the individual clergy seem to be related to clergy provision of marriage preparation. Some of the characteristics inferred from the literature relate to therapist effectiveness. Other factors include age, spiritual characteristics, and attitude toward marriage preparation.

Factors Related to Therapist Effectiveness

Studies of therapist effectiveness would seem to be applicable to clergy effectiveness as providers of marriage preparation. These studies suggested that some therapists are more effective than others irrespective of training, professional status, theoretical orientation, gender, age, patient characteristics, or adherence to therapeutic procedures (Huppert et al., 2001; Luborsky et al., 1997; Burlingame & Barlow, 1996; Berman & Norman, 1985).

Some therapist characteristics were found to affect outcomes, such as "being likeable, accepting, encouraging, and respectful; helping patients to understand themselves better; and not being too quiet" (Conte et al., 1995, p. 43); empathy (Lafferty et al., 1989); therapist defensiveness (Waldron et al., 1997); therapist self-disclosure (Barrett & Berman, 2001); and "the therapist's ability to deal competently with setting an agenda and assigning relevant homework while pacing the session appropriately" (Shaw et al., 1999, p. 844). The client's satisfaction with the therapist, which was linked to individual characteristics of the therapists, correlated significantly with measures of positive outcomes (Conte et al., 1994).

The therapist's level of experience seems to be related to outcome (Huppert et al., 2001; Leon, 2002). Luborsky et al. (1997) suggest that the safest basis for selecting a therapist is his or her effectiveness with previous caseloads. This notion could be applied to clergy in terms of marital stability of couples for whom they provided marriage preparation.

Barber, Crits-Cristoph, and Luborsky (1996) found that depressed patients in 16 sessions had better outcomes when therapists demonstrated competence in and adherence to techniques of supportive expressive dynamic psychotherapy. Blatt, Sanislow, Zuroff, and Pilkonis (1996) found that more effective therapists are more psychologically minded, avoid biological interventions, and expect treatment of depression to take longer than do less effective therapists. Lyons and Zingle (1990) found that end-oriented and quest-oriented clergy are perceived by clients to be significantly more empathic than means-oriented clergy.

Small studies of clergy counselors also found that therapist's time spent in prayer and other spiritual components also affected outcome (Smith, 1996; Foss, 2002). However, methodological problems, particularly small sample size, prohibit imputing significance to these studies.

A study conducted in a large Midwestern Christian counseling center explored the relationship of counselor credentials and client religiosity to perceived counselor expertness and treatment outcome (Randall, 1999). Results indicated that clergy members were perceived as more expert counselors than were non-clergy Christian counselors. However, there was no notable difference in positive change achieved by more religious clients who saw clergy counselors.

Hampson and Beavers (1996) conducted a study examining the association between relationships between therapist and family styles and therapeutic outcome for a group of 175 clinic families. The study found that more competent families that fared well had therapists that disclosed strategy, formed a partnership, and used a minimal power differential. The most disturbed families did better with therapists using lower levels of openness and partnership and a high power differential.

Some studies have examined outcome and process differences between professional and nonprofessional therapists. In a study of group therapists (Burlingame & Barlow, 1996), there were no outcome differences between professional and nonprofessional leaders in 22 of 24 comparisons. Meaningfulness of the findings was tempered by the study's use of clients with minimal symptomatic distress.

Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) suggest that the methodology clergy use in marriage preparation will be influenced by the counseling model they adopt. They indicate that those who use a screening model, often associated with the sacramental view of marriage, will often find the counseling sessions to be tense and difficult. In contrast, they believe that a pastor using a developmental model, influenced by the expectations of the pastoral counseling tradition, will develop a methodology designed to elevate the needs of the couple above those of the institution and its ideals or expectations. They suggest that such a model, based on meeting the couple where they are, will help the clergy counselor deal more effectively with each couple.

Adaptation to Stress

Adaptation to stress, especially burnout, among clergy and their families has been the subject of numerous studies. Although this topic was explored in relation to the

clergy marital system, the topic also seems relevant in terms of individual characteristics of clergy that might indirectly influence their effectiveness in providing marriage preparation.

Traditionally two theoretical/research perspectives have been used to explain clergy burnout (Grosch & Olsen, 2000): one perspective says that burnout results from external systemic factors such as difficult work conditions, poor administrative support, and bureaucracy, and the other perspective says that burnout results from intrapersonal factors such as Type-A personality, narcissism, high idealism, and perfectionism. Grosch and Olsen (2000) propose an integrative approach, suggesting that it is "the interplay of systemic factors with individual factors that together produce burnout" (p. 620).

In a summary of three studies conducted by colleagues at Fuller Theology Seminary, Malony (1988) reported that clergy experienced no greater stress than other persons. In fact, in a survey of 596 seminarians, priests, brothers, Protestant clergy, and rabbis, including 288 females (Rayburn et al., 1984, cited in Malony, 1988), the results not only confirmed earlier findings that clergy experienced less on-the-job stress and personal strain but also found that clergy believed they had greater personal resources compared to the general population. However, the data do suggest that clergy experience greater role overload, role ambiguity and role responsibility; greater interpersonal strain; and less recreational and rational-cognitive resources than the general population (Malony, 1988).

Gender seems to have some mediating influence on the effect of stress. Although some studies have indicated no overall difference between men and women in three areas of occupational stress, personal strain, or personal resources (Rayburn, Richmond,

Roberts, & Malony, 1984, cited in Malony, 1988), results have been inconclusive regarding specific relationships. For example, in one sample men experienced more role ambiguity and role boundary stress than women. Also, in one sample women reported having a greater perception of role overload, while in a larger sample men reported greater difficulty than did women in managing role ambiguity and role boundaries and also reported greater physical, vocational, and interpersonal strain.

Training

Buikema (2001) conducted interviews with 12 providers of marriage preparation. Eleven of the subjects were pastors who had graduated from Covenant Theological Seminary, and the twelfth was a former seminary professor and author of a premarital counseling textbook who was serving as an associate pastor at the time of the interview. The first theme to emerge in Buikema's study was that clergy consider themselves inadequately prepared to provide marriage preparation when they come out of seminary.

Although Buikema's (2001) study identified the denomination, the seminary, and the local congregation as having responsibility for training clergy, some respondents noted that the individual clergyperson also is responsible to see that the training takes place. For example, one subject stated, "I think the pastor individually is ultimately the one responsible to make sure they get the equipping" (Buikema, 2001, p. 82).

Respondents in Buikema's (2001) study suggested that pastors need to learn to practice basic communication and conflict resolution skills in their own relationships before they can become effective in counseling others. Some suggested that clergy often are not strong in their relational skills and need to seek help to work through their own issues.

Age

Age of clergy seems to influence involvement in marriage preparation. For example, Kay (2000) found that older ministers tended to perceive less discrepancy in role expectations, which could indirectly affect marriage preparation. Wilmoth (2003) found a significant negative correlation between age and the clergyperson's willingness to sign a commitment to conduct four to six marital preparation sessions. In addition, Beck's (1997) study of Iowa clergy and burn-out found that age was one of the most salient variables in the study, with increased age being associated with lower levels of burnout. Similar associations were found for years in ministry.

Gender

A number of demographic characteristics might possibly be associated with individual clergy factors that influence the effective provision of marriage preparation. Several of these variables were considered in a study of the effects of marital status on clergy earnings, with particular attention given to how gender mediates the effects of marriage and divorce (Chang & Perl, 1999). The study found that marriage has a positive effect on earnings for men but not for women among Protestant clergy. Also, there was no difference in earnings between men whose wives work outside the home or stay at home in a de facto "assistant to the pastor" role. Divorce has a positive effect on the earnings of women clergy, with analysis indicating that divorced women tend to work more paid hours than married women. In addition, divorce does not depress earnings for male clergy.

Gender also seems to be related to how clergy allocate their time to work tasks (Perl, 2002). For example, women clergy in mainline Protestant churches seem to prefer

one-on-one ministry when compared to men, which should make them more interested in providing marriage preparation. Although differential childcare responsibilities limit the participation of female clergy in activities such as home and hospital visitations, marriage preparation should be a viable outlet for this gender-related preference.

Summary

This chapter has examined the literature related to factors that potentially could constrain clergy from providing effective marriage preparation. Those factors were organized by seven systems related to the clergyperson providing marriage preparation: the community system, the clergy marital system, the congregational system, the denominational system, the premarital couple system, and the individual couple system. The next chapter will describe the methodology used to answer relevant research questions.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter, which presents the methodology utilized in conducting this study, is divided into nine sections. The first section describes the research design, and the second section describes three preliminary inquiries conducted prior to this study. The next four sections describe the selection of subjects, the instrument, procedures for collecting and recording the data, and data processing and analysis. The seventh section discusses methodological assumptions and limitations, the eighth section describes the measures and scales, and the final section details the operational hypotheses.

Research Design

The study is a survey of clergy in Oklahoma who provide marriage preparation. It utilizes a mailed questionnaire sent to 2,501 subjects randomly selected from the entire accessible population. Several statistical analyses are done to test the research hypotheses and to provide contextual information and theoretical insight. All items are analyzed with descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, means, and variance to provide a picture of the current state of marriage preparation among Oklahoma clergy, including demographic information. Other statistics used include reliability estimates, correlational procedures, *t* tests, ordinary least squares multiple linear regression, and discriminant analysis.

Preliminary Studies

Three precursor studies provided data used to clarify constructs, refine methodology, and design the instrument for this study. The studies included a mailed survey; a qualitative inquiry using interviews, participant observation, and retrieval of public records; and a pilot of this study.

Mailed Survey

The author conducted a mailed survey to fulfill a prerequisite for acceptance into the doctor of philosophy program at Oklahoma State University (Wilmoth, 2003). This exploratory study used descriptive statistics to investigate the attitudes and behaviors of Assemblies of God (A/G) pastors in Oklahoma in regard to marital preparation.

For random selection of subjects, a list of the 476 A/G churches in Oklahoma was obtained from the denomination's state office. The churches were identified sequentially by number, and 150 subjects were selected through use of an array of randomized numbers. Of the initial 150 churches selected, 14 were excluded because the church was currently without a pastor, and one was excluded because the principal investigator served as the church's pastor. Fifteen more churches were randomly selected to replace those that had been excluded from participation.

A 30-question instrument was constructed for the mail survey. Eleven of the questions were demographic, and the remaining 19 questions included a total of 73 potential responses. The questions were formulated to assess five dimensions of marriage preparation: attitudes toward marriage preparation; content; follow-up; resources; and self-perception of competency. The instrument was presented to

professionals in the field to review face validity and was field tested with a small group of pastors.

The survey indicates that A/G pastors generally recognized that marriage preparation has value, but it is not a high priority. The pastors indicated that they provide a moderate amount of skills training and information but use very few available resources (e.g., homework, videos, books, workbooks, inventories), and almost none of them provides meaningful follow-up after the couple is married.

Although most pastors believed they do a reasonably good job of preparing couples for marriage, they also recognized the need for more training, with the vast majority expressing interest in attending a brief seminar designed to make their marriage preparation more effective. Interestingly, the more weddings pastors performed and the more thorough the training they provided, the more open they were to upgrading their skills. Although the individual most responsive to additional training would appear to be influenced by age, size of the church, and number of weddings performed, the survey indicates that a vast majority of pastors would welcome at least some training.

Qualitative Exploration

A qualitative study utilized three distinct modes of inquiry to explore concepts related to marriage preparation. This methodological triangulation was used not only to increase reliability of findings but also to help contextualize the research. The primary means of data collection were interviews with pastors from a mid-size Oklahoma city in a university community. Additional methods involved participant observation of a relationship education program offered by a large Protestant church in a Tulsa,

Oklahoma, suburb and archival study of marriage license applications in Payne County, Oklahoma.

The author conducted face-to-face interviews with pastors of two churches in Stillwater, Oklahoma. One interview was audiotaped with permission of the subject, and pen-and-pencil notes were used to record the second interview. Selection of the subjects was based on a combination of purposive and convenience components (Flick, 2002). The pool of subjects was limited to those who were easily accessible in regard to schedule flexibility and geographical proximity, and the author was personally acquainted with both subjects. Among the available subjects, the two selected represented dissimilar churches: one was a small, non-denominational, charismatic congregation founded by the pastor, who had attended a non-accredited Bible college; the other was a liturgical church whose pastor had a seminary degree and decades of ministry experience. The transcript of the recorded interview and the detailed notes from the pen-and-pencil interview were subjected to content analysis to identify factors that inhibit or enhance clergy involvement in providing marriage preparation.

The author utilized a participant observation approach (Flick, 2002) to investigate delivery of a relationship education program in a local congregation, attending the first of six sessions of C-PREP, the Christian version of PREP. This program was chosen because the OMI has selected PREP to be the heart of its effort to reduce divorce and strengthen marriages in the state. The OMI provided manuals for participants and training for the presenters (the sponsoring church's director of counseling and one of its administrators). The sponsoring church was a large, non-denominational congregation located in an affluent suburb of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Convenience was the primary basis for

selecting this particular church. According to information provided by the OMI, only three churches were offering the program during the available time frame. The first church contacted, which was located in Tulsa, had canceled the program when no one registered to attend. A church in an Oklahoma City suburb also had scheduled the program, but only two couples had registered. Approximately 60 individuals (30 couples) were present for the first session at the program observed.

The State of Oklahoma reduces the cost for marriage license application fees to couples that have received premarital counseling. While non-reduced fees increased from $25 to $50 in 2003, the reduced rate remained at $5. A search of public archives (Berg, 2004) at the Payne County, Oklahoma, courthouse investigated several questions related to marriage preparation: How many couples take advantage of the discount? Has there been a pattern of change in the number of couples using the discount? Was the marriage preparation provided by clergy or by health professionals?

When the interviews were subjected to content analysis (Berg, 2004), three broad categories related to marriage preparation emerged: constraints and supports; content of preparation; and clergy-imposed requirements. Within the broad construct of constraints and supports, the following 6 more specific categories emerged: resource factors, congregation factors, couple factors, clergy factors, denomination factors, and community factors. The categories were ranked as follows according to the number of times each was mentioned: resource factors (44); clergy factors (32); couple factors (21); denomination factors and congregation factors (15 each); and community factors (1). The most-often identified sub-categories were clergy attitudes (25); time factors (23); couple attitudes (15); and adequacy of curricula (13).

Analysis of the data included the observation that the categories were arbitrarily assigned and could easily have been identified in other ways. For example, the congregation and denomination factors could have been combined into a "church" category; resource factors could have been disassembled and reassigned into other categories, such as clergy time into clergy factors and couple time into couple factors. The categories clearly overlapped and were highly interrelated.

Time and finances, in view of their finiteness and inherent limitation, always were listed as potential constraints, although the subjects frequently stated that they did not consider them as such. It was inferred that the potential constraining influence of these resources was influenced by the degree of motivation or the level of priority the clergy placed on marriage preparation.

In general, the most salient influences on the participation of clergy in providing marriage preparation were factors related to the clergy and to the engaged couple, specifically the attitudes each held regarding the importance of marriage preparation and the priority they placed on marriage preparation in relation to other responsibilities.

A more subjective analysis of the data included a number of noteworthy observations. For example, the subjects perceive themselves to be competent providers of marriage preparation, and they believe marriage preparation is important. They make sure it happens with couples whose weddings they perform, choosing to "make time" for the process in spite of other pastoral demands, and they often invest their personal finances in providing helpful resources. They also would be willing to receive additional training to improve their effectiveness as providers of marriage preparation.

Clergy use a variety of resources for providing marriage preparation. Both of the

subjects administered a premarital assessment, one a well-recognized and empirically validated instrument and the other a temperament analysis unknown to the researcher. One subject uses a standard format with all couples, using materials in excess of 20 years old, while the other is still developing a methodology and is looking for resources. The stability of the program seems to have a positive relationship with age. One subject keeps the congregation and governing body informed and seeks their approval for his marriage preparation program, and the other subject acts independently.

Content of the marriage preparation varies between clergy, with each placing different levels of emphasis on relevant topics. Communication was perceived as a primary need for both, though approaches to addressing the topic varied. Other topics addressed included children, finances, and the spiritual dimensions of marriage. Theological considerations are high in regard to selection of resources.

Usable data from the participant observation were limited, but some interesting observations emerged. Based on contact with the three churches offering the program, C-PREP does not appear to be uniformly appropriate for all churches. Though other factors no doubt affect suitability of the program, the size of the congregation seems to be one of the most significant.

The effectiveness of the program also could be affected by the quality of the presentation. The observation raised questions regarding the effectiveness of training for the presenters, individual modifications of the program, and differences in communication skills and styles. The decision by participants to attend seemed to be influenced as much by a relationship with the presenters as by the perceived value of the program content.

C-PREP is designed not only for marriage preparation but also for marriage enrichment. Participants in the observed group were predominantly already-married couples rather than couples preparing for marriage. In addition, the young, unmarried men seemed to be less invested in the training than were the young women they were with. (To a lesser extent the married men also seemed less invested in the program.) Subsequent telephone contact with one of the presenters indicated significant attrition over the course of the program, particularly among the men.

Though the sample for the search of data from public archives was small, the data indicate a significant increase in the number of couples who receive a discount for premarital counseling and a significant increase in the number of couples who pay for a judge to perform the ceremony (none of whom received the discount for premarital counseling). These data indicate that clergy have a significant (and potentially growing) opportunity to provide premarital counseling to couples. The data also indicated a growing opportunity for judges to influence couples by requiring premarital counseling for the weddings they perform.

Pilot Study

A four-page questionnaire was constructed based on results of the previous inquiries and a search of the literature. The instrument was presented to pastors of seven Protestant churches in a small Oklahoma city: Assemblies of God, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church in America, Southern Baptist, and United Methodist. The respondents determined it took approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey, and they made a few recommendations that were incorporated into a minor revision of the questionnaire.

The instrument also was presented to the OMI staff for their input.

Selection of Subjects

The available data (Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2002) showed the following distribution of Oklahoma residents who identified with a religious group: evangelical Protestant, 68.3%, mainline Protestant, 21.6%, Roman Catholic, 8.0%, Orthodox Christian, 0.2%, and other, 1.9%. "Other" included the following faiths: Bahá'í; Buddhism; Church of Christ, Scientist; Hindu; Jain; Jewish; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Muslim; Sikh; Tao; Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations; and Zoroastrian. The researcher limited the population of interest to include clergy from evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, and Roman Catholic groups.

Two primary sampling procedures were considered for the study. Stratified random sampling procedure was considered as a means of obtaining a representative sample of Oklahoma clergy. The goal of this method would have been to purposively select denominations within each major Christian group so that each major group would be proportionately represented in the overall sample. The officials of each chosen denomination would have been requested to provide the researcher with a complete list of clergypersons in the denomination from which a random sample would be drawn.

Recognizing that religious organizations often are resistant to making lists of churches or clergy available to those outside the organization, another strategy considered was to purchase a list from an independent, commercial vendor. This means of procuring a list has at least three disadvantages: accuracy of names and addresses is not expected to be as high as if obtained directly from the denomination; bypassing official channels may

result in diminished participation; and purchasing the lists would increase the cost of the study. In spite of these limitations, the researcher determined purchase of a commercial list was the most feasible approach.

After investigating possible vendors, Tri-Media Marketing Services was selected to provide the sample. Their database was compiled from sources including orders of church-related merchandise and searches of telephone directory listings. From its database of 6,206 Christian congregations in Oklahoma, Tri-Media randomly selected 2,501 names and addresses, printed mailing labels, and sent them to the researcher.

Instrumentation

The instrument was a four-page, 178-item, self-report questionnaire, which is provided in Appendix 1. Topics defining the eight sections were demographic, requirements, content, risk factors, resources, hindrances, attitudes, and Oklahoma Marriage Initiative.

The 15 demographic questions, seeking 26 responses, asked about age, gender, relationship status, years in ministry, ministry position, education and training, number of weddings performed by self or others in the congregation, who coordinates marriage preparation in the congregation, denominational affiliation, zip code, and willingness of the subject to be contacted for a follow-up interview. Questions about college courses and continuing education asked respondents to note the amount of participation in educational opportunities related to counseling, marriage and family, family life education, and marriage preparation. Buikema (2001) found that clergy were very interested in post-seminary education but believed that few such opportunities were available. Respondents in his study suggested a number of possible venues for such

continuing education, including doctor of ministry programs, mini-term courses, correspondence courses, conferences, seminars, and workshops.

Part 2 (Requirements) used 10 Likert-type questions to discover what requirements are set by clergy for couples whose wedding ceremonies they perform. Part 3 (content) used 18 Likert-type questions to investigate how satisfied clergy are with how thoroughly they address relevant content areas. Part 4 (Risk Factors) used 18 Likert-type questions to ask how important clergy believe various known risk factors are for marital success. Part 5 (Tools/resources) seeks to learn what resources clergy use in marriage preparation, including seminars or other educational programs, inventories, videos, books and workbooks, or referrals, including educational seminars and professionals to whom they refer couples for counseling or therapy for issues beyond their training. Part 6 (Hindrances) uses 17 Likert-type questions to seek the ideas of clergy about factors that might hinder clergy from providing effective marriage preparation. Part 7 (Attitudes) used six Likert-type questions to find out how clergy evaluate the value and effectiveness of marriage preparation. Part 8 (OMI) asked questions related to the OMI: four questions addressed their willingness to endorse components of the "Oklahoma Marriage Covenant," the likelihood of attending additional training, and their perception of how much their attitude toward marriage preparation and their effectiveness in marriage preparation have changed over the past 5 years.

Procedures for Collecting and Recording Data

Two waves of questionnaires, identical except for the cover letter, were mailed to the entire list of 2,501 churches approximately 2 months apart. Of the 431 responses, 424 (17%) were usable for data analysis. Of the 2,501 questionnaires mailed out, 115 were

returned by the U.S. Postal Service as undeliverable. Internet computer searches revealed possible addresses for 35 of these churches, and replacement surveys were sent to each of these. There were concerns about other problems with the quality of the list, such as duplicate addresses.

The questionnaires were mailed in a #10 carrier envelope imprinted with the return address of the Department of Human Development and Family Science at Oklahoma State University. On each envelope a message, "statewide survey for clergy in charge of marriage preparation," was hand-stamped in blue ink. An adhesive-backed, first-class postage stamp and an adhesive-backed mailing label were affixed to the envelope by hand. Also included in the mailing were a printed cover letter, found in Appendix 2, and a #9 self-addressed, postage-paid business reply envelope.

Responses were delivered to the university by the U.S. Postal Service and then to the researcher by the campus mail service. Data from the completed questionnaires were entered into a data file using the Statistical Package for Social Science computer program, utilizing a codebook prepared by the researcher.

Data Processing and Analysis

Methods of statistical analysis were selected to answer four general kinds of research questions: 1) Descriptive statistics were chosen to provide baseline information about demographics and about content and structure of marriage preparation programs; 2) correlational analysis was performed to determine the relationships among variables of interest; 3) a *t* test was performed to test the difference between means; 4) multiple linear regression was used to explore the relative power of individual constraining factors to predict clergy perception of their effectiveness in marriage preparation; and 5)

discriminant analysis and multiple linear regression were used to find an equation that would predict, on the basis of selected demographic variables, the likelihood of a clergyperson's willingness to receive training to present PREP workshops. In addition, Cronbach's alpha was used to estimate the reliability of hypothesized measures.

Methodological Assumptions and Limitations

Isaac and Michael (1995, pp. 136-137) suggest that the following guiding principles should underlie the development and use of surveys:

1. Systematic—carefully planned and executed to insure appropriate content coverage and sound, efficient data collection.
2. Representative—closely reflecting the population of all possible cases or occurrences, either by including everyone or everything, or by using scientific sampling procedures.
3. Objective—insuring that the data are as observable and explicit as possible.
4. Quantifiable—yielding data that can be expressed in numerical terns.

Mailed surveys have both strengths and limitations methodologically. Isaac and Michael (1995) characterize surveys as *reactive* in nature, involving the respondent directly in the process by eliciting a reaction. They suggest that surveys can be among the most credible means of collecting data, since respondents usually can speak for themselves.

Isaac and Michael (1995) also suggest that reactive methods such as surveys run significant risks for generating misleading information. Surveys only include respondents who are accessible and cooperative; create an unnatural context for the respondent, possibly causing him to produce artificial or slanted responses; arouse

"response sets," such as a proclivity to agree with positive questions or statements; and are vulnerable to bias from the tendency of some respondents to give consistently high or low ratings.

Distinctive characteristics of mailed surveys create additional advantages and limitations. Advantages listed by Isaac and Michael (1995) include the fact that they are inexpensive; wide-ranging; self-administering; able to be anonymous; and able to be well designed, simple, and clear. Suggesting other advantages, D. C. Miller (1991) notes that the mailed questionnaire can reach people that are difficult to locate and interview; permits more thoughtful answers; are more appropriate when the respondent has to check information; provides greater uniformity in posing questions; gives the respondent a sense of privacy; and lessens interviewer effect.

Some disadvantages of mailed questionnaires are that it is not possible to know for sure that the intended subject is the actual respondent; there is no assurance that questions were understood; and response rates are typically low (Isaac & Michael, 1995). D. C. Miller (1991) also noted that the sample may be biased in that respondents may differ significantly from nonrespondents, about whom virtually nothing is known.

Identification of Variables and Scales

A significant instrument in the study was a demographic survey. Additional scales were designed to determine structural components of marriage preparation, identify areas of content included in marriage preparation, discover how clergy perceive the importance of several risk factors, learn what tools or resources clergy are familiar with and use, identify what clergy perceive to be hindrances to effective marriage

preparation, assess attitudes of clergy toward marriage preparation, and answer questions related to the OMI.

Requirements Scale

This scale, with total potential values ranging from 0 to 68, taps into structural and process dimensions of marriage preparation. Ten items with 17 responses deal with a waiting period from contact to wedding, including the length of time required (range 0 – 8); premarital inventory (range 0 – 12); meeting with pastor, including the number of sessions required (range 0 – 8); group premarital class/education/enrichment (range 0 – 4); mentor or sponsor couples (range 0 – 8); homework, including number of assignments (range 0 – 8); church membership (range 0 – 4); premarital sexual abstinence (range 0 – 4); meetings/sessions after the wedding, including how many and how long after the wedding (range 0 – 8); and other (range 0 – 4).

Content Scale

This measure explores how satisfied clergy are with how thoroughly they personally deal with relevant issues in the marriage preparation they provide. Each of 18 items has a range of 0 – 4, for a total potential range of 0 – 72. Items in the scale include the wedding ceremony, realistic expectations, role perceptions, children/parenting, career, personality/temperament, relationship to God, communication, conflict resolution, problem-solving, family of origin, finances/budgeting, in-law relationships, friends, sexual relations, family planning, spiritual dimensions, and legal issues.

Risk Factor Scale

This scale identifies how important clergy consider conditions that have been identified to be associated with a higher likelihood of marital distress. Each of 18 items,

not including "other," has a range of 0 – 4, for a potential range of 72 for the scale. The items include having divorced parents; lack of support from parents; young age at marriage; limited income; limited education; dissimilarity of values and beliefs; dissimilarity of personal characteristics; cohabitation; premarital sex; premarital pregnancy and childbirth; poor communication skills; unrealistic expectations; poor conflict resolution skills; short length of acquaintance; past experience with physical abuse; past experience with sexual abuse; past experience with emotional or verbal abuse; and substance abuse by one or both partners.

Tools/resources Scale

This scale asked clergy to identify what tools or resources they were familiar with and which they commonly use in marriage preparation. The 5 subscales had a total of 31 items, plus seven opportunities for writing in resources not listed. Range for individual items was 0 – 3, with a potential range of 0 – 114 for the scale. The 5 subscales and the individual items included 1) Seminars/educational programs (range 0 – 12): The Cana Institute: Caring for the Soul of Marriage and Family, Engaged Encounter, PREP, PREPARE/ENRICH program, and other; 2) Inventories (range 0 – 15): FOCCUS, Myers-Briggs, PREPARE or PREPARE-MC, RELATE, Taylor-Johnson, and others; 3) Videos (range 0 – 12): *Before You Say 'I Do,' Fighting for Your Marriage, Saving Your Marriage before It Starts, When Two Become One,* and other; 4) Books and Workbooks (range 0 – 45): *Before You Say 'I Do,' The Five Love Languages, For Better or for Ever, Getting Ready for the Wedding, Intended for Pleasure, A Lasting Promise, Love for a Lifetime, Love Life for Every Married Couple, Making Love Last Forever, Pre-Marriage Questions, The Most Important Year…, Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts, Seven*

Principles for Making Marriage Work, Ten Great Dates before You Say 'I Do,' and four opportunities to suggest other books; and 5) Referrals (range 0 – 9): workshops offered by the religious community, workshops offered by the OMI, and professionals available for counseling/therapy for issues beyond my training. Traditionally clergy have been encouraged to be alert for psychological or relational issues beyond the scope of their training and to refer those individuals or couples to licensed therapists for additional help (J. K. Morris, 1960; Stahmann & Hiebert, 1987; Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). Buikema (2001) found that clergy are open to use professionals from other fields as well, including financial planners, accountants, lawyers, and physicians. However, he found mixed responses about the willingness of clergy to use the services of a psychologist or professional counselor, particularly if the therapist were not identified as a "Christian" counselor.

Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale

This scale seeks to discover the perceptions of clergy about factors they believe might hinder them from providing effective marriage preparation. Respondents were asked to use a Likert-type scale to identify the extent to which they agreed with each of 17 variables. They also had the opportunity to write in other perceived hindrances. The range for each item was 1 – 8, with a potential range of 17 – 136 for the scale. The Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale included the following subscales: 1) *Clergy Marriage Problems Subscale* (1 item, range 1-8): My own marriage has too many problems. 2) *Community Factors Subscale* (2 items, range 2 - 16): (1) Other clergy in my community do not seem to value marriage preparation. (2) The people of this community do not seem to value marriage preparation. 3) *Congregational Factors*

Subscale (3 items, range 3 – 24): (1) My congregation does not recognize the value of marriage preparation. (2) Church finances are limited. (3) I have too many responsibilities and not enough time. *Denominational Factors Subscale* (4 items, range 4 – 32): (1) My denomination does not encourage marriage preparation. (2) I do not think that I have received enough training to provide effective preparation. (3) I do not know what resources are available to assist me. (4) I am not convinced that these types of programs are very effective. 5) *Premarital Couple Factors Subscale* (3 items, range 3 – 24): (1) Couples are so focused on the wedding they cannot focus on marriage preparation. (2) Engaged couples do not think marriage preparation is valuable. (3) Too many couples still have problems after marriage preparation. 6) *Families-of-origin Problem Subscale* (one item, range 1-8): Parents often make the preparation process more difficult. 7) *Individual Clergy Factors Subscale* (3 items, range 3 – 24): (1) I do not think I am competent to provide marriage preparation. (2) I am not comfortable with "counseling" situations. (3) Couples are much more difficult to work with than individuals. The fact that the individual clergy system is embedded in or interacts with the other systems made the construction of some subscales somewhat arbitrary. A number of variables placed in other subscales could easily have been made a part of the individual clergy factors subscale. The Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale, when reverse coded, is identified as the Resources Scale.

Value and Effectiveness Scale

This scale evaluates what clergy think about the value and effectiveness of marriage preparation. Each of 6 items has a range of 1 – 8, with a potential range for the scale of 6 – 48. The items are: (1) Marriage preparation is a valuable aspect of my

ministry. (2) I provide marriage preparation only because it is expected of me (reverse coded). (3) I think that I generally do a good job preparing couples for marriage. (4) I am willing to receive additional training in effective marriage preparation. (5) Clergy should not be involved with a private matter like marriage preparation (reverse coded). (6) I think couples have benefited from the marriage preparation I provided in the past.

OMI Scale

This scale, with 3 subscales, seeks responses from clergy about topics related to the OMI. Potential range for the scale is 0 – 26. The OMI Covenant Endorsement Scale (range 0 – 10) asks clergy to respond to the following five components from the Oklahoma Marriage Covenant, indicating how likely they would be to endorse each: (1) Request a preparation period of 4 to 6 months of all couples asking me to preside over their wedding. (2) Conduct four to six marital preparation sessions with each couple during the preparation period. (3) Use the preparation period to encourage the spiritual formation of the couple. (4) Encourage the training of mentor couples to assist couples during the crucial first years of marriage. (5) Use a premarital assessment to supplement my marriage preparation.

The OMI Training Scale asks the following two questions to determine how likely clergy would be to participate in specific training programs designed to improve their effectiveness in marriage preparation (2 items, range 0 – 8): (1) How likely would you be to attend a 3-day seminar designed to train you to present one of the 3 versions of PREP (The Prevention & Relationship Enhancement Program)? (C-PREP Christian; J-PREP Jewish; or PREP for General Education) (2) How likely would you be to attend a 1-day seminar to learn about premarital assessments that can improve your ability to

identify both couple strengths and the most challenging marital topics or risks that are unique for each couple? The question about willingness to attend training to teach PREP workshops is particularly pertinent for Oklahoma in that the OMI has chosen PREP as the primary strategy for improving relationships in the state. The relevance of the question about training to use a premarital assessment is illustrated by Buikema's (2001) finding that most (11 of 12) pastors referred to at least one instrument; however, only a third actually use any kind of inventory, and only two were introduced to any assessment instrument during seminary. (That instrument was the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis.)

The OMI Change Scale (2 items, range 0 – 8) asks clergy to indicate how they have changed over the past 5 years in regard to the importance they place on marriage preparation and in regard to their effectiveness in providing marriage preparation. This question was specifically requested by individuals from the OMI to help gauge the effectiveness of educational and promotional efforts in the state over the previous 5 years.

The Perceived Effectiveness Scale

It would be important to know how effective clergy are in providing marriage preparation, but such conclusions are beyond the scope of the self-report mail survey used in this study. However, this scale, with a potential range of 10 – 160, seeks to determine the perception of clergy regarding their effectiveness. The Perceived Effectiveness Scale includes the Content Scale (range 0 – 72) and the 3 following items from the Value and Effectiveness Scale and the OMI Scale: (1) I think that I generally do a good job preparing couples for marriage (range 5 – 40). (2) I believe couples have

benefited from the marriage preparation I provided in the past (range 5 – 40). (3) Effectiveness now compared to 5 years ago (range 0 – 8).

Training Openness Scale

This scale seeks to measure how willing clergy would be to receive additional training designed to make their marriage preparation more effective. It includes the following 3 items from the Value and Effectiveness Scale and the OMI Scale: (1) I am willing to receive additional training in effective marriage preparation (range 1 – 8). (2) How likely would you be to attend a 3-day seminar designed to train you to present one of the three versions of PREP (The Prevention & Relationship Enhancement Program)? (C-PREP Christian; J-PREP Jewish; or PREP For General Education) (range 0 – 5). (3) How likely would you be to attend a 1-day seminar to learn about premarital assessments that can improve your ability to identify both couple strengths and the most challenging marital topics or risks that are unique for each couple (range 0 – 4)?

Value of Marriage Preparation Scale

This scale evaluates what clergy think about the value and appropriateness of marriage preparation. Three items are from the Value and Effectiveness Scale, and one is from the OMI Scale, with a potential range of 4 – 28 for the scale. The items are: (1) Marriage preparation is a valuable aspect of my ministry (range 1 – 8). (2) I provide marriage preparation only because it is expected of me (reverse coded, range 1 – 8). (3) Clergy should not be involved with a private matter like marriage preparation (reverse coded, range 1 – 8). (4) Importance now compared to 5 years ago (range 0 – 4).

Operational Hypotheses and Research Questions

The following hypotheses and questions are designed to explore questions of interest for the study. Although some theoretical justification exists for expectations of relational direction in most cases, a two-tailed model will be used for all tests because of the exploratory nature of the study. The significance level will be set at .05, with two exceptions. A large number of correlations calculated with the same set of comparisons increases the probability of Type I error, the likelihood that a given result will reach the significance level as a result of chance. When appropriate, the significance level will be set at .005 to compensate, using a modified Bonferroni correction (Keppel, 1991). Because of the exploratory nature of the study, a more generous level of .10 will be used to flag findings that might indicate potentially meaningful information justifying further investigation.

Hypothesis 1

Rationale. The first hypothesis, composed of eight parts, is designed to test the relationship between perceived effectiveness and scales or subscales intended to measure hindrances associated with various systems that have been identified through the literature, exploratory studies, and theory. Although each of these factors has been addressed in the literature, as discussed at length in Chapter 3, few or no available data suggest that the factors may be perceived by clergy to hinder their effectiveness in marriage preparation. This hypothesis is designed to test that relationship empirically.

Hypothesis. Scales measuring hindrances related to clergy-related systems will be correlated with the Perceived Effectiveness Scale.

H1a: Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale.

H1b: Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Premarital Couple Factors Subscale.

H1c: Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Community Factors Subscale.

H1d: Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Denominational Factors Subscale.

H1e: Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Congregational Factors Subscale.

H1f: Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Clergy Marriage Problems Subscale.

H1g: Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Families-of-origin Problems Subscale.

H1h: Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Individual Clergy Factors Subscale.

Procedure. The statistical procedure used for each part of this hypothesis is the calculation of the Pearson product-moment correlation between perceived effectiveness and the scale of interest. Although some theoretical justification exists in most cases to suggest the direction of the relationship, the exploratory nature of this study warrants using two-tailed tests. The significance level will be set at .005 to compensate for the multiple correlations performed using the same set of values.

Hypothesis 2

Rationale. Time and money can be distinguished from other potential hindrances to marriage preparation because of their quantifiable, finite nature. The clergy stress

literature identifies both factors as issues for clergy. As discussed above, other literature specifically suggests that time limitations are a possible hindrance for providing marriage preparation. Similarly, the lack of church finances has been linked to stress in ministers, which could cause an indirect effect on marriage preparation. Costs associated with marriage preparation, such as curricula, facilities, and training, also have been noted as potential constraints to marriage education.

Although time and finances were listed as constraints in the preliminary qualitative exploration, the subjects insisted that they did not consider them as such. It would be interesting to see how other factors, such as the size of the congregation or attitudes of the congregation toward marriage preparation would relate to perceptions of inadequate time or money being a barrier to effective marriage preparation. There has been some association found between the size of the congregation and the levels of job satisfaction and sense of accomplishment (Beck, 1997). It is conceivable that the size of the congregation could be related to the degree of responsibilities for the clergy, which then would influence the amount of time available for marriage preparation. It may be that the association is influenced by other factors, such as the number of ministry staff members. A curvilinear relationship, which was not tested, also seems possible. For example, in a small church with only one minister, as the size of the congregation increased the pastor's responsibilities and time demands also would likely increase until membership growth, which is associated with income growth, makes possible the addition of ministerial staff, which would probably change the amount of time available for marriage preparation. In addition, it seems likely that larger congregations would have more funds available for programs such as marriage preparation, decreasing the

constraining influence of inadequate funds. Also, the preliminary qualitative exploration identified inadequate finances as a potential hindrance to effective marriage preparation.

Hypothesis. The correlation of insufficient time and limited church finances with perceived effectiveness will be mediated by active church membership and lack of value by congregation.

Procedures: Four correlational procedures will be used to test this hypothesis. A Pearson product-moment correlation will be calculated between perceived effectiveness, limited church finances, and insufficient time. Then perceived effectiveness will be correlated with limited church finances and insufficient time, controlling for active church membership and lack of value by congregation, individually and together.

Hypothesis 3

Rationale. The PREP relationship education program was developed on empirical grounds and has been evaluated empirically more than any other similar program. These characteristics led to the decision by the OMI to use PREP as the flagship intervention in its attempt to prevent divorce and reduce distress in Oklahoma couple relationships. Clergy are among the groups targeted by the OMI to be trained as workshop leaders, with the expectation that they will teach the program in their own congregations and communities. A premise of this study is that clergy are in a strategic position to provide marriage preparation. However, there are at least two potential limitations to universal use of PREP by clergy. First, the 3 days required for training might seem to be an insurmountable hurdle for clergy who already feel squeezed by time constraints. Second, PREP is designed for use with groups of couples, and there are questions about whether most clergy conduct enough weddings to make a group

intervention feasible for the couples whose weddings they conduct. One possible alternative would be use of an inventory with feedback sessions, such as a program which has been designed to be used with PREPARE (Olson & Olson, 1999). Limited research (Fournier & Olson, 1986; Knutson & Olson, 2003) indicates that such an approach might be effective. Use of the PREPARE/ENRICH instruments and accompanying educational material requires 1 day of training. There is reason to believe clergy would be more likely to attend a 1-day training to use an instrument such as PREPARE than to attend a 3-day training to conduct PREP workshops.

Hypothesis. The mean for willingness to attend inventory training will be greater than the mean for willingness to attend PREP.

Procedure. This hypothesis will be tested with a paired samples *t* test. The mean for willingness to attend PREP will be compared with the mean for willingness to attend inventory training. Level of significance will be set at .05.

Hypothesis 4

Rationale. The author proposed a heuristic model, the ABC-X Model of Marriage Preparation, as a means of understanding how components of marriage preparation are related to one another and as a basis for organizing future research. The model, adapted from Hill's classic family stress theory, states that *A* (the marriage preparation event) interacting with *B* (resources available to the clergy) interacting with *C* (the meaning the clergyperson ascribes to the event) produces *X* (the quality of marriage preparation). Although a thorough testing of the model is beyond the scope of this study, it is possible to ascertain preliminary findings concerning relationships in the model. As stated in Chapter 1, resources available to the clergy are considered complementary to hindrances

to clergy involvement in marriage preparation; thus, the Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale will be substituted for "B (resources available to the clergy)" to test the model. The remaining dimensions of the model are operationalized as follows: Process (A) combines the Requirements Scale and the Tools/resources Scale; Meaning (C) combines the Value Subscale, the OMI Covenant Endorsement Scale, and the Training Openness Scale; and Outcome (X) is the same as the Perceived Effectiveness Scale.

Hypothesis. The relationships among scales constructed in this study will be consistent with the ABC-X Model of Marriage Preparation. Specifically, the correlation between Process (A) and Outcome (X) will decrease when controlling for Hindrances (B) and Meaning (C).

Procedure. Zero-order and partial correlations will be calculated between Process (A) and Outcome (X); partial correlations will control for Hindrances (B) and Meaning (C). Level of significance will be set at .005, using a two-tailed model.

Question 1

Rationale. Question 1 explores the relationships between perceived effectiveness and various scales associated with hypothesized systems of which the clergyperson is a member. It also would be helpful to understand how clergy perceive specific factors to be related to effective marriage preparation.

Question. How does each variable within the Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale individually contribute to the power to predict perceived effectiveness?

Procedure. Perceived effectiveness will be regressed on the linear combination of the individual variables from the Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale, using a

stepwise method of ordinary least squares multiple regression analysis. The level of significance will be set at .005.

Question 2

Rationale. As discussed previously, the OMI chose to use PREP as the primary intervention in its attempt to prevent divorce and reduce relationship distress in Oklahoma. Consistent with the assumptions of this study that clergy are in a strategic position to provide marriage preparation, the OMI has included clergy among those targeted to be trained as workshop leaders. Marketing funds could be used most efficiently if it were possible to predict, on the basis of observable demographic characteristics, which clergy would be most willing to attend training to become PREP workshop leaders.

Question. Is it possible, using demographic variables, to predict which clergy would be most likely to attend training to present PREP workshops?

Procedure. Three forms of statistical analysis will be used to investigate this question:

1. A Pearson product-moment correlation will be calculated between relevant demographic variables and the variable willingness to attend PREP training (top 55%). This grouping variable includes all respondents who said they probably would attend training to present PREP and those who said they would make it a high priority. Demographic variables used will include: age, gender, relationship status, first marriage, second or subsequent marriage, years as minister, years in current position, senior pastor, active church membership, level of education, college-level courses (counseling), college-

level courses (marriage and family), college-level courses (family life education), college-level courses (marriage preparation), continuing education (counseling), continuing education (marriage and family), continuing education (family life education), continuing education (marriage preparation), weddings performed by respondent, weddings performed by all in church, mainline, and Catholic. The level of significance cutoff for inclusion in further analysis will be .10.

2. Using the selected demographic variables, a two-group discriminant analysis will be performed to determine the best-fit equation for predicting membership in the group most likely to attend PREP training. Willingness to attend PREP (Top 55%) will be the classifying variable.
3. Willingness to Attend PREP (Top 55%) will be regressed on the linear combination of the four selected demographic variables to determine the best-fit equation for predicting which clergy are most likely to attend PREP training.

Summary

This chapter has described the methodology used in this study. The remaining chapters will discuss the results of the statistical analysis and the implications of the findings.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

This study focuses on descriptive analyses that provide a picture of the current state of marriage preparation among Oklahoma clergy. The data also have been subjected to additional statistical analyses.

Descriptive Statistics

A major goal of the study was to provide descriptive information about clergy in Oklahoma, the content and structure of the marriage preparation they provide, factors they perceive to be hindrances to effective marriage preparation, and their attitudes toward marriage preparation and concepts related to the OMI. This section will begin with a summary of demographic data and then present descriptive statistics related to the other areas of interest.

Demographics

The heuristic typical respondent to the survey is a 51½-year-old male in his first marriage. He has served 22 years as a minister, about 6 years in his current position, which is senior pastor of an evangelical Protestant congregation with 140 active participants. He is most likely to have earned a master's degree, which included two or three courses in counseling and a course in marriage and the family. He has attended a few seminars or continuing education events to stay equipped for ministry to couples and families, and he probably performs one or two weddings each year. Table 1 provides

Table 1

Ratio and Interval Demographic Variables

Variable	Mean	Median	SD	N
Age	51.55	52.00	10.58	423
Years as minister	22.05	20.00	11.59	422
Years in current position	8.35	6.00	.53	371
Active members or participants	281.07	140.00	460.31	414
Level of education 1 = High school or less 2 = Some college 3 = 4-year college 4 = Master's degree 5 = Doctoral degree	3.46	4.00	1.40	422
College-level courses— counseling	3.63	2.00	7.45	424
College-level courses—marriage and family	1.80	1.00	3.61	422
College-level courses—family life education	.93	.00	2.59	420
College-level courses—marriage preparation	.72	.00	2.40	421
Continuing ed—counseling	2.48	1.00	4.92	422
Continuing ed—marriage and family	1.96	1.00	2.81	424
Continuing ed—family life education	1.17	.00	2.72	423
Continuing ed—marriage preparation	1.20	1.00	1.90	423
Weddings in 2001	3.34	2.00	3.98	424
Weddings in 2002	3.37	2.00	4.29	424
Weddings in 2003	3.39	2.00	4.74	424
Weddings by others in 2001	1.08	.00	2.67	424
Weddings by others in 2002	1.21	.00	2.88	424
Weddings by others in 2003	1.26	.00	2.94	424

Table 2

Categorical Demographic Variables

Variable	Frequency	Percentage[A]
Gender		
Male	396	93.4
Female	23	5.4
Relationship status		
Single	38	9.0
Married	385	90.8
Relationship history		
First marriage	324	76.4
Second or subsequent marriage	54	12.7
Never married	24	5.7
Widowed	4	.9
Previously married	6	1.4
Current ministry position		
Senior pastor	385	90.8
Associate pastor	8	1.9
Other	30	7.1
Families of denominations		
Mainline	104	24.5
Evangelical	295	69.6
Roman Catholic	18	4.2
Orthodox	2	.5
Unknown	3	.7

[a]Percentages are based on total number of responses (N = 424).

descriptive statistics, including the mean, median, and standard deviation, for each of the demographic variables measured on interval or ratio scales. Table 2 provides frequencies for variables with nominal values.

Requirements

The Requirements section asked respondents to tell how often they required each of several possible components of marriage preparation, using a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (never used) to 4 (always required). The most frequently required component was meeting with pastor (M = 3.74; median = 4.00; SD = .72), and the least required were mentor or sponsor couple (M = .52; median = .00; SD = .88), group premarital class (M = .79; median = .00; SD = 1.16), and sessions after the wedding (M = .79; median = .00; SD = 1.16). Other requirements, in order of their being required, were a waiting period (M = 2.47; median = 3.00; SD = 1.45), homework (M = 2.40; median = 3.00; SD = 1.51), premarital sexual abstinence (M = 2.23; median = 3.00; SD = 1.72), premarital couple inventory (M = 1.94; median = 2.00; SD = 1.70), and church membership (M = 1.24; median = 1.00; SD = 1.45). A detailed summary of responses is provided in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages from Requirements Scale

Variable	Never Used		Seldom Used		Sometimes Used		Often Required		Always Required	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Meeting with pastor[a]	8	1.9	3	.7	13	3.1	43	10.1	357	84.2
Waiting period	36	16.3	42	9.9	76	17.9	96	22.6	141	33.3
Premarital sexual abstinence	128	30.2	33	7.8	44	10.4	51	12.0	168	39.6
Homework	83	19.6	41	9.7	67	15.8	89	21.0	144	34.0
Premarital couple inventory	152	35.8	39	9.2	43	10.1	61	14.4	129	30.4
Church membership	208	49.1	54	12.7	66	15.6	44	10.4	52	12.3
Sessions after wedding	246	58.0	70	16.5	68	16.0	23	5.4	17	4.0
Group premarital class	254	59.9	68	16.0	63	14.9	16	3.8	23	5.4
Mentor or sponsor couple	291	68.6	64	15.1	55	13.0	9	2.1	5	1.2

[a]Listed in order of frequency, based on combined responses to "Often Required" and "Always Required."

When a waiting period was required, the average length of time required was 1.30 months (median = 00; SD = 1.87). When meetings with the pastor were required, the average number of required meetings was 3.13 (median = 4; SD = .72). The average number of homework assignments, when required, was 1.96 (median = 1; SD = 2.79).

Content

In lieu of a way to measure the effectiveness of clergy in providing marriage preparation, respondents were asked to describe how satisfied they were with how thoroughly they deal with each of 18 content areas derived from the review of literature. The values ranged from 0 (not at all) to 4 (very satisfied). The respondents were generally satisfied with how thoroughly they deal with all of the topics, with legal issues having the lowest mean, which was slightly below the mid-point on the Likert-type scale (M = 1.96; median = 2.00; SD = 1.14).

The following content areas were rated a mean of at least 3.0: wedding ceremony (M = 3.55; median = 4.00; SD = .70), relationship to God (M = 3.42; median = 4.00; SD = .78), spiritual dimensions of marriage (M = 3.33; median = 3.00; SD = .78), communication (M = 3.33; median = 3.00; SD = .76), realistic expectations (M = 3.12; median = 3.00; SD = .85), conflict resolution (M = 3.05; median = 3.00; SD = .89), and role perceptions (M = 2.97; median = 3.00; SD = .85). All the other topics had a mean of at least 2.0: personality/temperament (M = 2.89; median = 3.00; SD = .91), sexual relations (M = 2.86; median = 3.00; SD = .98), problem-solving (M = 2.82; median = 3.00; SD = .86), finances/budgeting (M = 2.81; median = 3.00; SD = 1.09), in-law relationships (M = 2.74; median = 3.00; SD = .94), children/parenting (M = 2.68; median = 3.00; SD = .95), friends (M = 2.60; median = 3.00; SD = .93), family of origin (M =

2.57; median = 3.00; SD = 1.09), career (M = 2.44; median = 2.00; SD = .94), and family planning sexual relations (M = 2.50; median = 3.00; SD = 1.05).

Risk factors

Respondents were given a list of 18 known risk factors for marital success and were asked to indicate on a Likert-type scale (0 = not at all; 4 = very important) how important they believed each was for marital success. Every factor was rated as being important. Limited education was judged the least significant risk factor (M = 2.49; median = 2.00; SD = .97). Six of the factors had a median ranking of 3.00, and the other 11 factors had a median of 4.00. All 18 of the risk factors are listed in Chapter 4, and a summary of the results is provided in Table 4.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics from Risk Factors Scale

Variable	Mean[a]	Median[a]	SD	N
Risk Factors				
Substance abuse by either partner[b]	3.75	4.0	.60	419
Dissimilarity of values and beliefs	3.71	4.0	.62	421
Past experience with sexual abuse	3.67	4.0	.64	417
Poor communication skills	3.66	4.0	.61	419
Unrealistic expectations	3.63	4.0	.62	418
Poor conflict resolution skills	3.61	4.0	.63	417
Past experience with physical abuse	3.61	4.0	.66	417
Past experience with emotional or verbal abuse	3.57	4.0	.65	417
Premarital pregnancy and childbirth	3.47	4.0	.80	419
Cohabitation	3.32	4.0	1.01	419
Lack of support from parents	3.27	3.0	.85	421
Short length of acquaintance	3.27	3.0	.82	417
Premarital sex	3.24	4.0	1.04	420
Young age at marriage	3.23	3.0	.87	421
Having divorced parents	3.08	3.0	.91	421
Dissimilar personal characteristics (race, socioeconomic status, intelligence, age, religion, etc.)	2.93	3.0	.97	420
Limited income	2.85	3.0	.92	421
Limited education	2.49	2.0	.97	419

[a]0 = not at all; 4 = very important
[b]Listed in order of size of mean.

Tools/resources

In the Tools/resources section, respondents were asked about what tools they use in marriage preparation. Thirty-four specific items were listed in one of five sub-categories, and respondents also had the opportunity to list other tools they use. Each item was scored on a Likert-type scale (never use = 0; use always = 3), and they also were asked to indicate if they were unfamiliar with the item. A complete listing of the resources, with descriptive statistics and frequencies, is provided in Table 5.

Of the seminars or educational programs listed, the PREPARE/ENRICH program was most frequently used (M = 1.04; median = .00; SD = 1.39), with 35 respondents saying they use it some, 22 often, and 53 always. The inventory used by the most respondents was the Myers-Briggs, which 120 respondents reported using at least some of the time (M = 1.05; median = 1.00; SD = 1.12). However, PREPARE (M = .89; median = .00; SD = 1.35), was the inventory that had the highest number reporting that they use it frequently (18, use often; 49, use always).

Few respondents indicated that they utilize videos in their marriage preparation. The most frequently used was *Before You Say 'I Do'* by Wright (M = .94; median = 1.00; SD = 1.17), which 105 respondents said they use at least some of the time. The video used next most frequently was *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* by Parrott and Parrott (M = .62; median = .00; SD = .98), which is used by 53 respondents at least some of the time.

Respondents were asked to indicate how often they use each of 15 selected books or workbooks. Four books were marked by at least a fourth of the respondents as being used at least some of the time: *The Five Love Languages,* by Chapman (n = 156); *Before*

You Say 'I Do,' by Wright (n = 144); *Making Love Last Forever,* by Smalley (n = 110); and *Love for a Lifetime,* by Dobson (n = 112).

Table 5

Frequencies and Percentages from Tools/resources Scale

Variable	Not Familiar With		Never Use		Use Some		Use Often		Use Always	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Seminars/Educational Programs										
PREPARE/ENRICH Program	222	52.4	92	21.7	35	8.3	22	5.2	53	12.5
PREP	262	61.8	102	24.1	31	7.3	15	3.5	14	3.3
Engaged Encounter	281	66.3	90	21.2	29	6.8	20	4.7	4	.9
The Cana Institute	335	79	75	17.7	8	1.9	4	.9	2	.5
Inventories										
Myers-Briggs	167	39.4	137	32.3	69	16.3	33	7.8	18	4.2
PREPARE/PREPARE MC	246	58	96	22.6	15	3.5	18	4.2	49	11.6
Taylor-Johnson	236	55.7	112	26.4	42	9.9	15	3.5	19	4.5
FOCCUS	319	75.2	86	20.3	10	2.4	3	.7	6	1.4
RELATE	328	77.4	87	20.5	6	1.4	2	.5	1	.2
Videos										
Before You Say 'I Do'	204	48.1	115	27.1	51	12	33	7.8	21	5
Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts	260	61.3	111	26.3	22	5.2	18	4.2	13	3.1
When Two Become One	262	61.8	112	26.4	27	6.4	19	4.5	4	.9
Fighting for Your Marriage	299	70.5	101	23.8	11	2.6	8	1.9	5	1.2
Books/Workbooks										
The Five Love Languages	168	39.6	100	23.6	59	13.9	62	14.6	35	8.3
Intended for Pleasure	222	52.4	87	20.5	58	13.7	36	8.5	21	5.0
Love for a Lifetime	187	44.1	125	29.5	64	15.1	33	7.8	15	3.5
Making Love Last Forever	181	42.7	133	31.4	59	13.9	34	8.0	17	4.0
So You're Getting Married	239	56.4	103	24.3	39	9.2	30	7.1	13	3.1
Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts	248	58.5	110	2539	28	6.6	25	5.9	13	3.1
Love Life for Every Married Couple	262	61.8	109	25.7	33	7.8	9	2.1	11	2.6
Getting Ready for the Wedding	286	67.5	108	25.5	20	4.7	8	1.9	2	1.5
A Lasting Promise	287	67.7	107	25.2	11	2.6	10	2.4	9	2.1
7 Principles for Making Marriage Work	298	70.3	105	24.8	13	3.1	8	1.9	—	—
Pre-Marriage Questions	311	73.3	94	22.2	10	2.4	5	1.2	4	.9
For Better and For Ever	304	71.7	107	25.2	9	2.1	2	.5	2	.5
10 Great Dates Before You Say 'I Do'	306	72.2	105	24.8	8	1.9	4	.9	1	.2
The Most Important Year	312	73.6	101	23.8	6	1.4	4	.9	1	.2
Referrals										
Professionals for issues beyond training	106	25.0	60	14.2	130	30.7	87	20.5	41	9.7
Workshops by religious community	145	34.2	97	22.9	94	22.2	62	14.6	26	6.1
Workshops offered by OMI	204	48.1	123	29.0	60	14.2	24	5.7	13	3.1

[a]Listed in order of frequency within category, based on combined responses to "Use Some, " Use Often," and "Use Always."

The Referrals Subscale sought to discover how often clergy refer couples to workshops or to professionals for additional help. More than 6 of 10 (60.9%) said they

use professionals who are available for counseling/therapy for issues beyond their training. However, well over half never send couples to workshops provided either by the religious community (57.1%) or by the OMI (77.1%). Most often, these clergy are not aware of such services. Almost half (48.1%) are not familiar with workshops provided by the OMI, and more than a third (34.2%) do not know about workshops offered by the religious community.

Hindrances

A primary objective of this study was to discover what clergy perceive to be constraints to providing effective marriage preparation. Clergy were asked to indicate on a Likert-type scale how much they agreed or disagreed that each of 17 possible factors was a hindrance (8 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree). Generally the respondents did not strongly believe that any of the factors was a hindrance. The strongest agreement came with the 2 items related to the engaged couples: 1) Couples are so focused on the wedding they cannot focus on marriage preparation (M = 4.32; median = 5.00; SD = 2.08). 2) Engaged couples do not think marriage preparation is valuable (M = 4.09; median = 4.00; SD = 1.80). The strongest areas of disagreement that factors were a hindrance were related to problems in the clergy marriage (M = 1.43; median = 1; SD = .83) and lack of denominational encouragement (M = 1.87; median = 1.00; SD = 1.45). A summary of the responses to hindrances is in Table 6.

The finding of this study that clergy perceive the attitudes of the engaged couple to be among the most likely hindrances to effective marriage preparation is consistent with results of the preliminary qualitative exploration. Analysis of the interviews found that the most salient influences on the participation of clergy in providing effective

marriage preparation were factors related to the clergy and to the engaged couple, specifically the attitudes each held regarding the importance of marriage preparation and the priority they placed on marriage preparation. Although the literature has suggested the importance of the couple's attitudes for the success of marriage preparation, no empirical study could be found that addressed the perception of clergy regarding this phenomenon.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics from Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale and Value and Effectiveness of Marriage Preparation Scale

Variable	Mean[b]	Median[b]	SD	N
Hindrances				
Couples are so focused on the wedding…. [a]	4.32	5.0	2.08	416
Engaged couples do not think marriage prep is important.	4.09	4.0	1.80	416
Too many couples still have problems after marriage prep.	3.95	4.0	1.64	416
I do not think that I have received enough training….	3.79	4.0	1.83	417
I do not know what resources are available to assist me.	3.76	4.0	2.06	418
I have too many responsibilities and not enough time.	3.74	4.0	2.05	419
Church finances are limited.	3.72	3.0	2.26	414
The people of this community do not seem to value….	3.71	3.0	1.99	408
Parents often make the preparation process more difficult.	3.49	3.0	1.78	417
Other clergy in the community do not seem to value….	3.05	3.0	1.77	402
My congregation does not value marriage preparation.	3.03	3.0	1.87	419
I am not convinced these programs are very effective.	2.86	2.0	1.99	419
Couples are more difficult to work with than individuals.	2.84	2.0	1.62	415
I do not think I am competent to provide marriage prep.	2.54	2.0	1.58	417
I am not comfortable with "counseling" situations.	2.41	2.0	1.70	417
My denomination does not encourage marriage preparation.	1.87	1.0	1.45	405
My own marriage has too many problems.	1.43	1.0	.83	396
Value and Effectiveness of Marriage Preparation				
Clergy should not be involved…. (reverse scored)	7.71	7.0	.89	422
I am willing to receive additional training….	6.32	6.0	1.59	416
Marriage prep is a valuable aspect of my ministry.	6.30	7.0	1.53	421
I think couples have benefited from marriage prep I have provided.	6.30	6.0	1.41	418
I provide only because expected of me. (reversed scored)	5.94	6.0	1.36	422
I think that I generally do a good job preparing couples.	5.54	6.0	1.48	419

[a]Listed in order of size of mean within each scale.
[b]1 = Strongly disagree; 8 = Strongly agree

Lack of training (M = 3.79; median = 4.0) and being unaware of available resources (M = 3.76; median = 4.0) were among the highest-rated hindrances to

effectiveness. These findings are consistent with previous research that clergy believe their training has been inadequate. The rating of denominational encouragement as the second least likely hindrance is somewhat surprising in light of research that shows clergy believe denominations are largely responsible for both seminary training and continuing education.

Insufficient time (M = 3.72; median = 3.0) and church finances (M = 3.74; median = 4.0) were among the highest rated hindrances. This finding is consistent with research related to stress among clergy. Disagreement with the notion that problems in the clergy marital system were a hindrance (M = 1.43; median = 1.0) is not a surprising finding in light of a recent survey indicating that clergy are much more satisfied with their marriages than are members of their congregations (LaRue, 2005). It also is possible that response to this item could have been influenced by social desirability or that individuals with stressful marriages may be less likely to complete the survey.

Value and Effectiveness of Marriage Preparation

Six items probed the attitudes of clergy toward the value and effectiveness of marriage preparation. As summarized in Table 6, respondents tend to think marriage preparation is a valuable aspect of their ministry. They most strongly believed that clergy should be involved in marriage preparation (M = 7.71; SD = .89). They are least certain about agreeing with the evaluation that they generally do a good job preparing couples for marriage (M = 5.54; median = 6.0; SD = 1.48). The willingness to receive additional training is consistent with previous research that found clergy recognize the need for more training.

Oklahoma Marriage Initiative

Clergy were asked to respond to several areas related to the OMI. An early effort of the OMI was to encourage clergy to sign an "Oklahoma Marriage Covenant," which included five components related to marriage preparation. Wilmoth (2003) found that 37.2% of the A/G pastors were willing to request a 4- to 6-month preparation period; 69.8% said they would conduct four to six marital preparation sessions; 88.4% would use the preparation period to encourage spiritual formation; and 44.2% expressed willingness to encourage the training of mentoring couples. Respondents in the current study were asked to indicate how likely they would be to endorse each of these requirements (Yes = 2; Not sure = 1; No = 0). Most clergy indicated they were willing to endorse all requirements in the Covenant, but they responded with greater certainty on some items than on others. Willingness to use the preparation period to encourage the spiritual formation of the couple received the highest response (M = 1.92; median = 2.0; SD = .34), while requesting all couples to complete a preparation period of 4 to 6 months received the least endorsement (M = 1.31; median = 2.0; SD = .90). These findings were consistent with Wilmoth's (2003) findings.

The primary thrust of the OMI has been to train clergy, workers from government agencies, mental health professionals, and others to present PREP workshops throughout the state. Respondents were asked to indicate how likely they would be to attend one of these 3-day seminars. Their choices were never (0), not likely (1), I need more information (2), probably (3), or I would make it a high priority (4). More than half (54.2%) indicated they probably would attend or would make it a high priority. There were 110 who said they needed more information; many of these also indicated they

probably would attend the seminar. Five respondents volunteered that they already had attended PREP training.

The clergy also were asked how likely they would be to attend a 1-day seminar to learn about premarital assessments that can improve their ability to identify both couple strengths and the most challenging marital topics or risks that are unique for each couple. More than three-fourths of the respondents (78.1%) indicated they probably would attend or would make it a high priority to attend such a seminar. Making it a high priority (41.5%) was the modal response.

Table 7

Frequencies and Percentages from OMI Scales

Willingness to Endorse Oklahoma Marriage Covenant

Variable[a]	Yes		Not Sure		No		Mean[b]	SD	N
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%			
Use period to encourage spiritual formation	390	92.0	18	4.2	8	1.9	1.92	.34	416
Conduct 4 to 6 marital preparation sessions	333	78.5	52	12.3	30	7.1	1.73	.59	415
Use premarital assessment	310	73.1	81	19.1	25	5.9	1.69	.58	416
Encourage training of mentor couples	236	55.7	150	35.4	28	6.6	1.50	.62	414
Request preparation period of 4 to 6 months	216	50.9	103	24.3	96	22.6	1.31	.90	416

[a]Listed in order of size of mean.
[b]Yes = 2; Not sure = 1; No = 0

Likelihood of Attending Training to Improve Marriage Preparation

Variable	Never		Not likely		Need Info		Probably		High Priority	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
PREP	95	22.4	99	23.3	110	25.9	124	29.2	106	25.0
Premarital assessment	55	13.0	38	9.0	63	14.9	155	36.6	176	41.5

Change over Past 5 Years

Variable	Much Less		Somewhat Less		Same		Somewhat More		Much More	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Importance compared to 5 years ago	1	.2	5	1.2	191	45.0	103	24.3	109	25.7
Effectiveness compared to 5 years ago	3	.7	4	.9	159	37.5	160	37.7	79	18.6

Respondents also were asked to estimate, using a Likert-type scale (much less now = 0; much more now = 4), how they thought they had changed over the past 5 years in regard to the importance they place on marriage preparation and their effectiveness in providing marriage preparation. The means were similar for both items (importance = 2.77; effectiveness = 2.76) and fewer than 2% indicated the perception that either the importance or their effectiveness had decreased. There were meaningful differences elsewhere. Those who said they perceived the importance of marriage preparation to be about the same (n = 191; 45%) was significantly higher than those who said their effectiveness was about the same (n = 159; 39.3%). Respondents were more likely to say there had been an increase in their effectiveness (n = 239; 59%) than in their perception of the importance of marriage preparation (n = 212; 51.8%). However, they were much more likely to say the increase in effectiveness was somewhat more (n = 160; 37.7%) rather than much more now (n = 79; 18.6%). In contrast, they were slightly more likely to say their perception of the importance of marriage preparation had increased much more (n = 109; 25.7%) than somewhat more (n = 103; 24.3%). A summary of these findings is in Table 7.

Reliability Estimates

In addition to the demographic instrument, 7 scales were constructed based on review of the literature and preliminary studies in order to answer the research questions, as described in Chapter 4. Some scales also included subscales designed to gather data related to specific questions. Cronbach's alpha was used to estimate the internal consistency reliability of the scales and subscales. The subscales in the Tools/resources Scale could more appropriately be considered checklists and thus did not lend themselves

to use of Cronbach's alpha. For example, respondents would be expected to select only one among five choices of premarital assessments, making it difficult to establish a pattern within the subscale. Reliability estimates are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Reliability Estimates and Descriptive Statistics for Scales Used in Study

Scale	N of Items	N of Cases	Theoretical Range	Actual Range[1]	Mean[2]	SD[2]	Cronbach's Alpha
Requirements Scale	9	424	0-68	0-51	24.28	9.76	.56
Content Scale	18	397	0-72	0-72	51.66	11.41	.94
Risk factor Scale	18	407	0-72	0-72	60.50	8.10	.88
Tools/resources Scale (5 items)	5	424	0-93	0-51	9.25	8.40	.67
Seminars/programs Subscale	4	424	0-12	0-8	1.05	1.66	N/A
Inventories Subscale	5	424	0-15	0-12	1.33	1.80	N/A
Videos Subscale	4	424	0-12	0-10	.93	1.73	N/A
Books/workbooks Subscale	15	424	0-45	0-33	3.89	4.93	N/A
Referrals Subscale	3	424	0-9	0-9	2.05	2.01	N/A
Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale	17	350	17-136	17-101	54.60	16.25	.84
Community factors subscale	2	400	2-16	2-16	6.74	3.39	.77
Congregational factors subscale	3	410	3-24	3-24	10.54	4.58	.58
Denominational factors subscale	4	402	4-32	4-28	12.27	4.87	.56
Premarital couples factors subscale	3	391	3-24	3-20	9.81	3.83	.70
Individual clergy subscale	3	408	3-24	3-21	7.75	3.67	.61
Value & effectiveness perception scale	6	410	6-48	20-48	39.16	5.10	.66
Value subscale	4	406	13-28	4-28	23.80	2.91	.45
OMI scale	5	404	0-26	4-26	17.81	3.64	.62
OMI covenant endorsement subscale	5	413	0-10	0-10	7.96	2.28	.68
OMI training subscale	2	424	0-8	0-8	5.54	2.06	.80
OMI change subscale	2	404	0-8	2-8	5.53	1.42	.63
Perceived effectiveness scale	21	379	10-160	34-126	86.44	17.46	.93
Training openness scale	3	416	0-17	1-16	11.92	3.13	.75
Process (A) Scale	14	424	0-161	0-85	31.83	13.92	.62
Hindrances (B) Scale	17	350	17-136	17-101	54.60	16.25	.84
Meaning (C) Scale	12	397	4-54	19-54	43.93	5.96	.71
Outcome (X) Scale	21	379	10-160	34-126	86.44	17.46	.93

[1] Rounded to the nearest whole number.
[2] Rounded to nearest 100th.
[3] Rounded to nearest 1,000th

Hypothesis Testing

Several specific hypotheses were suggested in Chapter 4 that could be tested with statistical procedures. Most of them involved simple or partial correlations, some used

ordinary least squares multiple linear regression, one involved comparisons of means, one used a paired-samples *t* test, and one used a two-group discriminant analysis. Because of the large number of relationships tested between perceived effectiveness and other variables, the significance level was set at .005 for affected correlational hypotheses to compensate for the increased probability that a relationship would be the product of chance (Keppel, 1991). Although theoretical justification indicated a direction of relationship in most cases, a more conservative two-tailed model was used throughout because of the exploratory nature of the research.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis, which has eight parts, is directed at understanding what clergy perceive to be constraints that reduce their effectiveness in providing marriage preparation. The eight constituent hypotheses are designed to test rudimentary elements of the Systems Model of Constraints on Clergy Provision of Marriage, which suggests that clergy-provided marriage preparation is related to the overall level of hindrances as well as factors associated with at least seven interacting systems: the premarital couple system, a community system, a denominational system, a congregational system, the clergy marital system, a family-of-origin system, and an individual clergy system.

Hypothesis 1a. The first hypothesis (Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale.) is directed at understanding how the overall perceived level of hindrances is related to the effectiveness of marriage preparation.

Findings. Consistent with the theoretical model, the 2 variables in the hypothesis were significantly correlated (r_{XY} = -.42; p < .000), which indicates that clergy who

perceive a higher level of hindrances to effective marriage preparation are less likely to believe that the preparation they provide is effective.

Hypothesis 1b. The preliminary qualitative exploration indicated that factors related to the engaged couple were perceived to be some of the most salient predictors of effectiveness in providing marriage preparation. Similarly, Murray (2005) affirms the importance of attitudes of the premarital couple for participation in marriage preparation. The Oklahoma help-seeking study (Fournier & Roberts, 2003) found a number of internal, external, and relationship factors that could prevent a couple from taking advantage of relationship education or related services. Hypothesis 1b (Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Premarital Couple Factors Subscale.) was designed to test this notion.

Findings. The relationship was significant (r_{XY} = -.35; p < .000), indicating, as expected, that attitudes and priorities of the premarital couple are seen to be a major element in the effectiveness of marriage preparation.

Hypothesis 1c. A report speaking in behalf of the Marriage Movement indicated that goals through 2006 included organizing marriage efforts within communities and promoting pro-marriage cultural values (Institute for American Values, 2004). Doherty and Anderson (2004) reported on several significant community marriage initiatives. Two items in the questionnaire were written to measure perceived hindrances from the failure to value marriage education on the part of other clergy in the community and the community as a whole: (1) Other clergy in my community do not seem to value marriage preparation. (2) The people of this community do not seem to value marriage preparation. Hypothesis 1c seeks to discover whether clergy perceive lack of community

support to be a constraint to providing effective marriage preparation: Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Community Factors Subscale.

Findings. There was no relationship between the variables (r_{XY} = -.04; p = .468). This finding is surprising in light of the apparent effectiveness of a Community Marriage Policy (Birch et al., 2004) and the efforts to promote community marriage initiatives (Doherty & Anderson, 2004).

Hypothesis 1d. The literature implies that the denomination influences marriage preparation through providing resources (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997); expectations related to marriage preparation by clergy (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997); and training for marriage preparation as a function of the relationship between the clergy and the denomination with which he is affiliated (Barlow, 1999; Buikema, 2001). Hypothesis 1d (Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Denominational Factors Subscale.) examines the relationship between the denomination and the clergy perception of effectiveness.

Findings. The correlation was significant (r_{XY} = -.46; p < .000), in spite of the relatively low reliability for the Denominational Factors Scale (α = .56). Thus there seems to be a very powerful relationship between the influence of the denomination and the perception of clergy that marriage preparation is effective.

Hypothesis 1e. This hypothesis (Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Congregational Factors Scale.) tests the notion that factors related to the local congregation are perceived to be a hindrance to effective marriage preparation. Research related to clergy stress and literature that views clergy-congregation relationships from a systems perspective (Friedman, 1985) would suggest that what is valued by the

congregation would have a major impact on clergy activities, including time and energy expended to provide marriage preparation. In addition to an item measuring global perception of the relationship between effective marriage preparation and the value the congregation places on marriage preparation, 2 items measure the effect of inadequate resources (time and money) that are associated with the congregation in the clergy stress literature.

Findings. The correlation was significant (r_{XY} = -.30; p < .000). This correlation is stronger than expected in view of the preliminary qualitative exploration, which found that time and money always were listed as constraints but were not considered as such by the clergy, who "make time" and sometimes use personal funds to provide marriage preparation. However, the finding is consistent with clergy-stress and systems literature cited above. The moderate reliability of the Congregational Factors Scale (α = .58) may require further investigation about the meaningfulness of this correlation.

Hypothesis 1f. It is hypothesized, on the basis of the interaction principles inherent in Systems Theory, that clergypersons who have problems in their own marriage will find it difficult to provide effective marriage preparation for others. The operational hypothesis is, "Perceived effectiveness will be correlated with clergy marriage problems."

Findings. The correlation is significant (r_{XY} = -.27; p < .000). Although few clergy acknowledged that problems in their own marriages impeded the effectiveness of marriage preparation, those clergy who do recognize the relationship are more likely to consider the marriage preparation they provide to be ineffective.

Hypothesis 1g. Family of origin frequently is addressed in the literature as a

major influence on relationship quality and stability, and Murray (2005) discusses the possible influence of family culture on willingness to participate in relationship education. A single item, families-of-origin problems, measures the perception of clergy that parents often make the preparation process more difficult. To test this association, Hypothesis 1g says, "Perceived Effectiveness will be correlated with Family-of-origin Problems Subscale."

Findings. The correlation is not significant (r_{XY} = -.02; p = .659), which may indicate that clergy do not recognize the influence of the family of origin or that the influence is perceived to be neutral.

Hypothesis 1h. Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) suggest that the methodology used by clergy will influence the effectiveness of marriage preparation, and Hawkins et al. (2004) mention individual factors that might affect how the clergyperson connects to the participant. In addition, the preliminary qualitative exploration identified factors associated with the individual clergyperson to be one of the most salient variables in predicting effectiveness of marriage preparation. Hypothesis 1h (Perceived Effectiveness Scale will be correlated with Individual Clergy Factors Subscale.) includes 3 items dealing with individual factors thought to influence effectiveness in providing marriage preparation. Concepts addressed include perception of competency and issues dealing with counseling couples.

Findings. The correlation was significant (r_{XY} = -.47; p < .000), emphasizing the importance of unique internal factors that influence the effectiveness of marriage preparation. This also is consistent with the results of factor analysis in the Oklahoma help-seeking survey (Fournier & Roberts, 2003), which found that internal barriers were

powerful predictors, explaining about one-fourth of the total variance.

Hypothesis 1 Summary of Findings. Viewed *in toto*, the systems-related factors identified as potential hindrances are perceived by clergy to constrain their effective provision of marriage preparation. Exceptions are factors associated with the community and the premarital couples' families of origin.

Hypothesis 2

Time and finances were listed as potential constraints in the preliminary qualitative exploration, and the literature provided implications of at least some indirect influence. However, subjects indicated that lack of time or finances were not a significant factor. This hypothesis seeks to learn to what extent other factors, specifically the size of the congregation and the attitude of the congregation towards marriage preparation, might change the perception among clergy that inadequate time or money might be a barrier to effective marriage preparation.

Findings. For the first step of the analysis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated between perceived effectiveness and inadequate time (r_{XY} = -.24; p < .000) and between perceived effectiveness and limited church finances (r_{XY} = -.16; p = .002). Both relationships were significant at a .005 level in a two-tailed model. When partial correlations were calculated between the same variables, controlling for lack of value by congregation and active church membership, the correlation with inadequate time (r_{XY} = -.16; p = .002) was significant, but the correlation with limited church finances (r_{XY} = -.09; p = .105) was no longer significant. When controlling only for lack of value by congregation, the correlation with inadequate time (r_{XY} = -.16; p = .002) was significant, but the correlation with limited church finances (r_{XY} = -.08; p = .109) was not significant.

When controlling only for active church membership, the correlations with both inadequate time (r_{XY} = -.24; p < .000) and limited church finances (r_{XY} = -.16; p = .003) were significant.

The relationship between perceived effectiveness and inadequate finances was the only correlation that became insignificant when controlling for the lack of value by the congregation and the size of the active church membership. The size of the congregation alone seems to make little difference on either relationship, while controlling only for the congregational value has almost the same effect on the relationship as both variables together.

While the findings indicate that the lack of finances can be a significant factor in perceived effectiveness of marriage preparation, its significance depends on the value the congregation places on marriage preparation. It was suggested earlier that an increase in the size of a church's active membership could increase the level of responsibilities for a pastor, thus making lack of time a more significant factor in larger churches. The data do not support this assumption. Possibly this relationship is influenced by other variables, such as the number of staff employed by a congregation. The implication that lack of finances is a hindrance indicates clergy may be hesitant to provide more marriage preparation because of anticipated costs such as curricula. In the Oklahoma help-seeking study, financial considerations also were a significant constraint among potential participants in marriage preparation (Fournier & Roberts, 2003).

Hypothesis 3

The PREP relationship education program was developed on empirical grounds and has been evaluated empirically more than any other similar program. These

characteristics were dominant in the decision by the OMI to use PREP as the flagship intervention in its attempt to prevent divorce and reduce distress in Oklahoma couple relationships. Clergy are among the groups targeted by the OMI to be trained as workshop leaders, with the expectation that they will teach the program in their own congregations and communities. A premise of this study is that clergy are in a strategic position to provide marriage preparation. However, there are at least two potential limitations to universal use of PREP by clergy. First, the 3 days required for training might seem to be an insurmountable hurdle for clergy who already feel squeezed by time constraints. Second, PREP is designed for use with groups of couples, and there are questions about whether most clergy conduct enough weddings to make a group intervention feasible for the couples whose weddings they conduct. One possible alternative would be use of an inventory with feedback sessions, such as a program which has been designed to be used with PREPARE (Olson & Olson, 1999). Limited research (Fournier & Olson, 1986; Knutson & Olson, 2003) indicates that such an approach might be effective. Use of the PREPARE/ENRICH instruments and accompanying educational material requires 1 day of training. Hypothesis 3 (The mean for inventory attendance will be greater than the mean for PREP attendance.) tests the notion that clergy would be more likely to attend a 1-day training to use an instrument such as PREPARE than to attend a 3-day training to conduct PREP workshops.

Findings. Using a two-tailed model, the difference was significant, $t(423) = -12.74$, $p < .000$, indicating that clergy are significantly more likely to attend training ($M = 3.05$) to use a premarital assessment than to attend training to present PREP workshops ($M = 2.49$). This finding was consistent with expectations.

Hypothesis 4

The author proposed the ABC-X Model of Marriage Preparation, adapted from Hill's classic family stress theory, as a means of understanding how components of marriage preparation are related to one another and as a basis for organizing future research. The model states that *A* (the marriage preparation event) interacting with *B* (resources available to the clergy) interacting with *C* (the meaning the clergyperson ascribes to the event) produces *X* (the quality of marriage preparation). Based on the model, the correlation between Process (A) and Outcome (X) will be less when controlling for Hindrances (B) and Meaning (C). Level of significance, using a two-tailed model, was set at .005.

Findings. The zero-order correlation calculated between Process (A) and Outcome (X) indicated a significant relationship ($r_{XY} = .19$; $p < .000$). When the control variables, Hindrances (B) and Meaning (C), were partialed out, the relationship between the primary variables was no longer significant ($r_{XY} = .16$; $p = .010$). Consistent with the ABC-X Model of Marriage Preparation, this finding indicates that the relationship between Process (A) and Outcome (C) is influenced by Hindrances (B) and Meaning (C).

Question 1

Hypothesis 1 explores the relationships between perceived effectiveness and various scales associated with hypothesized systems of which the clergyperson is a member. It also would be helpful to understand how clergy perceive specific hindrances to be related to effective marriage preparation. Significance level will be set at .005 using a two-tailed model.

Findings. Perceived effectiveness was regressed on the linear combination of the

17 variables from the Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale, using a stepwise method with all variables forced into the equation. Change in the R-square value of the equation

Table 9

Changes to Variance with Addition of Variables from Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale

Model	Zero-order correlation[q]	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	F for Equation	Sig. F for Equation	Change Statistics				
							R^2 Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	-.47***	.47[a]	.22	.22	89.57	.000	.22	89.57	1	320	.000
2	-.38***	.54[b]	.29	.28	64.63	.000	.07	31.23	1	319	.000
3	-.40***	.56[c]	.31	.31	48.50	.000	.03	11.84	1	318	.001
4	-.02	.58[d]	.34	.33	40.85	.000	.03	12.60	1	317	.000
5	-.26***	.60[e]	.36	.35	34.92	.000	.02	7.75	1	316	.006
6	-.33***	.61[f]	.37	.36	30.72	.000	.01	6.60	1	315	.011
7	-.28***	.62[g]	.38	.37	27.47	.000	.01	5.42	1	314	.021
8	-.12*	.62[h]	.38	.37	24.35	.000	.00	1.93	1	313	.166
9	-.02	.62[i]	.39	.37	21.79	.000	.00	1.17	1	312	.281
10	-.28***	.62[j]	.39	.37	19.71	.000	.00	1.04	1	311	.308
11	-.21***	.62[k]	.39	.37	17.97	.000	.00	.68	1	310	.410
12	-.08	.62[l]	.39	.37	16.51	.000	.00	.67	1	309	.414
13	-.13*	.63[m]	.39	.37	15.24	.000	.00	.42	1	308	.516
14	-.30***	.63[n]	.39	.37	14.15	.000	.00	.40	1	307	.527
15	-.21***	.63[o]	.39	.36	13.18	.000	.00	.14	1	306	.713
16	-.15**	.63[p]	.39	.36	12.33	.000	.00	.08	1	305	.780

a Predictors: (Constant), Doubt personal competence
b Predictors: Variables in Model 1 plus Lack of denominational encouragement
c Predictors: Variables in Model 2 plus Inadequate training
d Predictors: Variables in Model 3 plus Other clergy in community do not value
e Predictors: Variables in Model 4 plus My own marriage has problems
f Predictors: Variables in Model 5 plus Unaware of available resources
g Predictors: Variables in Model 6 plus Couples focus on wedding
h Predictors: Variables in Model 7 plus Not convinced programs effective
i Predictors: Variables in Model 8 plus Parents make the process more difficult
j Predictors: Variables in Model 9 plus Congregation does not value
k Predictors: Variables in Model 10 plus Not enough time
l Predictors: Variables in Model 11 plus People of community do not value
m Predictors: Variables in Model 12 plus Inadequate church finances
n Predictors: Variables in Model 13 plus Discomfort with counseling
o Predictors: Variables in Model 14 plus Couples harder than individuals to counsel
p Predictors: Variables in Model 15 plus Couples still have problems after prep
q Zero-correlation for new variable added to the model
* Significant at .05 level
** Significant at .01 level
*** Significant at .001 level

was not significant at a probability of 0.05 after the inclusion of the first 7 variables. Table 9 shows which variables are entered into the equation in the order of the amount of variance added. Even though several variables have significant zero-order correlations

with perceived effectiveness, multicollinearity causes the increase in the R-square value to be insignificant.

Three of the four variables in the Denominational Factors Subscale were among the 7 variables that added significant variance to the equation. The other subsystems represented among these 7 variables were the individual clergy system, the community system, the clergy marital system, and the premarital couple system.

Question 2

One goal of the study was to find a means of predicting which clergy would be most likely to attend PREP training offered by the OMI. As discussed previously, the OMI has selected PREP workshops as the primary strategy to prevent divorce and relationship distress, and clergy are one of the target groups to receive training to present PREP workshops. Knowing which clergy would be most likely to attend training seminars could increase the efficiency of marketing resources.

Findings. The first step in this process was dichotomizing the variable willing to attend PREP. Those who said they probably would attend training to teach PREP or would make it a high priority comprised 55% of the responses, so this group was assigned the value of 1 and all others were assigned the value of 0. Next, Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated between demographic variables and the variable "Willingness to attend PREP (Top 55 Percent)." Correlations with the following variables were significant at an alpha of 0.10 or less: gender, active church membership, continuing ed – marriage and family, and continuing ed – marriage preparation.

These correlated variables were entered into a two-group discriminant analysis procedure, with willingness to attend PREP (top 55%) used as the grouping variable. All

variables were entered together. Application of the function resulted in the correct classification of 61% of original grouped cases. Standardized coefficients are presented in Table 8, and the structure matrix is presented in Table 9. The function cannot consistently predict the likelihood of attending a training seminar to present PREP workshops.

Willingness to attend PREP (Top 55%) was regressed on the linear combination of the four selected demographic variables with similar results. With all variables entered together, the model accounted for approximately 4% of the total variance (R square = .04; adjusted R square = .04). These results indicate it is not appropriate to use the demographic variables found in this study as a means of predicting which clergy would be most likely to attend training to present PREP workshops.

Table 10— Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

	Function
	1
Gender	.649
Active church membership	.521
Continuing ed—marriage and family	-.510
Continuing ed—marriage preparation	-.254

Table 11— Structure Matrix

	Function
	1
Gender	.593
Continuing ed—marriage and family	-.576
Active Church Membership	.474
Continuing ed—marriage preparation	.386

Pooled within-groups correlations between discriminating variables and standardized canonical discriminant functions.

Variables ordered by absolute size of correlation within function.

Although the information from the analysis is not useful for decision-making, it is

somewhat interesting and deserves some observations. Gender, which accounted for the most variance, suggests that males are more likely candidates to attend training to become PREP presenters. Since approximately 95% of the clergy in the sample were male, this information has little meaningful value. The inclusion of active church membership suggests that clergy from smaller churches are slightly more likely to attend PREP training. The relationship of 2 variables related to past participation in family-related continuing education suggests that clergy who have attended training in the past are more willing to do it in the future.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study. Descriptive statistics were used to provide a snapshot of clergy in Oklahoma, including demographic data, the content and structure of the marriage preparation they provide, factors they perceive to be hindrances to effective marriage preparation, and their attitudes toward marriage preparation and concepts related to the OMI.

Several hypotheses and research questions were tested and reported on. Several of these dealt with how various factors are related to the perception clergy have of their effectiveness in marriage preparation. A proposed model of marriage preparation received preliminary testing and was found to be consistent with the results. Other analyses dealt with the likelihood of clergy to attend training to become more effective in marriage preparation.

Generally the results were consistent with expectations. Chapter 6 will discuss these findings and implications for practice and scholarship.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Review of the Study

The importance of marriage preparation has been highlighted by recent efforts of the federal and state governments to reduce divorce and relationship distress. An example of these efforts is the OMI, which seeks to combine the forces of government, private, business, and faith sectors to reduce the rate of divorce by 30% within 10 years. Governmental involvement in this arena often has been prompted by economic concerns, but social costs, though more difficult to quantify, have provided additional impetus to focus new attention on relationship education.

Clergy are in a particularly strategic position to provide marriage preparation for several reasons, including their access to and influence with couples, a belief in the value of marriage, a strong educational tradition, and an institutional base of operations. However, there are questions as to how effective clergy have been in taking advantage of this opportunity. Although there is some data concerning how many couples receive premarital education from clergy, little is known about the process, content, or outcomes of what they provide.

This study has two primary objectives: 1) to provide a concise picture of clergy-provided marriage preparation in Oklahoma, including demographic characteristics of clergy, requirements they set, content they cover, tools and resources they use, how

valuable they believe the process is, and how effective they believe their efforts are, and 2) to examine factors that clergy perceive constrain their effectiveness in providing marriage education. To aid in this endeavor, two heuristic theoretical models have been proposed, one that illustrates the marriage preparation process and outcome and one that depicts various clergy-related systems from which potential hindrances might emanate.

In order to gather the information needed for the study, a 4-page questionnaire was mailed to clergy from 2,501 churches randomly selected from the Christian churches in Oklahoma. Data were analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Science computer program.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Demographics

Clergy in Oklahoma are involved with marriage preparation to varying degrees and use multiple procedures, methods, and resources. A heuristic typology of an Oklahoma clergyperson involved in marriage preparation is a 51½-year-old male in his first marriage. He has served 22 years as a minister, about 6 years in his current position, which is senior pastor of an evangelical Protestant congregation with 140 active participants. He has earned a master's degree, taking two or three courses in counseling and a course in marriage and the family. He has attended several seminars or continuing education events to stay equipped for ministry to couples and families, and he probably performs one or two weddings a year.

This picture of a "typical" clergyperson hardly tells the whole story. For example, while the mean size of active membership is 140, the median is 281.07, with the range extending from 8 to 3,500. The diversity in the size of church membership has

multiple implications, such as varying resources, support staff, and especially the number of couples available for marriage preparation.

The number of weddings performed illustrates the diverse circumstances among clergy. While one respondent reported 60 weddings in the most recent year, 1 in 5 (21.7%) did not perform any weddings at all, more than half did 2 or fewer (54.2%), and only 5.4% performed 10 or more in a year. Methodologies used by clergy in larger churches, such as group classes or seminars for couples, would not be appropriate for the majority of clergy. This finding is particularly relevant in Oklahoma, where the OMI has selected PREP as the intervention of choice for relationship education. The vast majority of clergy would not have enough premarital couples at any given time to make PREP a feasible approach. PREP has been adapted for populations other than just premarital couples, and it may be that some clergy could use the workshops for both married and premarital couples, a question beyond the scope of the data in this study. So far as marriage preparation is concerned, however, it seems that PREP is not the most effective strategy for most clergy to use with couples.

Training History

Other research has indicated that clergy recognize the need for additional training in how to prepare couples for marriage. Two-thirds of clergy in this study have never had a college-level course in how to provide marriage preparation. Almost half (44.9%) have never attended any kind of seminar, workshop, or other continuing education opportunity related to marriage preparation. Although clergy generally believe they are competent to provide marriage preparation and that couples have benefited from their help in the past, they generally recognize the need for additional training. On a scale of 1

(strongly agree) to 8 (strongly disagree), the mean was 6.32 and the mode (30%) was 8 for agreeing with the statement, "I am willing to receive additional training in effective marriage preparation." They also responded positively about their willingness to attend specific training events. Asked about attending a 3-day seminar to learn how to conduct PREP workshops, more than half (54.2%) said they probably would attend or would make it a high priority. While this response indicates a large market for the OMI training, it is possible that training funds could be spent more effectively. When asked about attending a 1-day seminar to learn how to use premarital assessments, the response was even higher, with 78.1% saying they probably would attend or would make it a high priority. Since assessments are designed to use with one couple at a time, this approach might be more appropriate for a much broader audience of clergy.

Requirements

An early effort of the OMI was to encourage clergy to sign an "Oklahoma Marriage Covenant" agreeing to request a 4- to 6-month preparation period, conduct at least four to six sessions, encourage spiritual formation, encourage the use of mentor couples, and use a premarital assessment. Currently, only 1 in 8 (12.4%) requires a waiting period of at least 4 months; 39.9% require four or more sessions with couples; 3.4% often or always use mentor couples; and 44.8% often or always use some kind of premarital inventory. When asked about specific assessments used, 18.6% used an instrument specifically designed for premarital couples (PREPARE, 15.8%; FOCCUS, 2.1%; or RELATE, 0.7%), and 20% used Myers-Briggs or Taylor-Johnson. Although PREPARE is the most widely used nationally, its popularity in Oklahoma may be enhanced in that one of the authors is on the faculty of Oklahoma State University.

Other than meeting with the pastor (84.2% always require), the two components clergy always require most often are homework (34%) and premarital sexual abstinence (39.6%). The use of homework has been supported in the literature, and couples generally seem to have found it helpful (Williams et al., 1999). The requirement that couples remain sexually abstinent before marriage is problematic, reflecting a tension some clergy seem to feel between their theology and the reality that more than half of couples cohabitate before marriage. Several respondents volunteered information regarding the challenge they face trying to enforce what they believe is in the best interest of the couple.

The two least frequently cited requirements were mentor couples and sessions after the wedding. (See Table 3.) While research is limited regarding either of these, there is reason to believe that both have the potential to be among the most effective interventions available to clergy. It might be productive to educate clergy about the potential efficacy of these interventions as well as to provide appropriate tools to facilitate their implementation.

Content

The Content Scale did not discriminate so well as hoped, with most clergy indicating they were satisfied with how thoroughly they deal with almost all of 18 marriage preparation issues listed. On a scale of 0 (not at all) to 4 (very satisfied), the mean was above 2.0 for every item but legal issues (1.97). It may be significant that family of origin had the largest number of no responses (16); perhaps some clergy are not familiar with the concept.

Clergy seem to be well satisfied with how they deal with communication (M =

3.32) and conflict resolution (M = 3.05). However, the study did not address whether this component was entirely information-based or if it included skills training. This question probably should be explored in more depth.

Tools/resources

Educational Programs

The most frequently used educational program was the PREPARE Program, which 26% of the respondents report using at least occasionally. The next most frequently used were PREP, used at least some of the time by 14.1%, and Engaged Encounter, used at least occasionally by 12.4% of the respondents. Of the many other programs listed in open-ended responses, none were well-known research-based or theory-based programs such as RE, COUPLE COMMUNICATION, or PAIRS. The use of the PREPARE program by such a significant percentage of clergy suggests that using an inventory as the basis of an educational program may be readily accepted by clergy.

Videos and Books

Videos and books or workbooks are used by well over three-fourths of respondents. Each of these resources has the potential to be used impersonally with little clergy-couple interaction: "Read or watch these to learn how to have a successful marriage." Perhaps that helps to explain why other research found that videos in particular were not rated as very helpful by individuals who had attended premarital education, while interaction with clergy or lay couples was rated most helpful (Williams et al., 1999). The second most frequently used video was *Saving Your Marriage before It Starts*, by Parrott and Parrott (used at least some of the time by 53 respondents). The relative popularity of the Parrotts' materials no doubt was influenced by their having

served for a year as “Marriage Ambassadors” appointed by the governor of Oklahoma.

Referrals

More than 6 of 10 (60.9%) respondents said they refer couples to professionals who are available for counseling/therapy for issues beyond their training. This is encouraging in light of evidence that clergy often are hesitant to refer someone to a therapist for marriage preparation, particularly if the therapist may not share religious values with the clergyperson.

However, well over half never send couples to workshops provided either by the religious community (57.1% never use) or by the OMI (77.1% never use). Most often, these clergy are not aware of such services. Almost half (48.1%) are not familiar with workshops provided by the OMI, and more than a third (34.2%) do not know about workshops offered by the religious community. The fact that a higher number said they are not familiar with PREP (61.8%) than workshops provided by the OMI (48.1%) suggests that a percentage of clergy know that the OMI is providing some kind of workshops but do not know that they are PREP.

The use of services offered by the religious community should be related to the community marriage initiatives reported on by Doherty and Anderson (2004), such as the Community Marriage Policies that show evidence of being related to a decrease in divorce rates (Birch et al., 2004). Since such initiatives are still uncommon, especially in smaller communities, it is understandable that clergy would not use such services. However, there seems to be reason for concern considering the number of individuals trained by the OMI to present PREP (including the C-PREP Christian version), especially

since the OMI effort to reduce divorce rates by a third within 10 years is halfway through its projected program.

One of the nuances of the findings is that more is not necessarily better, either in the number of requirements established or the number of tools/resources used, as they relate to how effective clergy perceive the outcome to be in the marriage preparation they provide. It may be that those who consider themselves most effective have refined their process to include minimal components that they have found particularly helpful. It would be interesting to discover which particular requirements and tools or resources are used by clergy who rate their effectiveness highest.

Hindrances

A major objective of the study was to learn about factors that clergy believe keep them from providing more effective marriage preparation. These were conceptualized as being related to one or more systems in which the clergyperson is embedded.

Community System

Lack of correlation between community hindrances and perceived effectiveness suggests that clergy might have an attitude that says, "My decision to provide marriage preparation does not depend on what others in my community think or do." This finding raises questions about why Community Marriage Policies apparently are related to a decrease in divorce rates. It is possible that clergy are influenced by the attitudes of others in their community more than they realize.

Premarital Couple System

The marriage preparation link is obvious between the clergyperson and the premarital couple. If the couple don't consider marriage preparation valuable or if they

are so focused on the wedding that they can't focus on marriage preparation, it is reasonable to expect that marriage preparation programs will be less effective. If the clergyperson also perceives that the couple will have problems in marriage even after going through marriage preparation, his motivation to expend time and energy on the process no doubt will be affected. Indeed, the study finds that clergy often perceive all these factors to hinder effectiveness in preparing couples for marriage.

The Oklahoma help-seeking study (Fournier & Roberts, 2003) indicates that it is reasonable for clergy to see characteristics of the couple to be significant hindrances to effective marriage preparation. Fournier and Roberts (2003) found that among factors explaining why couples choose not to attend relationship education, the most significant by far had to do with problem-solving deficiencies, including the inability to resolve conflict, find solutions, recognize conflicts, or deal with stress. Other relational factors included safety issues and lack of partner consensus about whether or not to attend classes. While the help-seeking study looked at factors that prevent couples from attending relationship education opportunities, no doubt the same factors also would affect the effectiveness of the program if they participated in marriage preparation.

Individual Clergy System

Variables associated with individual clergy factors had the highest correlation with perceived effectiveness (r_{XY} = -.47; p < .000) among all the subscales in the Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale. In addition, one of the items in this subscale, doubt about personal competence, was the first variable entered in the equation when perceived effectiveness was regressed on the linear combination of the 17 variables from the Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale, using a stepwise method with all variables

forced into the equation. No doubt a key to making religious marriage preparation more effective is to address the clergy perception of competence in working with couples.

Congregational System

The importance of congregational attitudes in effective marriage preparation is illustrated by the significant correlation between perceived effectiveness and the Congregational Factors Subscale. The value the congregation attributes to marriage preparation seems to be particularly evident in whether availability of money becomes an issue in providing marriage preparation. The priorities of the congregation seem to determine the allocation of funds. It is possible that clergy who recognize the importance of marriage preparation could benefit from educating the congregation about the theological aspects of marriage and the practical dimensions of marriage preparation. Influencing congregational attitudes also might be a consequence of community marriage initiatives that seek to promote a marriage culture and marriage education climate in a community.

Denominational System

The Denominational Factors Subscale had a significant relationship with perceived effectiveness (r_{XY} = -.46; p < .000), the second highest correlation among the subscales. In addition, all 4 items in the subscale were among the 7 variables that added a significant amount of variance to the regression equation mentioned earlier. These findings emphasize the important link between the denomination a clergyperson is affiliated with and the perception he has regarding the effectiveness of marriage preparation. It would seem that a long-term strategy for increasing effectiveness of marriage preparation should direct efforts toward denominational leadership, with goals

of improving seminary training, continuing education, program resources, and the perception that the denomination values marriage preparation.

The OMI Activities and Goals

Oklahoma Marriage Covenant

As mentioned earlier, there is a significant discrepancy between the components called for in the Oklahoma Marriage Covenant and the actual practices of clergy. The results from this section indicate that clergy generally would be willing to adopt the requirements listed in the covenant. As would be expected, almost all the clergy (92%) indicated they would be willing to use the marriage preparation time to encourage spiritual formation. Although fewer than 4 in 10 (39.9%) of clergy currently require four or more sessions for marriage preparation, more than three-fourths (78.5%) expressed a willingness to require four to six sessions. This willingness, in order to be sustained, presumably would need to be accompanied by resources or curricula to fill up the additional sessions. This need could be addressed by the OMI, denominations, or community marriage initiatives.

Almost three-fourths (73.1%) of respondents also said they would be willing to use a premarital assessment as part of the marriage preparation they provide, compared to the 30.4% who say they always use an assessment now. The percentage of those who are willing to endorse this component of the Oklahoma Marriage Covenant is similar to the percentage (78.1%) who indicated they probably would attend training to learn how to use a premarital assessment. Although the OMI has encouraged clergy to use assessments, there has been no visible effort to make appropriate training available for using such assessments profitably. In light of the broad willingness to agree to this

component of the Covenant and to receive requisite training, it would seem appropriate that the OMI investigate ways to facilitate this aspect of marriage preparation.

More than half (55.7%) of the clergy indicated they would be willing to include the training of mentor or sponsor couples as part of their marriage preparation regimen. This percentage is in stark contrast to the 3.3% who report they often or always require involvement of mentor couples now. It might be that initial efforts by the OMI to encourage mentor training were counterproductive, in light of the perception by some attendees that luncheons designed to address the topic did not live up to expectations. Although subsequent OMI efforts to address this topic have shown limited success, the response to training opportunities has not been consistent with the interest indicated in this study. While helping clergy to develop mentor programs seems to offer potential for increasing effectiveness of marriage preparation, a gap exists between the stated willingness of clergy to endorse the concept and the resolve to put it into practice. Perhaps empirical and anecdotal evidence of the efficacy of mentoring would help provide needed motivation. It also is possible that clergy need additional follow-up resources.

Openness to Training

This study confirmed that clergy generally are very open to the possibility of receiving additional training to make their marriage preparation more effective. More than half said they probably would attend training to present PREP workshops or would make it a high priority. However, for several years the OMI has been making PREP training available to clergy, and only a small percentage have attended. In addition, 61.8% indicate they are not familiar with the program. If indeed PREP is an appropriate

intervention for clergy to use in marriage preparation and enrichment, the OMI apparently has a challenge in communicating the availability of the training to clergy. This study included attempts to use discriminant analysis or multiple regression to predict which clergy would be most likely to attend PREP training on the basis of relevant demographic variables. The inability to discover such an equation illustrates the challenge in effectively targeting potential PREP workshop leaders.

Respondents indicated they were significantly more likely to attend a 1-day training to use a premarital assessment with marriage preparation than to attend training to present PREP workshops. The survey did not ask about reasons for choosing one program over the other. However, in light of literature that indicates clergy often feel they are in a time crunch, it is reasonable that one consideration is the shorter time necessary for training to use an inventory. No doubt the unfamiliarity with PREP among a majority of clergy also helps accounts for the preference to receive training in use of assessments.

Program Suitability

The study raises several questions about the suitability of PREP for use by the majority of clergy in marriage preparation. The number of couples the typical clergy will prepare for marriage in any given year is so small that the standard 12-hour group format for PREP would seem to be unfeasible. On the other hand, there are components of PREP that a clergyperson can use with an individual couple, including communication and conflict resolution skills training. It may be that the curriculum should be modified for use with individual couples. Considering the strategic position of clergy to provide marriage preparation, it might be that the OMI should consider pursuing adaptation of the

program for clergy to use with couples in a premarital counseling setting. Likewise, it might be profitable to offer a shortened training program for the modified version.

It also might be advantageous for the OMI to find a way to capitalize on the relative popularity of the PREPARE Program (12.5% always use) compared to PREP (3.3% always use). If the OMI is philosophically or contractually tied to PREP, perhaps it would be possible to train clergy how to incorporate PREP components into marriage preparation utilizing the PREPARE Program or another premarital assessment.

Limitations

Caution must be exercised when generalizing from this study. The population of Oklahoma clergy likely differs from clergy in other parts of the United States. Similarly, it is likely that clergy from other religious groups would differ from Christian clergy in regard to their marriage preparation practices, the meaning they impute toward marriage and marriage preparation, and the potential obstacles they would face. It would be important to explore how the sample compares with clergy in other locations and among other faith groups.

Another limitation is the relatively low rate of responses. Although low responses are common with mailed surveys, clergy seem particularly prone to this phenomenon. Rees and Francis (1991, quoted in Beck, 1997) suggested from their study that burnout and workload are two reasons they do not respond to work-related questionnaires. The length of the instrument could have been a deterrent for individuals who already feel pressured by time constraints. Though a 17% response rate is not uncommon for mailed surveys of clergy, there is no way to know for certain how the respondents may have differed from the non-respondents. A reasonable assumption is that the respondents were

the members of the sample who were most interested in marriage preparation. However, a majority of the respondents reported performing few if any weddings in any given year. Interest could indicate either a positive or a negative attitude toward marriage preparation. Lack of interest could indicate that subjects do not consider marriage preparation valuable, or perhaps they perform weddings or conduct marriage preparation so infrequently they thought their responses were irrelevant. It also is possible that non-respondents were so busy providing marriage preparation that they did not have the time to complete and return the questionnaire. Social desirability also could have influenced the response rate for this instrument, which requested a phone number if respondents were willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview. Demographic data such as age, gender, and size of the congregation generally were consistent with what is known about Oklahoma churches, which is encouraging.

A consequence of the low response rate is that the data are not robust enough to conduct confirmatory analyses. This shortcoming is particularly important in regard to the models which have been proposed.

Recommendations for Research

Theoretical

The author proposed a theoretical model related to each of the primary objectives in the study as heuristic aids in conceptualizing central constructs and their relationships to one another. The Systems Model of Constraints on Clergy Provision of Marriage suggested that factors hindering effective provision of marriage preparation by clergy are associated with one or more of the multiple systems in which the clergyperson is embedded. Seven of those systems were identified through review of the literature,

exploratory investigations, and theory: the premarital couple system, a community system, a denominational system, a congregational system, the clergy marital system, a family-of-origin system, and an individual clergy system. The ABC-X Model of Marriage Preparation was adapted from Hill's classic ABC-X model of family stress to illustrate how the dynamic interaction among major components produces an outcome. In this adaptation, *A* (the marriage preparation event) interacting with *B* (resources available to the clergy) interacting with *C* (the meaning the clergyperson ascribes to the event) produces *X* (the quality of marriage preparation).

These models could provide the theoretical foundation for further research of marriage preparation provided by clergy. In order to test the Hindrances model, scales more precise than were possible in this study should be developed to measure each of the dimensions in the model. For example, only one item was used to measure hindrances from either the Clergy Marriage System or the Family-of-origin System(s). Also, the improved measures should be analyzed with techniques such as cluster analysis to determine if the hypothesized scales accurately depict the actual factors or if the model needs to be revised. Low reliability on some of the subscales points to the need to do more work building accurate scales to measure potential hindrances to clergy involvement in marriage preparation.

Methodological

Changes in methodology could improve the understanding of clergy involvement in marriage preparation. For example, a more widely representative sample should be used to discover how these findings compare with conditions in other states besides Oklahoma and among faith groups other than Protestant and Catholic Christian churches.

One of the deficiencies of the current study was the inability to measure outcome rather than the clergy perception of effectiveness. This is an area that should be approached through longitudinal studies utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The relatively low response rate leaves questions unanswered about subjects in the sample who did not respond to the survey. It would be helpful to conduct studies utilizing telephone interviews and mailed surveys with more exhaustive follow-up efforts.

The data set was designed for broad, diverse goals and had a limited number of variables to measure any particular construct. Rather than such a superficial shotgun approach, it would be helpful to focus on hindrances, developing a more comprehensive instrument to explore the areas of possible constraints.

Summary

A constellation of factors points to a remarkable opportunity to improve marital stability and satisfaction in Oklahoma through the involvement of clergy in marriage preparation. There is convincing evidence that marriage preparation makes a significant difference in improving marital success. The study by Stanley et al. (in press) suggests that this benefit is specifically demonstrable in Oklahoma, where clergy provide the vast majority of marriage preparation. These results seem to be true even though little is known about the content of marriage preparation or the proficiency of the clergy who provide it.

Clergy not only have the potential to positively impact marriages in Oklahoma, but they are strategically positioned to reach more couples than any other private or

public entity. The vast majority of couples still choose to get married in a religious setting, and more than 90% of all Oklahoma couples who receive any sort of marriage preparation do so from religious clergy.

Although clergy in Oklahoma already seem to make a positive difference in the quality of marriages by providing premarital education, they question their effectiveness. This study demonstrates that these doubts are reasonable, considering how many do not use empirically proven curricula or theoretically validated methods or tools. Often clergy do not even know what resources exist. Acknowledging their deficiencies, clergy overwhelmingly say they would be willing to receive more training so that they can provide more effective marriage preparation.

Thus, the study presents a group of individuals who have access to couples at a developmentally critical moment, who already help couples prepare for marriage, who recognize they can be more effective, and who are willing to receive training. These would seem to be ingredients for making a major difference in the stability and quality of marriages in Oklahoma.

Providing appropriate training for clergy seems to be a key element in maximizing the potential of this group. PREP, an excellent relationship education program, is available for clergy in Oklahoma. However, many clergy still do not know this resource exists, and others undoubtedly wonder if this program is appropriate for the churches where they minister. Indeed, it might be that a curriculum that requires less investment of time for training and that is appropriate for dealing with one couple at a time would be better suited for many of these clergy,. A curriculum utilizing a premarital assessment possibly could meet those criteria. Perhaps another curriculum should be

developed and disseminated. Whatever strategy is devised, a willing force is in position and ready to be trained to reduce the rate of divorce and relationship distress.

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APPENDIX A

Sample of Survey Questionnaire

CONFIDENTIAL OPINION SURVEY
OKLAHOMA CLERGY INVOLVEMENT IN MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Clergy from all over Oklahoma will be asked to participate. Results are completely confidential and cannot be linked to any respondent. The goal of this survey is to determine the views of Oklahoma clergy on a variety of topics related to marriage preparation. Your voluntary response to each question is greatly appreciated.

INSTRUCTIONS – Part 1: First, we need to be able to summarize a few general characteristics of the people who are completing this survey and the churches they serve. This information is confidential and will help us determine whether the Survey Group is similar to other Oklahoma clergy and churches.

1. Your age is: _____ Years
2. Your gender is: ❒ Male ❒ Female
3. What is your current relationship status? ❒ Married ❒ Single
   If married: ❒ First marriage ❒ Second or subsequent marriage
   If single: ❒ Never married ❒ Widowed ❒ Previously married
4. How many years have you served as a minister? _____ in your current position? _____
5. What is your current ministry position?
   ❒ Senior pastor ❒ Associate pastor ❒ Other _____
6. Approximately how many people (all ages) are active members or participants of your congregation? _____
7. What is the highest level of formal education you have completed? (Check the best answer.)
   ❒ Doctoral degree ❒ Master's degree ❒ 4-year college ❒ Some college ❒ High school or less
8. Please indicate the approximate number of college-level (12-16 weeks) courses you have taken in each of the following subject areas:
   Counseling ____ Marriage and family ____ Family life education ____ Marriage preparation ____
9. Please indicate the approximate number of seminars/training/continuing education opportunities you have taken in each of the following subject areas:
   Counseling ____ Marriage and family ____ Family life education ____ Marriage preparation ____
10. How many weddings (approximately) did you perform in each of the following years?
    2001 _____ 2002 _____ 2003 _____
11. Approximately how many weddings did ministers in your church other than yourself perform in each of the following years?
    2001 _____ 2002 _____ 2003 _____
12. Who coordinates the area of ministry in your congregation that would include marriage preparation?
    ❒ Senior pastor ❒ Associate pastor ❒ Lay individual/couple ❒ Other _____
13. With what denomination are you affiliated? _____

Zip code of church: ____ ____ ____ ____ ____
Purpose of Zip: To help us represent the entire state.

Would you be willing to be contacted by the researcher for a 20-minute follow-up interview? ❒ Yes ❒ No

If yes: Best day(s) of week to call: _____ Best time(s) of day to call: _____

Telephone number: _____/_____/_____

Thank you for your participation! Please return the survey immediately in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

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INSTRUCTIONS – Part 2: In Part 2 we want to learn about the requirements clergy set for couples whose wedding ceremonies they perform. Below are some of the requirements that some pastors have set. Please check the box that best describes the extent to which you require each. If you set requirements not listed, please write those in the space provided.

Never Used	Seldom Used	Sometimes Used	Often Required	Always Required		
0	1	2	3	4	Waiting period from contact to wedding *If required, length of time required?* _____	1
0	1	2	3	4	Premarital couple inventory. *If required, which one?* _____	2
0	1	2	3	4	Meeting with pastor *If required, number of sessions required:* _____	3
0	1	2	3	4	Group premarital class/education/enrichment	4
0	1	2	3	4	Mentor or sponsor couples (trained, experienced lay couples in the church who meet with the engaged couples)	5
0	1	2	3	4	Homework *If required, approximate number of assignments given:* _____	6
0	1	2	3	4	Church membership	7
0	1	2	3	4	Premarital sexual abstinence	8
0	1	2	3	4	Meetings/sessions after the wedding. *If required:* *How many sessions?*_____ *How many months after wedding?*_____	9
0	1	2	3	4	Other post-marital contacts:_____ Other:	10

INSTRUCTIONS – Part 3: In Part 3 we seek to learn what areas of content that pastors include in marriage preparation. Please circle the number that best describes how satisfied you are with how thoroughly you personally deal with each issue in the marriage preparation you provide, ranging from "not at all" (1) to "very satisfied" (5).

Not At All				Very Satisfied		
0	1	2	3	4	The wedding ceremony	1
0	1	2	3	4	Realistic expectations	2
0	1	2	3	4	Role perceptions	3
0	1	2	3	4	Children/parenting	4
0	1	2	3	4	Career	5
0	1	2	3	4	Personality/temperament	6
0	1	2	3	4	Relationship to God	7
0	1	2	3	4	Communication	8
0	1	2	3	4	Conflict resolution	9

Not At All				Very Satisfied		
0	1	2	3	4	Problem-solving	10
0	1	2	3	4	Family of origin	11
0	1	2	3	4	Finances/budgeting	12
0	1	2	3	4	In-law relationships	13
0	1	2	3	4	Friends	14
0	1	2	3	4	Sexual relations	15
0	1	2	3	4	Family planning	16
0	1	2	3	4	Spiritual dimensions	17
0	1	2	3	4	Legal issues	18

INSTRUCTIONS – Part 4: In this section we seek to learn how important clergy consider conditions that are related to a higher likelihood of marital distress. Following are some known risk factors. Please circle the number that best describes how important you believe each issue is for marital success, ranging from "not at all" (1) to "very important" (5).

Not At All				Very Important	Known Risk Factors	
0	1	2	3	4	Having divorced parents	1
0	1	2	3	4	Lack of support from parents	2
0	1	2	3	4	Young age at marriage	3
0	1	2	3	4	Limited income	4
0	1	2	3	4	Limited education	5
0	1	2	3	4	Dissimilarity of values and beliefs	6
0	1	2	3	4	Cohabitation	7
0	1	2	3	4	Premarital sex	8
0	1	2	3	4	Dissimilar personal characteristics (race, socioeconomic status, intelligence, age, religion, etc.)	9

Not At All				Very Important	Known Risk Factors	
0	1	2	3	4	Premarital pregnancy and childbirth	10
0	1	2	3	4	Poor communication skills	11
0	1	2	3	4	Unrealistic expectations	12
0	1	2	3	4	Poor conflict resolution skills	13
0	1	2	3	4	Short length of acquaintance	14
0	1	2	3	4	Past experience with physical abuse	15
0	1	2	3	4	Past experience with sexual abuse	16
0	1	2	3	4	Past experience with emotional or verbal abuse	17
0	1	2	3	4	Substance abuse by either partner	18

List any other Risks not mentioned that you believe are important:

INSTRUCTIONS – Part 5: In Part 5 we are seeking to learn what resources or tools clergy are familiar with and which they commonly use in marriage preparation. Listed below are some examples of resources (workbooks, inventories, videos, seminars, etc.). Please circle the number that best describes your use of each (*not familiar with; familiar with but never use; use some; use often; or use always*). If you use other resources, please identify those in the space provided.

Not Familiar	Never Use	Use Some	Use Often	Use Always		
					Seminars/Educational Programs	
NF	0	1	2	3	The Cana Institute: Caring for the Soul of Marriage and Family	1
NF	0	1	2	3	Engaged Encounter	2
NF	0	1	2	3	*PREP: Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program* (Markman et al.)	3
NF	0	1	2	3	*PREPARE/ENRICH Program* (Olson et al.)	4
NF	0	1	2	3	**Others:**	5
					Inventories	
NF	0	1	2	3	FOCCUS	1
NF	0	1	2	3	Myers-Briggs	2
NF	0	1	2	3	PREPARE or PREPARE-MC	3
NF	0	1	2	3	RELATE	4
NF	0	1	2	3	Taylor-Johnson	5
NF	0	1	2	3	**Others:**	6
					Videos	
NF	0	1	2	3	*Before You Say 'I Do'* (Wright)	1
NF	0	1	2	3	*Fighting for Your Marriage* (Markman et al.)	2
NF	0	1	2	3	*Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* (Parrotts)	3
NF	0	1	2	3	*When Two Become One* (Dobbins)	4
NF	0	1	2	3	**Others:**	5
					Books & Workbooks	
NF	0	1	2	3	*Before You Say 'I Do'* (Wright)	1
NF	0	1	2	3	*The Five Love Languages* (Chapman)	2
NF	0	1	2	3	*For Better and For Ever* (Ruhnke)	3
NF	0	1	2	3	*Getting Ready for the Wedding* (Parrotts)	4
NF	0	1	2	3	*Intended for Pleasure* (Wheat)	5
NF	0	1	2	3	*A Lasting Promise* (Stanley et al.)	6
NF	0	1	2	3	*Love for a Lifetime* (Dobson)	7
NF	0	1	2	3	*Love Life for Every Married Couple* (Wheat)	8
NF	0	1	2	3	*Making Love Last Forever* (Smalley)	9
NF	0	1	2	3	*Pre-Marriage Questions* (Biehls)	10
NF	0	1	2	3	*The Most Important Year...* (Wolgemuth & DeVries)	11
NF	0	1	2	3	*Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* (Parrotts)	12
NF	0	1	2	3	*Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (*Gottman & Silver*)	13
NF	0	1	2	3	*So You're Getting Married* (Wright)	14
NF	0	1	2	3	*Ten Great Dates Before You Say 'I Do'* (Arps)	15
NF	0	1	2	3	**Others:**	16
NF	0	1	2	3		17
NF	0	1	2	3		18
NF	0	1	2	3		19
					Referrals	
NF	0	1	2	3	Workshops offered by the religious community.	
NF	0	1	2	3	Workshops offered by the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative.	
NF	0	1	2	3	Professionals available for counseling/therapy for issues beyond my training.	1

INSTRUCTIONS – Part 6: In Part 6 we are seeking your ideas about factors that might hinder clergy from providing effective marriage preparation. The following statements identify reasons why some clergy may think that the marriage preparation they provide could be more effective. Please check the box that represents how much you personally **agree** with each statement.

Strongly Agree		Generally Agree		Generally Disagree		Strongly Disagree			
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I do not think that I have received enough training to provide effective preparation.	1
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	My congregation does not recognize the value of marriage preparation.	2
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I am not convinced that these types of programs are very effective.	3
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	My denomination does not encourage marriage preparation.	4
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I am not comfortable with "counseling" situations.	5
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Church finances are limited.	6
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I do not know what resources are available to assist me.	7
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Other clergy in my community do not seem to value marriage preparation.	8
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	The people of this community do not seem to value marriage preparation.	9
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I have too many responsibilities and not enough time.	10
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I do not think I am competent to provide marriage preparation.	11
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Couples are so focused on the wedding they cannot focus on marriage preparation.	12
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Engaged couples do not think marriage preparation is valuable.	13
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	My own marriage has too many problems.	14
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Parents often make the preparation process more difficult.	15
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Too many couples still have problems after marriage preparation.	16
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Couples are much more difficult to work with than individuals.	17
								Other:	18

INSTRUCTIONS – Part 7: In Part 7 we are seeking to learn what clergy think about the value and effectiveness of marriage preparation. Please check the box that represents how much you personally agree with each of the following statements.

Strongly Agree		Generally Agree		Generally Disagree		Strongly Disagree			
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Marriage preparation is a valuable aspect of my ministry.	1
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I provide marriage preparation only because it is expected of me.	2
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I think that I generally do a good job preparing couples for marriage.	3
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I am willing to receive additional training in effective marriage preparation.	4
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Clergy should not be involved with a private matter like marriage preparation.	5
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I think couples have benefited from the marriage preparation I provided in the past.	6

INSTRUCTIONS - Part 8: In Part 8 we are seeking your views about questions related to the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative.

1. The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative has encouraged clergy to sign an "Oklahoma Marriage Covenant" that includes a commitment to require several items as part of marriage preparation. Please circle the response that best indicates how likely you would be to endorse each requirement. (**Y**=Yes; **N/S**=Not sure; **N**=No)

   Y N/S N Request a preparation period of four to six months of all couples asking me to preside over their wedding.
   Y N/S N Conduct four to six marital preparation sessions with each couple during the preparation period.
   Y N/S N Use the preparation period to encourage the spiritual formation of the couple.
   Y N/S N Encourage the training of mentor couples to assist couples during the crucial first years of marriage.
   Y N/S N Use a premarital assessment to supplement my marriage preparation.

2. How likely would you be to attend a 3-day seminar designed to train you to present one of the 3 versions of PREP (The **P**revention & **R**elationship **E**nhancement **P**rogram)? (C-PREP Christian; J-PREP Jewish; or PREP for General Education)

   ❒ Never ❒ Not likely ❒ Probably ❒ I would make it a high priority ❒ I need more information

3. How likely would you be to attend a 1-day seminar to learn about premarital assessments that can improve your ability to identify both couple strengths and the most challenging marital topics or risks that are unique for each couple?

   ❒ Never ❒ Not likely ❒ Probably ❒ I would make it a high priority ❒ I need more information

One last question: In light of questions in this survey, how would you say you have changed over the past 5 years in regard to the importance you place on marriage preparation and your effectiveness in providing marriage preparation? (Circle the best answer.)

Importance now compared to 5 years ago:	Much less now	Somewhat less	About the same	Somewhat more	Much more now
Effectiveness now compared to 5 years ago:	Much less now	Somewhat less	About the same	Somewhat more	Much more now

APPENDIX B

Cover Letters

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

OSU

College of Human Environmental Sciences
Department of Human Development and Family Science
233 Human Environmental Sciences
Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078-6122
405-744-5057; Fax: 405-744-2800

Dear Christian Leader:

More than 90 percent of Oklahoma couples that receive any premarital preparation do so in a religious setting. Research shows that good preparation can help marriages be stronger and happier, and clergy are in a strategic position to provide couples with the training they need. However, we currently have little information about what clergy are doing to prepare couples for marriage or what they believe is most effective.

We are asking you to participate in a statewide survey that will seek to find out several things about the involvement of Oklahoma clergy in providing marriage preparation:

- What are the current practices and attitudes of Oklahoma clergy related to marriage preparation?
- What things do clergy believe make it harder to provide effective marriage preparation?
- Would clergy like to receive additional training designed to make the marriage preparation they provide more effective?

This study is part of a research project conducted by Oklahoma State University in cooperation with the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative.

You are one of 2,500 clergypersons selected at random from all Christian denominations in Oklahoma. Participation in this study in voluntary; however, the usefulness of the findings improves when all randomly selected individuals choose to participate. The questionnaire, which has been screened by several Oklahoma clergy, takes approximately 20 minutes to complete. No identifying information is included so that we can guarantee complete anonymity.

Please complete the survey and return it in the enclosed business reply envelope as soon as you can. Thanks for your time and consideration on this important matter affecting Oklahoma couples.

Sincerely,

David Fournier, Professor
Project Coordinator

Joe Wilmoth
Project Co-Coordinator

Note to study participants: Since participation is voluntary, returning the survey gives project coordinators permission to use your responses as part of the statewide summary of clergy opinions and experiences. If you have an questions about the study, please feel free to contact David Fournier (Oklahoma State University, 232 HES, Stillwater, OK 74078) at 405-744-8351. For information on subjects' rights, contact Carol Olson, Institutional Review Board Chair (415 Whitehurst Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078 or 405-744-1676). You can also request a copy of the findings from David Fournier.

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OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

OSU

College of Human Environmental Sciences
Department of Human Development and Family Science
233 Human Environmental Sciences
Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078-6122
405-744-5057; Fax: 405-744-2800

Dear Christian Leader:

You recently received a similar request to participate in a statewide survey about the involvement of Oklahoma clergy in providing marriage preparation. Since it is very important that the majority of selected persons complete a survey, we are sending this reminder and another copy of the questionnaire. If you already have returned your original survey, we thank you for taking the time to help with this project.

Clergy are in a strategic position to provide couples with training that can help marriages be stronger and happier. However, we currently have little information about what clergy are doing to prepare couples for marriage or what they believe is most effective.

The survey will seek to find out several things about the involvement of Oklahoma clergy:

- What are the current practices and attitudes of Oklahoma clergy related to marriage preparation?
- What things do clergy believe make it harder to provide effective marriage preparation?
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Please complete the survey and return it in the enclosed postage-paid envelope as soon as possible. Thanks for your time and consideration on this important matter affecting Oklahoma couples.

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Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 6/28/2005

Date: Tuesday, June 29, 2004 IRB Application No HE0474

Proposal Title: Oklahoma Clergy Involvement in Provision of Marriage Preparation

Principal Investigator(s):

David Fournier
232 HES
Stillwater, OK 74078

Joe D. Wilmoth
328 HES
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact me in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, colson@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carol Olson

Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Joe Dwayne Wilmoth

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: INVOLVEMENT OF OKLAHOMA CLERGY IN MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Major Field: Human Environmental Sciences

Biographical:

Education: Received Bachelor of Arts degree with majors in communications and Biblical studies from Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri, May 1973; received Master of Arts degree in Biblical studies from Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri, June 1978; completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, August 2005.

Experience: Employed as editorial assistant, editor, promotions coordinator, editorial assistant, and free-lance writer for the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri, 1973-77; minister of education, director of publications, and administrative assistant at First Assembly of God, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1978-86; senior pastor of New Life Assembly of God, Spanish Fort, Alabama, 1986-91; senior pastor of New Life Assembly of God, Marksville, Louisiana, 1991-94; principal of Christian Life Academy, director of Noah's Ark Day Care, and minister of education and interim pastor at Christian Life Center, Kenner, Louisiana, 1994-95; senior pastor at Calvary Assembly of God, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 1995-2003; teaching assistant, responsible for teaching four courses, at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 2003-2004; assistant state specialist for personal and family relations at Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 2004-2005.

Professional Memberships: National Council on Family Relations, Oklahoma Council on Family Relations, General Council of the Assemblies of God.

Name: Joe D. Wilmoth Date of Degree: July 2005
Institution: Oklahoma State University Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: INVOLVEMENT OF OKLAHOMA CLERGY IN MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Pages in Study: 202 Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Human Environmental Sciences

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to learn about current practices and attitudes of Oklahoma clergy related to marriage preparation, including their perceptions of constraints to clergy involvement in providing effective marriage preparation. A 4-page questionnaire was mailed to clergy at 2,501 randomly selected churches in Oklahoma.

Findings and Conclusions: Although individual circumstances vary widely, a "typical" respondent to the survey is a 51-year-old male in his first marriage. He has served 22 years as a minister, about 6 years in his current position, which is senior pastor of an evangelical Protestant congregation with 140 active participants. He is most likely to have earned a master's degree, which included a course or two in counseling and a course in marriage and the family. He has attended a few seminars or continuing education events to stay equipped for ministry to couples and families, and he probably performs one or two weddings each year. A heuristic model of hindrances to effective marriage preparation conceptualized constraints as coming from several systems in which the clergyperson is embedded. Factors related to each of the following systems had significant correlations with the clergyperson's perception of effectiveness: premarital couple system, denominational system, congregational system, and the clergyperson's own marital system. Clergy generally believe the marriage preparation they provide is beneficial, but they recognize the need for more training. More than half said they would probably attend a 3-day seminar to learn how to present PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) workshops, and more than three-fourths said they probably would be willing to attend a 1-day workshop to learn how to use a premarital assessment in marriage preparation. An ABC-X Model of Marriage Preparation proposed by the author was consistent with findings from the study, indicating that the relationship between the marriage preparation process and outcome (perceived effectiveness) is mediated by the resources available and the personal meaning or importance the respondent attached to marriage preparation.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. David G. Fournier