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Original Article

### Analysis of the Current Challenges to the Stability of Christian Marriages despite the Presence of the Church Doctrines, in SDA Church Keroka Station, Kenya

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#### Keywords:

*Christian Marriage,  
Doctrinal Foundation,  
Levirate Marriage,  
Single Parenting,  
Intercultural Marriages,  
Cross-Cultural  
Interaction.*

Today, there are ongoing challenges to the stability of Christian marriages and values that affect tenets like fidelity, oneness, sexual intimacy, and permanence, despite church teachings on marriage as a "mystery" and the ideal embodiment of all the Christian life: that seeking out of the "Mind of Christ" (phronema Christou) that seeks a kenosis in order to gain the love and communion of the beloved. The purpose of the study is to analyse the current challenges to the stability of Christian marriages despite the presence of the church doctrines in the SDA church. The study was conducted at Keroka Station of Nyamira West Field of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The study employed a community-based qualitative research method, adopting a descriptive research design. The data collection tools used were questionnaires and an interview schedule for group focus. Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 23) to describe the findings of the study. The findings were reported through tables and verbatim. Several respondents noted that modern challenges such as infidelity, financial instability, secular influence, inadequate communication, and lack of commitment to church teachings as ongoing threats to Christian marriages. The study recommends that SDA focus on enhancing doctrinal application, addressing contemporary marital challenges, reinforcing Christian values, and strengthening church-based support systems. This indicates a need for more holistic and contextually relevant interventions. Perceptions of Christian marriage remain largely positive among members, who see it as a holy and essential institution. However, the impact of societal influence, generational gaps, and personal struggles complicates adherence to these values.

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to examine the ongoing challenges to the stability of Christian marriages among members of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, specifically within the Keroka Station of Nyamira West Field, and to analyse how these challenges persist despite the presence of doctrinal teachings on marriage. Christian marriage is based on the love principle, as stressed by the Bible in 1 Corinthians 13. This is a well-known passage often read at wedding services. Understanding the teaching of this passage gives one an insight into true love: Love is patient and kind, Love does not envy, Love does not boast, Love is not self-seeking. It is directed at others and not meeting one's needs. Love is not easily angered or rude, Love keeps no record of wrongs, Love protects the self-worth of the spouse, Love perseveres - however difficult the circumstances, and Love trusts, it is not suspicious.

As taught by the SDA church, marriage is God's idea and not a human one, which is crucial and essential. God established a few fundamental guidelines for marriage, as indicated by different phrases in the Bible. These include: Genesis 2:18, 21-24. This story in Genesis demonstrates that God instituted marriage. These words also reveal that God intended marriage to be a place of closeness and connection. Exodus 20:14 states that in a married partnership, husbands and wives must be

sexually faithful to one another. Proverbs 31:10: A solid union is priceless. It has been said that Proverbs 31 describes "the ideal wife." However, the characteristics listed in this chapter are appropriate for both wives and husbands. Marriage is a lifetime commitment, according to Ecclesiastes 9:9. Malachi 2:13-14: Marriage is a lifetime covenant created by God in which the husband and wife are permanently joined into one flesh, not a reversible arrangement or contract. Corinthians 7:1-2 also suggests that becoming married is preferable to engaging in immoral sexual behaviour. God, therefore, intended marriage to bring to human beings both holiness and happiness.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

SDA churches consist of a solid doctrinal foundation (SDA Church Manual, 2022). Nonetheless, some SDA church members' marriages experience challenges. Shifts in gender roles, modern nonspiritual values, and economic pressures cause some of these challenges. Moreover, cultural beliefs such as bride price and polygamy, which are common in most Kenyan communities, negatively affect the teachings of SDA churches on marriage. According to Ojowa (2005), most marriages in Kenya are terminated alarmingly. For instance, one out of two marriages is terminated in the country. Ojowa (2005) argued that most people do not know why they are getting married. For example, someone gets into marriage

for selfish reasons. Certain groups are involved in marriage with the hope of settling some of their needs in life.

On the other hand, some seek sexual pleasure, security, and association with influential family, companionship, and child support. Marital conflict is a common phenomenon. For instance, couples are unproductive if they are not sound in spirit, mind, and body (Ojowa, 2005), contributing to frequent conflicts in marriage.

Moreover, church teaching on levirate marriage is another issue affecting Christian marriages (Maronya et al., 2023). According to both the Old and New Testaments' teachings, marriage is an eternal union between two people (a man and a woman) forming one flesh, destined by mutual agreement and honoured by the church minister as outlined in Mathew 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12, ESV. Other purposes of marriage, such as consummation, entail companionship, childbearing, and mutual love relationships between couples, depending on the first fundamental principle (Maronya et al., 2023). These factors form the vital principle of the theology of the Bible on marriage. Therefore, any practice without these factors is not considered marriage. As a result, Christian marriage should consist of these factors (Maronya et al., 2023). In circumstances where one partner has died, the remaining person is free to remarry, as pointed out in 1 Timothy 5:14, ESV.

Nonetheless, if the remaining partner is a lady, she should remarry any man except her departed husband's brother. For this reason, this principle rejects unions such as sororities, polygamy, and levirate. Hence, such unions are not permitted in church (Maronya et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, some passages in the Old Testament support levirate marriage. For instance, Genesis 38:8, ESV, talks about Tamar and Judah as a circumstance in the Bible that encourages levirate marriage. In the passage above, God instructed Onan to go into his brother's wife, carry out his

duties as brother-in-law, and raise offspring for his brother. Again, Deuteronomy 25:5-10, ESV, permits a brother to take a departed brother's wife to raise offspring for his brother, especially a son, maintaining his brother's lineage. According to Maronya et al. (2023), the law of levirate marriage is encouraged by the Holy Scriptures and is practised globally by communities encompassing Judeo-Christian traditions. Paul seems to use the Torah's responsibility of getting married to their brother's widow, especially in conditions without a male successor. For various reasons, levirate marriage was practised in the Old Testament and some communities in Kenya, such as the Luos and Abagusii. Some of these reasons include the prosperity of family bonds and community, taking care of the widow and the child of the deceased husband, etcetera. Another issue with levirate marriage is the virginity (Maronya et al., 2023). The church advocates abstinence until marriage. For example, Leviticus indicates that a high priest should be a virgin.

For this reason, he should avoid marrying a widow, a prostitute, or a divorced woman. The Seventh Day Adventist Church adopts these teachings (SDA Church Manual, 2020). Therefore, teachings that advocate for the remarrying of widows to keep the ideology of monogamous marriages challenge the passage (Virginity) in Leviticus 21:13-15, ESV. Based on the socio-ecclesial view, encouraging virgin marriages is a sign of disrespect for widows in the Seventh Day Adventist Church. This makes it challenging for widows to claim remarriage in the SDA church, and it contributes to their disregard, isolation, abandonment, and mistreatment, as illustrated in Isaiah 1:23; 10:1-2; Jeremiah 7:4-16, ESV.

LGBTQ is another challenge affecting marriages in Kenyan churches, including SDA churches. The Kenyan government criminalises same-sex sexuality. However, Kenya's Constitution, promulgated in 2010, provides wide-ranging protection of human and civil rights. The Kenyan

Constitution does not openly mention transgender, bisexual, lesbian, and gay persons, but it is debated that statutes of Kenya discerning LGBT individuals are unconstitutional (Mbote et al., 2018). According to the Kenyan Constitution, Article 10 indicates that governance's national principles and values encompass protection and non-discrimination of marginalised persons, human rights, equality, inclusiveness, and social justice. Additionally, Article 19, second paragraph in the same constitution, indicates that the aim of identifying and defending human rights and essential freedoms is to protect the dignity of communities and people and enhance social justice and the understanding of the potential of all individuals.

The members of the church have a guiding statement about LGBTQIA reading as follows, “The Seventh-day Adventist Church's official position on LGBTQIA+ issues is generally considered conservative, with the church's global leadership affirming that sexual intimacy is only appropriate within a heterosexual marriage.” This stance leads to a variety of practices, including the refusal to ordain LGBTQIA+ individuals, the prohibition of same-sex marriage, and the potential for church discipline for members who openly engage in homosexual behaviour.

## RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design. A case study is ideal when exploring complex, context-specific issues in depth, particularly when “how” and “why” questions are central (Vu et al., 2022). The use of a case study allowed for the exploration of the ongoing challenges facing Christian marriages within a particular religious context, specifically, the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church at Keroka Station, Nyamira West Field. This design provided an appropriate framework for understanding the lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of church members regarding marital instability despite adherence to

doctrinal teachings (Morgan, 2022; Myeong et al., 2022).

### Target Population

The study was conducted at Keroka Station of the Nyamira West Field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kenya. The target population included married members of the SDA Church, church elders, and pastors who are actively involved in marital counselling and family ministry.

### Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The study used purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method suitable for qualitative inquiry, where participants are selected based on their experience, knowledge, and involvement in the issue under investigation (Banfield et al., 2022). A total of 30 participants were selected, comprising: 20 married congregants (10 males and 10 females), 5 church elders and 5 pastoral staff involved in marriage and family ministry. This sample size was considered sufficient for a qualitative case study, where data saturation is prioritised over numerical representation (Liu, 2022). The inclusion of both male and female participants ensured gender representation, while involving elders and pastors enriched the data with theological and leadership perspectives on marriage.

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

#### *Inclusion Criteria:*

Married SDA Church members affiliated with Keroka Station for at least five years.

Church elders and pastors actively serving in the family ministries or marital counselling.

#### *Exclusion Criteria:*

Individuals below the age of 25 or married for less than two years.

Church members are not directly involved in marriage or family ministry.

Individuals unwilling or unable to provide informed consent.

These criteria ensured that participants had adequate experience and contextual knowledge relevant to the study's objectives.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Two data collection instruments were employed: semi-structured questionnaires and a focus group interview schedule.

#### ***Questionnaires***

The semi-structured questionnaires consisted of open-ended questions, allowing participants to express their experiences and beliefs freely. Topics covered included: Personal experiences in Christian marriage, Challenges faced in sustaining doctrinal marital values, Perceptions of church support and teachings on marriage, Views on societal influences and secularism. The use of open-ended questions allowed for rich, descriptive responses that aligned with the exploratory nature of the study.

#### ***Focus Group Interviews***

In addition to the questionnaires, two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, one with married couples and another with church leaders. The FGDs were structured around guiding questions that explored: The perceived effectiveness of church teachings on marriage, Community-level influences on marital stability and strategies used within the church to address marital challenges. The interview sessions were moderated by the researcher, recorded with permission, and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. This triangulation of data sources improved the credibility and depth of findings (Wu et al., 2022).

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data collected through both instruments were analysed using thematic analysis in conjunction with SPSS Version 23. The qualitative data were first transcribed and coded to identify recurring

themes, patterns, and narratives. Themes were then categorised into broad conceptual areas such as infidelity, communication gaps, secular influence, financial challenges, and doctrinal understanding.

Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were generated from the coded data using SPSS, enabling the researcher to present findings through tables, charts, and graphs, while verbatim quotes from participants were used to preserve the authenticity of the responses (Vu et al., 2022).

The analysis process adhered to the following steps: Familiarisation with the data, Initial coding, Theme identification, reviewing themes in relation to research questions, writing and interpreting themes alongside literature. This mixed approach to qualitative data analysis ensured that both quantifiable trends and nuanced personal insights were captured.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical integrity was upheld throughout the research process. Approval for the study was obtained from the relevant research and ethics committee. The following ethical considerations were adhered to:

**Informed Consent:** Participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study. Written consent was obtained.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:** All data were anonymised using pseudonyms. Participant identities were protected during transcription, analysis, and reporting.

**Voluntary Participation:** Respondents were assured that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

**Data Security:** All recordings and transcriptions were securely stored on password-protected devices and were accessible only to the researcher.

### **FINDINGS**



## Challenges Facing Christian Marriages

Despite the foundational teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church emphasising love, faithfulness, respect, and spiritual commitment, Christian marriages at Keroka Station face significant challenges. Respondents identified both spiritual and socio-economic factors undermining the realisation of Christian marital ideals.

A primary theme was unfaithfulness and marital infidelity, consistently cited across numerous responses. Infidelity, often exacerbated by substance abuse and the influence of secular values through social media, undermines trust and the covenantal nature of Christian marriage. Exposure to digital platforms facilitates secrecy and fosters unrealistic expectations, contributing to relationship breakdowns (Aloqaili, 2021; Hertlein & Ancheta, 2020). The phenomenon of "Mpango wa Kando" (extra-marital affairs) further illustrates the tension between contemporary cultural norms and Christian doctrines (Waithaka, 2020).

Communication breakdown was another major challenge, with respondents linking poor communication to misunderstandings, anger, and a lack of forgiveness. Technological distractions, peer pressure, and evolving gender roles further exacerbate these issues, threatening marital unity (Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020).

Financial strain emerged as a dominant theme, with widespread reports of poverty and economic struggles introducing stress that triggers other marital problems, including infidelity and emotional disconnect. Economic hardship has been shown to significantly contribute to marital conflict and dissatisfaction, particularly when couples lack adequate coping resources (Falconier et al., 2019).

Changing cultural and social norms, often driven by modernisation and secular influences, also pose serious challenges. Media exposure and shifting societal values conflict with traditional Christian marriage ideals, promoting individualism over

communal values like commitment and fidelity (Curran, 2021). Respondents expressed particular concern over the technological invasion into relationships, with digital spaces promoting behaviours that undermine marital trust and stability (Hertlein & Ancheta, 2020).

Issues surrounding gender role conflicts and emotional disconnect were frequently mentioned. Respondents noted that imbalances in household responsibilities, with some men abdicating traditional roles, often led women to seek emotional or financial support elsewhere, sometimes resulting in infidelity. Research supports that mutual respect and shared responsibilities are crucial for marital health (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2020).

Substance abuse and gender-based violence (GBV) were also highlighted, suggesting a need for expanded church support systems, including counselling and rehabilitation services. Emotional instability, lack of trust, and domestic violence were recognised as foundational problems that erode spiritual and emotional bonds within marriages (Smith et al., 2020).

Childlessness or barrenness emerged as a culturally significant challenge. In African contexts, the inability to have children can create tension and dissatisfaction within marriages, reflecting deeply rooted societal expectations (Ngussa & Role, 2018).

Further concerns included tribalism, racism, and work-life and family-life imbalances, as well as a lack of positive role models. The absence of mentors to guide younger couples weakens the reinforcement of Christian marriage ideals, highlighting the importance of intergenerational mentorship programs (Fincham & Beach, 2018).

Sexual dissatisfaction and mismatched expectations between spouses were also noted. Misalignment between the idealised version of Christian marriage taught by the church and the reality experienced by couples often leads to disillusionment, especially as they face life's challenges (Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel,

2020). Additionally, materialism was identified as a corrosive factor, with a growing focus on wealth and possessions detracting from genuine marital commitment (Kasser et al., 2019). Another pressing issue was the insufficient knowledge of church teachings among some members. Even though the church offers doctrinal guidance, respondents indicated that it is not always effectively internalised or applied in daily life. Personal attitudes, such as pride and misuse of free will, also play significant roles in undermining marital stability (Fincham & Beach, 2018). Finally, respondents stressed the need for more frequent marriage seminars and educational programs. Although foundational teachings exist, ongoing mentorship, counselling, and workshops are

necessary to help couples apply Christian principles effectively in their marriages (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2020).

### **Nature of Marital Challenges – External or Internal Influences**

The study sought to examine whether the marital challenges faced by Christian couples in the Seventh-day Adventist Church at Keroka Station stem more from external factors (e.g., societal, economic) or internal dynamics (e.g., communication, emotional health, moral issues). The participants' responses suggest that both internal and external factors significantly contribute to marital distress, although internal issues were frequently emphasised, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Marital Challenges Among SDA Members at Keroka Station (N = 90)**

Category	Type of Challenge	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1. Internal Challenges	Personal/Relational	13	14.4%
2. External Challenges	Socioeconomic/Cultural	27	30.0%
3. Interaction of Internal & External Factors	Mixed Influences	33	36.7%
4. Spiritual Challenges	Faith/Religious	4	4.4%
5. Effects of Modernisation & Secularism	Cultural/Societal Shift	4	4.4%
6. Societal Comparison & Lifestyle Pressure	External/social media	2	2.2%
7. Unclear/Non-committal Responses	Data Limitation	7	7.8%

Table 1 demonstrates that despite the strong spiritual foundations emphasised by the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, Christian marriages at Keroka Station face significant internal and external challenges. A notable theme among respondents is the internal causes of marital difficulties, such as poor communication, emotional disconnection, and moral failings like dishonesty and unfaithfulness. These issues are consistent with recent marital research, which emphasises relational skills such as conflict resolution, trust-building, and emotional intelligence as critical predictors of marital satisfaction (Gottman & Silver, 2015; Johnson, 2020). Neglect of spiritual responsibilities further compounds these problems, suggesting that

individual commitment to spiritual growth is central to sustaining healthy marital relationships.

Conversely, a significant number of participants highlighted external pressures as the primary challenges to marital stability. Financial struggles, societal expectations regarding children, and the influence of cultural norms like polygamy were frequently cited. Research confirms that economic hardship intensifies marital conflict and emotional stress (Conger et al., 2010; Wadsworth et al., 2022). Moreover, respondents pointed to the detrimental effects of social comparison, particularly via social media, which fosters unrealistic expectations and dissatisfaction within marriages, aligning with

findings on the impact of digital platforms on wellbeing (Fardouly et al., 2015; Verduyn et al., 2021).

A complex theme emerging from the responses is the interplay of internal and external factors. Many respondents acknowledged that marital challenges cannot be attributed solely to one domain. Rather, issues such as financial struggles (external) and moral failings or disregard for Christian teachings (internal) interact to shape marital outcomes. This dual perspective reflects Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, emphasising the interconnected influence of personal, relational, and societal systems on marriage.

Interestingly, some respondents offered a spiritual framing of challenges, distinguishing between spiritual and external causes. Spiritual struggles, including a decline in faith commitment, were perceived as weakening the marital bond, consistent with Christian views that emphasise spiritual unity as foundational to marriage (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2016; Luetz, 2021). This theological dimension suggests that beyond interpersonal and economic challenges, spiritual health remains a crucial pillar for marital resilience.

Other notable concerns included the impact of modernisation and secularism. Respondents observed that exposure to media and shifting cultural values challenge traditional Christian marital ideals. Studies have shown that modernisation often erodes traditional marriage structures, encouraging individualism and materialism at the expense of communal and spiritual values (Cherlin, 2017; Wilcox et al., 2019).

Responses from participants such as 57 and 103 also highlight the growing impact of societal comparison and financial strain, particularly among younger couples increasingly influenced by media portrayals

of idealised lifestyles. This aligns with recent research showing that unrealistic social comparisons can negatively impact marital satisfaction (Verduyn et al., 2021).

A small number of respondents did not provide clear responses, perhaps reflecting discomfort or uncertainty in categorising marital challenges. Others provided unclear or non-committal responses, suggesting potential gaps in understanding or reluctance to engage with sensitive marital issues, a finding worth exploring in future studies on marital counselling and support in religious contexts.

In conclusion, the findings at Keroka Station reveal that Christian marriages are affected by a complex blend of internal relational dynamics, external socio-economic pressures, and spiritual challenges. Effective interventions must therefore adopt a holistic approach, strengthening spiritual formation, enhancing relational skills like communication and conflict resolution, addressing economic vulnerabilities, and educating couples on managing societal influences. Regular marriage seminars, mentorship programs, and faith-based counselling could serve as practical strategies to bolster marital stability within the church community (Luetz, 2021; Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2016).

### **How the Church Addresses the Challenges**

Responses to this question reflect a diverse range of opinions regarding the effectiveness of the church in addressing the challenges faced in Christian marriages. Participants generally identified counselling, prayer, seminars, and education as key strategies employed by the church. However, a significant number expressed dissatisfaction with the current efforts, citing limited frequency, lack of practical support, and inconsistencies among church leaders as shortcomings, as shown in Table 2.



**Table 2: Respondents' Perceptions of the SDA Church's Role in Addressing Marital Challenges (N = 90)**

Category	Type of Perception	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1. Strongly Affirmative	Church is actively helping	16	17.8%
2. Generally Affirmative	Church is engaged overall	11	12.2%
3. Conditionally Positive	Efforts exist but limited	10	11.1%
4. Ambivalent/Moderate	Mixed or average effort	6	6.7%
5. Dissatisfied	Church is not doing enough	25	27.8%
6. Highly Dissatisfied	Consistently negative views	12	13.3%
7. Nuanced/Critical Suggestions	Proposals for improvement	4	4.4%
8. No Clear Response/Unspecified	No clear position given	6	6.7%

According to Table 2, several respondents acknowledged that the church is making genuine efforts to help couples through spiritual counselling, guidance, seminars, and prayer. These strategies are consistent with the church's traditional roles in nurturing moral and spiritual growth within families (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2016). For instance, respondent 22 outlined a community-based support system through regional divisions ("Ebinyoro"), financial contribution groups, and lesson study discussions that foster accountability and follow-up among members.

In line with previous literature, spiritual activities such as corporate prayer and Bible study are known to strengthen marital bonds and offer a shared moral foundation (Mahoney et al., 2001). Workshops and family life programs also function as preventative tools for conflict resolution and marital growth (Larson & Holman, 1994).

From the analysed responses, it is evident that mixed sentiments persist regarding the role of the church in mitigating the challenges faced in Christian marriages. While some participants believe the church is actively engaged in providing spiritual and practical support, others feel that the

efforts are inconsistent, insufficient, or too theoretical.

Respondents who affirmed the church's efforts often mentioned:

*Modelling Christian behaviour (response 42)*

*Conflict resolution strategies and prayer (42)*

*Workshops/seminars and Biblical teaching (44, 45, 56)*

*Guidance and counselling (48, 60)*

*Reading and studying the Bible (54, 55, 57)*

This aligns with established scholarship, which identifies religious education, spiritual formation, and communal support as effective tools in supporting marriages (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2016; Mahoney et al., 2001). For example, respondent 50 emphasised the role of prayer and spiritual guidance in promoting continuity in marriage, reinforcing the notion that faith-based interventions can enhance marital resilience (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Respondents 51, 56, and 60 believed the church was doing enough, highlighting services like counselling and addressing financial challenges. These findings are supported by research showing

that faith communities can help address economic stressors by fostering resource-sharing and psychosocial support networks (Ellison et al., 2011).

Participants noted that the church plays a positive role through:

*Seminars, crusades, and camp meetings (68)*

*Family life classes (72)*

*Guidance, counselling, and spiritual support (73, 75, 79, 82)*

*Elder and pastor mediation (85)*

*Biblical reference as a foundation (86)*

These approaches mirror what is termed "relational spirituality", where institutions provide spiritual tools and community resources to strengthen marriages. Specifically, family life seminars and church counselling align with best practices in religious communities to buffer marital strain (Ellison et al., 2011). The inclusion of Bible verses (86) underlines the doctrinal emphasis that continues to frame SDA approaches to marriage support.

The responses from the participants affirmed the church's role, albeit with caveats regarding effectiveness and limitations. Many respondents acknowledge that the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church at Keroka Station is making commendable efforts to address marital challenges through spiritual, educational, and social support, though some indicate that gaps still remain. A majority of participants agree that the church is actively engaging in addressing marital challenges.

These responses mention methods such as:

*Family life teachings and seminars (87, 91)*

*Biblical grounding and spiritual guidance (90, 93, 94, 95)*

*Support for financial struggles (96)*

*Educational resources and books on marriage and trust (99)*

*Establishment of supportive systems (101)*

*Widespread coverage, addressing about "70% of Christian marriages" (102)*

These strategies align with the framework of "relational spirituality", wherein churches provide not only spiritual nourishment but also practical relationship guidance to improve marital well-being. The use of family life teachings echoes methods seen across Christian denominations where premarital and marital counselling programs serve as preventive and corrective mechanisms (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2008).

Some respondents emphasise that the church provides Biblical instruction and encouragement, offering a theological framework for enduring marital challenges. This reflects the SDA Church's reliance on scripture as a foundational guide to Christian living, marriage included. However, as Mugambi (2011) argues, scriptural fidelity must be balanced with cultural relevance to ensure the church is not just teaching ideals but helping congregants apply them meaningfully in daily life.

The responses from participants 104 to 118 provide a rich overview of perceptions regarding the role of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church at Keroka Station in addressing marital challenges. They highlight varying degrees of satisfaction with church interventions, revealing a generally mixed perception of effectiveness. In contrast, other respondents affirmed that the church is doing something substantial to support couples.

These responses highlight specific interventions such as:

*Pre-marital counselling and open dialogue spaces (109)*

*Teaching humility and promoting family life values (110)*

*Self-reliance programs, which may aim to reduce economic strains (115)*

*Spiritual interventions, such as prayer and counselling (118)*

These actions reflect traditional SDA emphases on family life ministries and Biblical instruction as key tools for guiding couples through challenges (White, 1952). The emphasis on humility and character-building (110) resonates with the denomination's values of Christ-centred marital living. Participant 107 offers a unique angle by raising the issue of age and preparedness for marriage, suggesting that education and awareness at the premarital stage are crucial. This implies a broader need for the church to engage in lifespan marriage education from adolescence through marriage, which is supported in marriage enrichment literature (Fincham & Beach, 2010).

Meanwhile, the suggestion in 112 that counselling must be coupled with material support points to a holistic model of pastoral care. As Mugambi (2011) emphasises, addressing spiritual needs without recognising material and emotional burdens limits the church's real-world impact.

Despite these efforts, many respondents felt the church was not doing enough. Common concerns include:

*Infrequent programs: Respondent 15 noted that seminars are often held only once a year, limiting their impact.*

*Theoretical vs. practical support: Respondent 6 criticised the church for offering "theoretical answers" that may lack real-world applicability.*

*Failure to model teachings: Respondent 33 highlighted the hypocrisy among church leaders who do not model the values they promote.*

*Lack of contextual sensitivity: Some respondents (e.g., 19, 38) indicate that the*

*church might be out of touch with specific challenges, such as widowhood or modern socio-economic pressures.*

These findings align with research indicating that religious institutions often struggle to provide practical and contextual responses to marital issues, especially when leadership is either inadequately trained or inconsistently committed (Thomas & Cornwall, 1990).

Some respondents expressed conditional approval, suggesting the church is trying or doing "enough where it can", but may need to improve. Others acknowledged the church's role in education and encouragement, but implied it may not reach all couples equally. This highlights the importance of scalable and inclusive programming in church ministry efforts.

Interestingly, respondent 27 took a more doctrinal approach, emphasising the marriage oath and personal accountability over institutional support. This suggests a theological orientation where marriage is seen as a covenant primarily between the couple and God, with limited external intervention.

However, a significant number of participants expressed dissatisfaction or complete disapproval of the church's current role:

Respondent 43 noted that;

*Leaders are "preoccupied by personal things" and give minimal time to marriage-related issues.*

Respondent 46 explicitly

*Stated the church "has not done enough," often citing inadequate teaching, lack of leadership commitment, and failure to address real-life problems such as gender biases and polygamy.*

Respondent 52's observed;

*Tolerance or indirect support of polygamy within church circles points to the disconnect*

*between doctrine and practice, a dilemma frequently discussed in African ecclesiastical studies.*

Respondents 62 to 67 uniformly responded “No” or offered a negative critique, emphasising the shortcomings in education, leadership commitment, and practical support systems. This reflects a growing sentiment in church-based research that religious institutions must evolve to provide contextual, relevant, and sustained marital support (Thomas & Cornwall, 1990). Some respondents reflected moderate or ambivalent views, suggesting that the church is “trying” or doing “just average.” This implies partial satisfaction but also highlights a need for improvement in consistency, depth, and frequency of engagement. The responses from participants reflect a continued divergence in opinion on whether the Seventh-day Adventist Church at Keroka Station is doing enough to address the challenges facing Christian marriages. As observed earlier, there were sentiments with a mix of affirmative, negative, and nuanced responses, pointing to both strengths and limitations in church engagement. Similarly, a significant portion of participants expressed dissatisfaction with the church’s performance. Criticisms included:

*Failure to address marriage issues directly (69)*

*Minimal mentorship and inadequate teaching (70, 80, 83)*

*Lack of problem resolution despite counselling efforts (79, 82)*

These concerns are supported by Chitando (2013), who argues that African churches often prioritise doctrinal rhetoric over practical marital support, leaving many struggling couples without applicable solutions. Respondent 78 explicitly states that the church is “not doing enough,” while others note that programs exist but lack follow-through or effectiveness. Thomas and Cornwall’s (1990) emphasise that institutional religious involvement does not always translate to real-life marital

satisfaction, particularly when socio-cultural expectations such as gender roles and fertility are not addressed in nuanced ways. Additionally, respondent 71 offered a middle-ground perspective, noting that while the church is trying, there is a lack of full commitment to Christian teachings by its own members, suggesting the need for internal reflection and reform.

Some participants placed partial responsibility outside the church, citing societal pressure and cultural encroachment:

*Respondents 81 and 84 emphasise that “the society is affecting the church,” indicating that external cultural influences are diluting or interfering with Biblical standards and church policy.*

This reflects an important dynamic within African religious life: the tension between religious doctrine and societal expectations. Chitando (2013) and Mugambi (2011) both note how churches often become battlegrounds between preserving scriptural integrity and conforming to evolving cultural norms, such as economic status or gender roles.

Furthermore, the use of religious literature and structured teaching (99) represents an effort to codify marital values, helping to address issues like trust and communication, core components of marital health as noted by Fincham and Beach (2010).

Some participants suggest that while the church is doing something, it cannot reach everyone, and its approach is sometimes limited. Participant 89’s suggestion to form groups for mutual support highlights the perceived need for peer-based and grassroots support systems within the church to supplement top-down interventions.

Participant 98 underscores that the church’s efforts, while present, may not always be effective, especially if the processes used to enforce or promote adherence to teachings are limited. This

reflects a tension between intent and impact, a theme noted in previous literature. According to Chitando (2013), religious institutions in African settings often lack the structural flexibility to adapt their teachings to the complex realities faced by modern couples, including economic hardship, gender equity, and cultural influences.

A significant number of respondents express dissatisfaction with the church's efforts, consistently stating that the church is not doing enough. The reasons provided include:

*A lack of proactive engagement, such as inadequate support in areas like financial aid or food security (112).*

*A culture of fear and stigma that prevents individuals from openly sharing marital issues (114).*

*Minimal or partial involvement by the church in addressing pressing needs (111).*

This aligns with previous literature indicating that churches often play a reactive rather than proactive role in marriage support, especially in African settings where marriage is both a social and spiritual institution (Chitando, 2013). The lack of adequate systems for conflict resolution and open dialogue can hinder the church's effectiveness, as noted by Mahoney et al. (2001), who emphasises that relational spirituality must be coupled with real-world interventions.

## CONCLUSION

This section presents the conclusions drawn from the study. The study aimed to examine the implications of church doctrines on the stability of Christian marriages among SDA members in Keroka Station, explore the challenges that undermine marital stability despite these doctrines, assess the perception of Christian marriage and its values, and evaluate the church's support systems in upholding marriage values. The conclusions are derived from qualitative data collected from the

respondents and reflect the core findings of the study. These insights are essential in understanding the current dynamics affecting Christian marriages within the church context.

## Challenges to the Stability of Christian Marriages Despite Doctrines

Despite the presence of strong church doctrines, the study found that Christian marriages continue to face significant challenges. Infidelity, financial instability, secular cultural influences, inadequate communication, and declining commitment to church values were frequently cited as barriers to marital stability. Participants expressed concern that while the church addresses these issues doctrinally, its practical response, especially in areas of mentorship, follow-up support, and confidential counselling, is insufficient. This disconnect suggests a need for the church to enhance its capacity to address contemporary marital issues through more responsive and holistic support systems.

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