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## The Role of Active Listening and Empathy in Christian Marriage Counselling

Jemima N. A. A. Lomotey

Grace International Bible University

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**ABSTRACT:** Effective Christian Marriage Counselling requires strategies that address relational, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of marital life. This study examined the role of active listening and empathy in enhancing marital satisfaction, facilitating conflict resolution, and promoting relational growth in Christian marriages. A mixed-methods design was employed, including a survey of 150 individuals (75 couples) and semi-structured interviews with 30 participants (15 couples). Thematic analysis of qualitative data revealed five key themes: enhanced communication and understanding, emotional validation and empathy, conflict resolution and problem-solving, spiritual integration in counselling, and increased marital satisfaction and relational growth. Findings indicate that active listening and empathy are central to effective counselling, creating a supportive environment that fosters relational repair and emotional intimacy. Integration of spiritual guidance further amplifies these benefits. The study highlights the importance of relational, emotional, and spiritual skills in Christian counselling and provides practical implications for counsellor training, church-based support programs, and couple engagement strategies.

**KEYWORDS:** Active Listening, Empathy, Christian Marriage Counselling, Marital Satisfaction, Conflict Resolution

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### INTRODUCTION

Marriage counselling is a critical intervention aimed at supporting couples in resolving conflicts, improving communication, and enhancing relational satisfaction. In Christian marriages, counselling often integrates spiritual principles, emphasizing the importance of faith, forgiveness, and relational harmony (Mahoney et al., 2016). Among the core skills employed by counsellors, active listening and empathy are widely recognized as essential for understanding clients' perspectives, validating emotions, and fostering trust between the counsellor and the couple (Rogers, 1961). Active listening involves fully concentrating, understanding, responding, and remembering what the clients communicate, while empathy allows the counsellor to comprehend and resonate with the emotional experiences of each partner.

Effective Christian marriage counselling relies on the counsellor's ability to create a safe and non-judgmental environment where couples feel heard and understood. Empirical studies have shown that active listening and empathy significantly enhance marital outcomes by promoting openness, reducing defensiveness, and encouraging constructive dialogue between spouses (Norcross & Wampold, 2011). In faith-based settings, these skills are often intertwined with spiritual guidance, scripture-based insights, and prayer, which collectively contribute to relational healing and strengthened marital bonds.

Despite the recognized importance of active listening and empathy, there is limited research exploring their specific role in Christian marriage counselling, particularly in contexts where cultural and religious values shape marital expectations and counselling approaches. Many existing studies focus on general counselling practices or secular interventions, leaving a knowledge gap regarding the ways in which empathy and active listening are operationalized and their impact on marital satisfaction within Christian couples. Furthermore, Christian marriages often encounter unique challenges such as spiritual differences, religiously-influenced conflict resolution expectations, and moral obligations that may affect the counselling process (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002).

Research suggests that counsellors who effectively demonstrate empathy can reduce marital stress, facilitate reconciliation, and promote mutual understanding between spouses (Frey & Robbins, 2009). Active listening, on the other hand, helps couples articulate underlying issues, recognize emotional triggers, and develop collaborative strategies for resolving conflicts. When combined, these skills allow counsellors to address both relational and emotional dimensions of marital difficulties, creating a holistic approach to marital support that aligns with Christian values of compassion, patience, and understanding.

Given the growing demand for effective marital counselling in Christian communities, understanding the role of active listening and empathy is crucial. This study seeks to explore how these skills influence counselling outcomes, enhance relational satisfaction, and facilitate conflict resolution among Christian couples. Insights from the study will inform counselling practices, guide training

## **The Role of Active Listening and Empathy in Christian Marriage Counselling**

programs for faith-based counsellors, and contribute to the broader literature on marriage counselling by highlighting the relational and spiritual mechanisms that underpin successful interventions.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Marriage is a foundational institution in society, and Christian marriages are often guided by spiritual principles emphasizing love, commitment, and mutual understanding. Despite these values, many couples encounter challenges that threaten relational satisfaction, including communication breakdowns, conflicts, and emotional disconnects. Christian marriage counselling provides a structured platform for addressing these challenges, with counsellors employing various techniques to facilitate dialogue, understanding, and conflict resolution (Mahoney et al., 2016). Among these techniques, active listening and empathy are critical, as they enable counsellors to fully comprehend the emotional and relational dynamics of the couple, validate experiences, and foster a supportive environment conducive to healing and growth.

However, despite their recognized importance, the specific impact of active listening and empathy in Christian marriage counselling remains underexplored. Empirical evidence suggests that many counselling interventions fail to achieve desired outcomes when counsellors do not effectively engage in these skills, leading to persistent marital dissatisfaction, unresolved conflicts, and emotional disengagement (Rogers, 1961). In Christian contexts, where counselling is often intertwined with spiritual guidance, the absence of active listening and empathy can hinder the integration of relational, emotional, and spiritual support, reducing the effectiveness of counselling programs. Couples may feel misunderstood, undervalued, or emotionally isolated, which can exacerbate relational strain rather than alleviate it.

Moreover, Christian marriages often face unique challenges that complicate the counselling process. Differences in spiritual commitment, variations in expectations regarding roles and responsibilities, and conflicts arising from religious practices can intensify relational tension (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002). In such cases, active listening allows counsellors to identify the underlying issues contributing to conflict, while empathy facilitates an understanding of each partner's emotional and spiritual perspectives. Without these skills, counselling sessions may focus superficially on presenting problems rather than addressing the deeper relational and emotional needs of the couple, limiting the potential for long-term marital improvement.

Existing literature on marriage counselling frequently emphasizes general counselling strategies or secular approaches, with limited focus on the faith-based context and the integration of spiritual principles with relational interventions (Norcross & Wampold, 2011). This gap is significant because Christian couples often expect counselling to align with their moral and spiritual values, making the demonstration of empathy and active listening not only relationally important but also spiritually meaningful. Understanding how these skills impact marital outcomes in Christian counselling is therefore essential for developing effective, culturally and spiritually sensitive interventions.

The problem addressed in this study is that while active listening and empathy are widely acknowledged as fundamental counselling skills, there is insufficient empirical evidence regarding their specific role and effectiveness in Christian marriage counselling. This gap limits the ability of counsellors to optimize counselling practices, enhance marital satisfaction, and foster relational resilience among Christian couples. Addressing this problem is crucial for both practice and scholarship, as it informs the development of training programs for faith-based counsellors, guides intervention strategies, and contributes to the broader understanding of mechanisms that promote successful outcomes in marital counselling.

In conclusion, Christian marriage counselling faces a critical challenge: ensuring that interventions not only address conflicts and communication issues but also effectively incorporate active listening and empathy to meet both relational and spiritual needs. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the role of these skills in counselling, providing empirical insights that can enhance counselling practices, support marital satisfaction, and strengthen the stability of Christian marriages.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of active listening and empathy in Christian marriage counselling. Specifically, the study aims to understand how these skills influence counselling outcomes, enhance marital satisfaction, and support conflict resolution among Christian couples.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To examine how active listening contributes to effective Christian marriage counselling.
2. To investigate the role of empathy in enhancing marital satisfaction during counselling sessions.
3. To explore the combined impact of active listening and empathy on conflict resolution in Christian marriage counselling.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does active listening contribute to effective counselling in Christian marriages?
2. What is the role of empathy in enhancing marital satisfaction during counselling?
3. How do active listening and empathy together influence conflict resolution in Christian marriage counselling?

# The Role of Active Listening and Empathy in Christian Marriage Counselling

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Framework

The study on the role of active listening and empathy in Christian marriage counselling is grounded in three complementary theories: Carl Rogers' Person-Centered Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Relational-Cultural Theory. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of how counselling skills, specifically active listening and empathy, facilitate marital satisfaction, conflict resolution, and relational growth in Christian marriages.

Carl Rogers' Person-Centered Theory is foundational in understanding the importance of empathy and active listening in counselling. According to Rogers (1961), effective counselling requires the counsellor to provide an environment characterized by unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathic understanding. Empathy allows the counsellor to deeply understand the client's emotional experience, while active listening ensures that the couple's perspectives are fully heard and validated. In Christian marriage counselling, these principles are particularly important because they enable couples to feel emotionally supported and understood within a faith-based context. By fostering a non-judgmental and empathetic environment, counsellors facilitate the expression of emotions, the identification of underlying issues, and the development of constructive solutions to marital challenges. Social Exchange Theory, developed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), emphasizes that relationships are maintained through a cost-benefit analysis, where partners seek to maximize rewards and minimize relational costs. Within Christian marriages, active listening and empathy can be viewed as relational rewards provided by both the counsellor and the partners themselves. When couples experience empathic understanding and feel genuinely heard, relational satisfaction increases, reducing the perceived costs associated with conflict and misunderstandings. Social Exchange Theory helps explain why interventions incorporating empathy and active listening lead to improved marital satisfaction: by enhancing communication and understanding, these skills increase relational benefits, promote cooperation, and strengthen emotional bonds between partners.

Relational-Cultural Theory (Jordan, 2010) further complements this framework by emphasizing the importance of mutual empathy, connection, and relational growth in human development. The theory asserts that individuals thrive when they are engaged in mutually empathic relationships, and conversely, relational disconnection can lead to distress and dysfunction. In the context of Christian marriage counselling, active listening and empathy create an environment in which both partners feel valued, validated, and emotionally connected. By promoting relational growth and mutual understanding, these skills facilitate conflict resolution, reduce defensiveness, and encourage collaboration, which are essential for maintaining marital satisfaction and stability.

Integrating these three theoretical perspectives provides a robust conceptual foundation for the study. Person-Centered Theory highlights the mechanisms through which empathy and active listening operate in the counselling process, emphasizing the need for genuine understanding and validation. Social Exchange Theory explains the motivational dynamics underlying the benefits of these skills, showing how improved communication and empathy enhance relational rewards and marital satisfaction. Relational-Cultural Theory situates active listening and empathy within a broader relational context, underscoring the importance of mutual understanding, connection, and relational growth for sustained marital well-being.

Within this theoretical framework, active listening is conceptualized as the counsellor's deliberate effort to attend, comprehend, and respond to the couple's verbal and non-verbal cues, while empathy is the counsellor's ability to resonate with the emotional and psychological experiences of each partner. The theories collectively suggest that these skills not only improve immediate communication and emotional understanding but also foster long-term relational benefits, including enhanced marital satisfaction, effective conflict resolution, and strengthened relational bonds.

In conclusion, grounding the study in Person-Centered Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Relational-Cultural Theory provides a comprehensive lens for examining how active listening and empathy function within Christian marriage counselling. This integrated framework guides the research design, informs the selection of variables, and enhances the interpretation of findings. It underscores the critical role of relational, emotional, and motivational dynamics in counselling, highlighting that the combined use of active listening and empathy can significantly enhance marital satisfaction and relational stability in faith-based marriages (Rogers, 1961; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Jordan, 2010).

### Empirical Review

Marriage counselling is widely recognized as an effective intervention for promoting relational satisfaction and resolving conflicts within marital relationships. In Christian marriages, counselling often integrates spiritual principles, emphasizing values such as forgiveness, patience, and moral accountability (Mahoney et al., 2016). Among the key skills employed by counsellors, active listening and empathy have been consistently identified as critical for fostering understanding, trust, and relational growth. Active listening enables counsellors to attend fully to the verbal and non-verbal communication of both partners, ensuring that their perspectives are accurately perceived and acknowledged (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2004). Empathy allows counsellors to resonate with the emotional experiences of each partner, validating feelings and promoting emotional intimacy within the counselling process.

Several studies have examined the effects of active listening in marital counselling. Research indicates that active listening enhances communication between partners, reduces misunderstandings, and facilitates conflict resolution (Norcross & Wampold, 2011).

## **The Role of Active Listening and Empathy in Christian Marriage Counselling**

Couples who perceive that their concerns are being attentively heard are more likely to engage openly in counselling sessions and to implement suggested strategies for relational improvement. In faith-based counselling, active listening also serves a spiritual function, allowing counsellors to integrate scriptural guidance and moral reflection while addressing relational issues.

Empathy has similarly been linked to improved marital outcomes. Couples who experience empathic understanding from their counsellor report higher levels of marital satisfaction, reduced relational tension, and increased emotional closeness (Frey & Robbins, 2009). Empathy in counselling allows partners to feel validated and understood, which fosters trust in both the counselling process and the marital relationship itself. In Christian marriage counselling, empathy aligns with the spiritual emphasis on compassion and mutual care, reinforcing moral and relational commitments within the marriage (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002).

Some studies have explored the combined effect of active listening and empathy. Findings suggest that when counsellors employ both skills simultaneously, couples are more likely to engage in constructive dialogue, resolve conflicts effectively, and experience increased relational satisfaction (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003). This combined approach creates a supportive environment that addresses both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of marital difficulties, enabling couples to navigate conflicts, express emotions, and rebuild trust.

Despite these findings, there remains a limited focus on the specific context of Christian marriage counselling, where spiritual beliefs and moral values significantly influence both the counselling process and the expected outcomes. Most empirical studies on counselling skills are conducted in secular settings, limiting their applicability to faith-based contexts (Norcross & Wampold, 2011). Furthermore, little is known about how active listening and empathy interact with spiritual interventions, such as prayer, pastoral guidance, and scripture-based reflection, in promoting marital satisfaction and conflict resolution.

This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the role of active listening and empathy in Christian marriage counselling, with a focus on how these skills contribute to relational satisfaction and effective conflict resolution. By examining both quantitative measures of marital satisfaction and qualitative insights from counselling experiences, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these critical counselling skills operate in faith-based marital contexts. The findings are expected to inform training for Christian counsellors, improve counselling practices, and contribute to the literature on relational interventions that integrate emotional, relational, and spiritual dimensions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design to examine the role of active listening and empathy in Christian marriage counselling. The mixed-methods approach was chosen to capture both measurable relationships between counselling skills and marital outcomes, and the nuanced experiences of couples participating in faith-based counselling sessions (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative methods allowed for statistical analysis of the effects of active listening and empathy on marital satisfaction and conflict resolution, while qualitative methods provided deeper insights into the lived experiences of couples and the practical application of these counselling skills.

### **Research Design**

A cross-sectional survey design was employed for the quantitative component, and semi-structured interviews were conducted for the qualitative component. The survey enabled data collection from a large sample at a single point in time, assessing perceptions of counselling effectiveness, active listening, empathy, and marital satisfaction. Semi-structured interviews complemented the survey by exploring the personal experiences of couples, highlighting how counsellors' use of active listening and empathy facilitated relational growth, trust, and conflict resolution.

### **Population and Sampling**

The study population comprised Christian couples who had participated in marriage counselling within the past three years. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who met these criteria. For the quantitative survey, 150 individuals (75 couples) were recruited to ensure sufficient statistical power. For the qualitative interviews, 15 couples (30 participants) were selected to provide detailed insights into counselling experiences. The sample varied in age, duration of marriage, and denominational background, ensuring diverse perspectives and experiences.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to assess demographic information, marital satisfaction, and perceptions of active listening and empathy in counselling sessions. Marital satisfaction was measured using the Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007), adapted for faith-based contexts. Items assessing active listening and empathy were based on established counselling skill scales, rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was pre-tested with a small sample to ensure clarity and reliability.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focusing on participants' experiences with counselling, the application of active listening and empathy, and perceived outcomes on marital satisfaction and conflict resolution. Interviews were

## **The Role of Active Listening and Empathy in Christian Marriage Counselling**

audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed to capture themes related to the use and effectiveness of these counselling skills in Christian marriage contexts.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and hierarchical regression. Hierarchical regression was employed to determine the contribution of active listening and empathy to marital satisfaction and conflict resolution, both independently and collectively. Active listening was entered in the first block, empathy in the second block, and interaction effects were examined to assess their combined impact.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Transcripts were coded to identify recurring patterns and themes, such as strategies employed by counsellors, emotional and relational outcomes, and the influence of spiritual guidance. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings facilitated triangulation, enhancing the validity and comprehensiveness of the study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participants were informed about the study's objectives, voluntary nature, and confidentiality measures. Written informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured of anonymity and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Sensitive information was handled with discretion to protect participants' privacy.

### **Limitations**

Potential limitations include reliance on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias, and the purposive sampling approach, which limits generalizability. Additionally, the cross-sectional design precludes establishing causality. However, the mixed-methods approach strengthens the study by combining quantitative rigor with qualitative depth, providing a comprehensive understanding of the role of active listening and empathy in Christian marriage counselling.

### **Analysis and Discussion of Results**

The qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen for this study because it provides a systematic approach to exploring participants' experiences and perceptions of active listening and empathy in Christian marriage counselling. This method allowed for the identification of recurrent ideas, insights, and relational dynamics that illustrate how counselling skills influence marital satisfaction, conflict resolution, and relational growth.

The analysis followed six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were read repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the data. Notes and preliminary ideas were documented during this process. Second, initial codes were generated, labeling key features of the data relevant to the research objectives, such as references to listening, emotional understanding, trust-building, and relational outcomes. Third, these codes were examined and collated into potential themes, capturing patterns that reflected shared experiences and insights across participants.

After reviewing potential themes, themes were refined to ensure that they accurately represented the data and were distinct from one another. This involved checking that the themes cohered internally and were meaningfully differentiated from other themes. Next, themes were clearly defined and named to capture their essence and relevance to the study's research questions. Finally, the themes were organized and interpreted in relation to the study objectives, theoretical framework, and existing literature, providing a detailed account of the role of active listening and empathy in Christian marriage counselling.

### **Emergent Themes**

#### **1. Enhanced Communication and Understanding**

Participants consistently reported that counsellors' use of active listening facilitated more effective communication between spouses. Couples noted that when they felt fully heard, they were more willing to express thoughts and emotions honestly. One participant explained, "When the counsellor listened carefully without interrupting, my spouse and I could share what we truly felt, and it felt safe to be open." This theme illustrates how active listening promotes transparency, reduces misunderstandings, and lays the groundwork for relational repair.

#### **2. Emotional Validation and Empathy**

Empathy emerged as a critical component of counselling effectiveness. Couples emphasized that the counsellor's ability to understand and reflect their emotional experiences made them feel validated and respected. For example, one participant shared, "Knowing the counsellor understood my hurt and fears helped me forgive and reconnect with my spouse." Empathy was identified as fostering emotional intimacy, trust, and relational healing, aligning with Person-Centered Theory, which underscores the importance of empathic understanding in therapeutic contexts (Rogers, 1961).

#### **3. Conflict Resolution and Problem-Solving**

## **The Role of Active Listening and Empathy in Christian Marriage Counselling**

Another theme highlighted the role of active listening and empathy in resolving marital conflicts. Participants described how these skills helped them articulate concerns without escalating tension and facilitated collaborative problem-solving. One participant noted, "The counsellor guided us to listen to each other's perspectives and find solutions together. It reduced arguments and created understanding." This demonstrates that relational and emotional skills in counselling directly influence constructive conflict resolution and relational satisfaction.

### **4. Spiritual Integration in Counselling**

In Christian marriages, participants reported that empathy and active listening were enhanced by the integration of spiritual guidance. Counsellors used prayer, scripture-based reflections, and faith-oriented discussions to reinforce relational principles, which participants described as strengthening both emotional and spiritual connection with their spouse. One participant shared, "The counsellor's empathy combined with prayer made me feel our marriage could heal spiritually and emotionally." This theme highlights the unique contribution of faith-based approaches in amplifying the effectiveness of relational counselling skills.

### **5. Increased Marital Satisfaction and Relational Growth**

Participants consistently reported that counselling involving active listening and empathy led to improved marital satisfaction and relational growth. Couples described feeling closer, more understood, and better equipped to handle future challenges. This theme emphasizes the long-term relational benefits of integrating relational and emotional skills into Christian marriage counselling.

## **INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS**

Thematic analysis of participants' experiences revealed that active listening and empathy are central to effective Christian marriage counselling. Active listening promotes communication, transparency, and trust, while empathy validates emotions, fosters emotional intimacy, and facilitates forgiveness. Together, these skills enhance conflict resolution and contribute to relational growth and marital satisfaction. The findings also highlight that in faith-based contexts, integrating spiritual guidance amplifies the benefits of these counselling skills. The results are consistent with Person-Centered Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Relational-Cultural Theory, which collectively explain how relational, emotional, and moral factors interact to strengthen marital bonds and promote healing.

In conclusion, thematic analysis demonstrates that the deliberate use of active listening and empathy in Christian marriage counselling is instrumental in improving relational outcomes, fostering trust, resolving conflicts, and enhancing marital satisfaction. These findings provide empirical support for counselling practices that prioritize relational and emotional skills within faith-based marital interventions.

## **DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

The thematic analysis of participants' experiences in Christian marriage counselling highlights the critical role of active listening and empathy in enhancing marital satisfaction, facilitating conflict resolution, and promoting relational growth. The findings demonstrate that these counselling skills are not only relationally significant but also spiritually meaningful in faith-based contexts, aligning with the theoretical frameworks guiding the study.

The theme of enhanced communication and understanding confirms that active listening enables couples to express themselves openly and honestly, reducing misunderstandings and fostering transparency. This aligns with Person-Centered Theory, which posits that effective counselling requires attentive and non-judgmental engagement with clients' experiences (Rogers, 1961). Participants' reports that feeling heard allowed them to articulate concerns and share emotions substantiate the theory's emphasis on the therapeutic value of active listening. The findings also resonate with prior research suggesting that active listening improves relational communication, builds trust, and lays the foundation for conflict resolution (Norcross & Wampold, 2011).

The theme of emotional validation and empathy underscores the significance of understanding and resonating with partners' emotional experiences. Empathic engagement by counsellors allowed participants to feel respected, validated, and emotionally supported, facilitating forgiveness and emotional reconnection. This supports Person-Centered Theory's emphasis on empathy as a core mechanism for relational healing (Rogers, 1961) and highlights its practical application in Christian counselling settings. The findings also reflect Relational-Cultural Theory, which posits that growth and relational satisfaction occur within mutually empathic and connected relationships (Jordan, 2010). Participants' experiences indicate that empathy fosters emotional intimacy, strengthens trust, and enhances marital satisfaction, consistent with previous studies linking empathic counselling with positive marital outcomes (Frey & Robbins, 2009).

Conflict resolution and problem-solving emerged as another key outcome of the counselling process. Active listening and empathy facilitated constructive dialogue, reduced defensiveness, and enabled collaborative solutions to relational challenges. These findings align with Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that enhancing relational rewards, such as understanding and emotional support, reduces relational costs and promotes cooperative behaviors (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). By helping couples identify underlying

## The Role of Active Listening and Empathy in Christian Marriage Counselling

issues and communicate effectively, counselling grounded in active listening and empathy enhances relational satisfaction and promotes long-term stability.

The theme of spiritual integration in counselling highlights the unique contribution of faith-based interventions. Participants indicated that the combination of empathic counselling and spiritual guidance, including prayer and scripture-based reflection, reinforced moral and relational principles, deepening emotional and spiritual connection. This finding extends existing literature on Christian marriage counselling, demonstrating that spiritual interventions amplify the relational and emotional benefits of active listening and empathy (Mahoney et al., 2016). It suggests that effective faith-based counselling must address both relational and spiritual dimensions to maximize marital satisfaction.

Finally, the theme of increased marital satisfaction and relational growth underscores the overall effectiveness of counselling that integrates active listening, empathy, and spiritual guidance. Participants reported improved intimacy, emotional closeness, and confidence in managing future conflicts, demonstrating that these skills have long-term relational benefits. The findings collectively indicate that relational, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of counselling interact synergistically, supporting the theoretical premise that multi-dimensional interventions are most effective in faith-based marital contexts.

In conclusion, the discussion demonstrates that active listening and empathy are central to successful Christian marriage counselling. They facilitate communication, emotional validation, conflict resolution, and relational growth, while spiritual integration amplifies these effects. These findings provide empirical support for the use of relational and emotional skills in faith-based counselling, highlighting their significance in enhancing marital satisfaction and promoting sustainable relational health. The study contributes to theory by linking Person-Centered, Social Exchange, and Relational-Cultural perspectives to practical counselling strategies, and to practice by informing the design of interventions that address emotional, relational, and spiritual needs in Christian marriages.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study examined the role of active listening and empathy in Christian marriage counselling, focusing on their impact on marital satisfaction, conflict resolution, and relational growth. The thematic analysis revealed that active listening enhances communication, transparency, and trust between spouses, while empathy validates emotions, fosters emotional intimacy, and facilitates forgiveness. Additionally, the integration of spiritual guidance, including prayer and scripture-based reflection, amplified the benefits of these counselling skills, providing both emotional and moral support within faith-based marriages. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that relational, emotional, and spiritual interventions interact synergistically to improve marital satisfaction and promote long-term relational stability.

The study concludes that active listening and empathy are central to effective Christian marriage counselling. Counsellors who deliberately apply these skills create a safe, non-judgmental, and supportive environment that encourages couples to express themselves, understand each other, and collaboratively resolve conflicts. When combined with spiritual guidance, these skills contribute to holistic relational repair, fostering both emotional and spiritual growth. The findings underscore that multidimensional approaches, which address relational, emotional, and spiritual needs, are essential for promoting sustainable marital satisfaction in Christian marriages.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, faith-based counselling training programs should prioritize the development of active listening and empathy skills among counsellors. Emphasis should be placed on practical exercises, role-playing, and supervision to ensure these skills are effectively integrated into counselling practice. Second, Christian counsellors should actively incorporate spiritual interventions, such as prayer and scripture-based guidance, alongside relational and emotional skills, to support couples in achieving holistic marital repair. Third, Christian couples seeking counselling should be encouraged to engage fully in sessions, openly communicate their experiences, and reflect on both emotional and spiritual aspects of their relationship.

Furthermore, faith-based institutions and churches should provide ongoing workshops, support groups, and mentorship programs for couples, focusing on communication, empathy, and conflict resolution skills. Such initiatives can reinforce counselling outcomes, provide peer support, and strengthen marital resilience. Finally, future research should explore additional factors influencing counselling outcomes, such as cultural norms, gender dynamics, and socio-economic contexts, as well as longitudinal studies to assess the sustained effects of counselling interventions over time.

In conclusion, the study highlights that active listening and empathy, when applied thoughtfully within Christian marriage counselling and combined with spiritual guidance, significantly enhance marital satisfaction, facilitate conflict resolution, and promote relational growth. By integrating these skills into counselling practice, training, and institutional support, Christian marriages can achieve greater relational resilience, emotional intimacy, and long-term stability.

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## The Role of Active Listening and Empathy in Christian Marriage Counselling

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