

## **Decolonizing Parallel Marriage Ceremonies in the Ghanaian Context**

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**ABSTRACT:** *“This research sought to answer the double or parallel marriage rites performed by couples and how it affects the institution of marriage in Winneba in the Efutu Municipality of Ghana. A qualitative approach was used to provide a successful conduct of the research given the complexity of the phenomenon under study. The research design used for the study was a case study. The targeted population for the study were married people who performed parallel marriage ceremonies, adults who have reached their marital age but are not married, parents, opinion leaders (pastors) and marriage counsellors. In all, fifteen individuals were purposively and conveniently chosen for the study. This consists of five (5) married individuals who performed parallel marriage ceremonies, four (4) unmarried individuals who have reached their marital but are not married, two (2) opinion leaders, two (2) parents and two (2) marriage counsellors. The purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used to select the elements such as married individuals who performed parallel marriage ceremonies, adults who have reached their marital age but are not married, parents and opinion leaders (pastors). Also, a critical case sampling technique was used to sample the marriage counsellors involved in the research work. A semi-structured interview guide was employed for the data collection. It was revealed that the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies has contributed to the problems of marriage than it was ever imagined. Marriage is seen to be an expensive venture by most of the unmarried individuals. This perception has created fear in the hearts of many unemployed and ungainful employed young individuals who have found their love but have no means to tie the knot. Cohabitation, considered against societal norms many years ago, is now accepted and endorsed by society due to the rigorous dynamics involved in getting married in the Ghanaian context these days. It is, therefore, inferred from the conclusion and recommended that the State and other agencies involved in contracting marriages should come together to find better ways through which the effects of the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies on the institution of marriage can be reduced or eradicated.”*

**KEYWORDS:** dual marriage, effects, Ghana, marriage, marriage ceremony, parallel marriage

## INTRODUCTION

According to Elyasu (2020, p. iv), “Throughout the world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a milestone in an adult’s life.” These ceremonies have gotten much attention in various societies because of how the institution of marriage is cherished. This is because marriage occurs in all eras of history and all cultures. Every culture seems to have its theories about the origin of marriage and how it is celebrated. For instance, in China, the story about the origin of marriage is centred on the marriage of Nuwa and Fu Xi, who were once sisters and brothers respectively. The story tells about how they invented marriage procedures to guide subsequent marriage celebrations after they have gotten married. It was said that the use of fans by the women in China during their marriage ceremony was done by the Nuwa to cover her blushing face to hide her shyness. Every ethnic group may have many mythical stories about their marriage ceremonies of which Africans are not an exception.

“Marriages in African nations were severely touched and moulded by the West’s colonialism of Africa, and hence exist as an institution distorted by Western beliefs and concepts” (Omotoso, 1998 cited in Dankwa et al., 2022, p. 19). According Hastings (1973):

“This perplexing situation has confronted many African Christian couples in the wake of church marriage rules and discipline. The lack of recognition of customary marriage by the mission churches for church and government purposes has resulted in numerous Christian dilemmas over marriage. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to say that at marriage, African Christian couples end up with a particular sense of being torn at the three corners of a triangle: the claims of African tradition, the claims of a new-found faith, Christianity, and the claims of the State” (p. 45).

Globalisation, modernisation, and religion have all influenced the way marriage is contracted these days (Owurasah, 2015). The differences in the notion of marriage contraction have their effects. As a result of the influences of social change on marriage and its associated negative effects, Ameyaw, Dankwa, and Eshun (2023) assert that “differences in values and beliefs can cause tension and miscommunication in a marriage” (p. 44). In recent times the contraction of marriage has taken a new dimension. The marriage ceremony though a key element in the process of marriage has become a very fashionable event in many societies, especially, among Christians (Onuorah, 2013). This has also influenced would-be couples who are poorly prepared towards taking on marital roles as compared to how they prepare for the marriage ceremony (Booth & Edwards 1985; Thiombiano, 2017). In our current societies, “the church wedding ceremonies has been seen as one of the complex transitions into marriage the would-be couples have to go through” (Erlank, 2014).

Society is also, acculturated to think that people who perform only the traditional or customary marriage rite are poor or not civilized or unchristian and unfashionable (Obudho, 1985). As a result, would-be young couples are forced indirectly to undertake both the customary and the ordinance or church marriage (parallel marriage ceremonies) to avoid ridicule (Onyima, 2003). Parallel marriage ceremonies “refer to a situation in which more than one marriage ceremony is performed, usually by Christian would-be couples, whereas any of the ceremonies suffice to pronounce the couple married” (Dankwa et al., 2022).

Smith (1997) stated that “modern-day family sociologists concentrate more on marriages than the marriage ceremony. Although it has been realized that many have written about marriage ceremonies (Agboka, 2008; Mensah, 2013; Obudho, 1985; Onyima, 2003), to the best of our knowledge, there is not enough literature on parallel marriage ceremonies. This research seeks to fill the gap in the literature concerning the effects of double or parallel marriage ceremonies. This has influenced in doing an exploratory study on parallel marriage ceremonies in Winneba in the Efutu Municipality.

The purpose of this study was to analyse the effects of the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies. Therefore, the research was guided by this research question - *How does the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies affect marriage as an institution?* The scope of the study was delimited in content to the effects of the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies. Also, it was delimited in setting to Winneba in the Efutu Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. Furthermore, in context, it was delimited to the Christian community and viewed as a religious institution.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature underpinning this research was based on several researchers’ in-depth work done on the concept of marriage and scholarly discussion geared towards parallel marriage. This paper can best be understood through an arty sociological lens.

### **The Concept of Marriage**

The universality of marriage should have influenced a generally accepted definition. This assumption has never been the case, thereby making a universally accepted institution like marriage difficult to define (Nukunya, 2003). The definition of marriage can be looked at from different angles. Thus, the socio-cultural viewpoint, the religious (Christianity) and the civil or the State’s point of view. Looking at the definition of marriage from these viewpoints makes it clear that although marriage is considered universal, not all definitions can meet the socio-cultural, religious and national constitutions of all societies or cultures (Sheikh et al., 2013). The concept of marriage is, therefore, looked at from three perspectives, namely, the customary (socio-cultural) concept of marriage, and the Christian and civil concepts of marriage.

A definition by Seligman and a Committee of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland cited in the work of Tambiah (1966) says that marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognized as legitimate offspring of both parents. This particular definition has made authorities ask questions about marriage being used to determine the legitimacy of the children born in the marriage by the wife (Leach, 1971; Nukunya, 2003). Are all children born in marriage legitimate children of the couple? To these authors, marriage is how society can be preserved through procreation. The above authorities have also asserted that marriage is socially constructed. Hence it needs to be contracted to meet the needs of the society that oversees it (Ngundu, 2011). This indicates that every society has some form of marriage.

### **Monogamous marriage**

Monogamy according to Lewis et al. (2011), is a form of marriage whereby a man marries one woman at a time. The customary laws of Ghana do not frown on monogamous marriages. Considering the available literature, no man was and has been forced to marry more than one except in extreme cases where duty demands. For instance, with the Akan tradition, some chiefs are made to marry in addition to their wife after their enstoolment. These women given to the chiefs in marriage are called “Nkunguayere” literally meaning stool wife. This means that whoever becomes a chief is obliged to marry any of such women assigned to the stool. Some of the men who marry more than one wife are customarily influenced by some factors which have been discussed under polygyny in the next sub-section.

### **Polygynous marriage**

Polygamy is an umbrella term for ‘polygyny’ and ‘polyandry’. The Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (2019) asserted that polygyny is a form of marriage whereby one husband simultaneously marries two or more wives, and polyandry is where a wife marries many husbands simultaneously. Polygamy is a broad term which is often used interchangeably with polygyny so will it be in this work. Hammer et al. (2008) stated that genetic analysis in some times past, few men mated polygynously and enjoyed a large reproductive success. Polygynous mating eventually became a polygynous marriage.

According to the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (2019), polygyny is recognized by the customary laws of some countries in West Africa of which Ghana is one but since the colonial days, it has been singled out as a form of marriage that is against the Western morals and the right of the women (Bowan, 2013). This was evident in the 1884 Marriage Act which sought to ban polygamous marriage in the then Gold Coast. Although the Marriage Act of 1884 was somehow against polygamy, Nukunya (2003) asserted that in most Ghanaian societies it is customary right for the wife to ask the husband to take additional wife to help her manage the home. To him, some women even go to the extent of wooing a girl she is pleased with for her husband. According

to Nukunya (2003), the following are some of the reasons that will compel an African man to marry more than one:

- Some men claim that women in monogamous marriages are not as obedient as those in polygamous marriages.
- Some men also choose polygyny for economic benefits. That is more wives and more children for farm work.
- Some may marry more than one woman as a means of getting assistance for their wives.

Finally, according to Sahel (2019), most of the West African countries' civil laws also recognise and regulate polygamous marriage and allow a man to marry up to four women under certain conditions, which to Sahel (2019) include the financial capacity of the man to support multiple wives and families. This is in agreement with the Laws of Ghana which has it that all marriages contracted under the customary laws are potentially polygamous (Ermakova, Protopopova, & Pukhart, 2019). Although the Marriage Act 1884-1985 makes provision for the registration of customary marriage, its polygamous nature persists (Graphic Online, 2019, Sept., 08). This argument shows that any would-be couple who decides not to perform only the customary marriage but also registers it under the customary laws has accepted to engage in a potentially "polygamous" marriage. This is simply because marriage under our customary laws is polygamous.

### **Christian Concept of Marriage**

The laws of Ghana touch on two religions when it comes to marriage. That is the Christian marriage and the Islamic or the Marriage of Mohamadans (Marriages Act, 1884-1985 Cap. 127). This work focuses on or is limited to the Christian marriage as a religious institution. This makes all the religious concepts of marriage to be delimited to Christianity. First of all, since the Bible is the manual for Christians, the study considers what it says about marriage. According to Brooks (2000), marriage was not man's idea, it was God's. In the books of Genesis 2:20b-24 and Genesis 1:28, marriage was fully defined as:

“But Adam no suitable helper was found. So, the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man and He brought her to the man... For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:20b-24. NIV) God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it... (Genesis 1:28 NIV)

Also, both Jesus Christ and Saint Paul, the most prolific and famous first-century Christian, emphasized marriage as an image of the Kingdom of God, analogizing the

love and sacrifice that spouses offer one another to the love and sacrifice offered by God to God's "bride," the Church (DeSimone, 2003).

In the early church history, marriage was considered to be a sacrament (Thornton et al., 2007). In addition, the establishment of the autonomous Roman Catholic Church through the papacy of Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) emphasized the sacramental value of marriage (DeSimone, 2003). Christians see marriage as God ordained and He had a plan for it. Christians know that marriage is a solemn covenant, and marriage vows are forever. Christian doctrine teaches that marriage is a covenant and for that "God hates divorce" (Malachi 2:13-16; Proverbs 2:16-17NIV). These suggest that marriage is not just a social institution but a covenant between a man and a woman and the God who instituted it (Brooks, 2000). Also, Harper (1949) added that the consideration of marriage as a sacred contract is part of Hebrew and Christian religious traditions. William (2002) asserted that the purpose of marriage for Christians is procreation, and also serves as a remedy against sin and fornication and mutual affection.

According to Witte (1997) cited in the work of DeSimone (2003), in his examination of marriage from different religious constructs in the West, it was pointed out that the Christian Church's early construction of the law and theology around marriage became the "cornerstone of the Western tradition of marriage for nearly two millennia. Based on the argument above, principles of Christian marriage have been the benchmark on which civil or ordinance marriage was carved. Finally, according to Meyers (2013), the group that produced the "I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing" document believed, it was imperative for all persons desirous of living in a Christian marriage to note that, the relationships be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God. Because Christianity endorses monogamous marriage, many would-be couples prefer to marry under such conditions to secure their marriages (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2011). The concept of marriage and the essence of monogamous marriage in Christendom hinges on the aforementioned discourse.

### **Civil Concept of Marriage**

According to Afrim-Narh (2008), Article 23 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) approved the family as an essential basis of society therefore it is entitled to protection by the State and society. The right to marry and to find a family in Article 23(2) of the ICCPR, according to Afrim-Narh (2008) provides a direct link between marriage and family establishment. Therefore, the State's keen interest in the marriage and family issues of her citizenry is in the right direction. Ghana as a State has had many issues in terms of marriage contraction. Since colonial days, many marriage acts have been enacted to help solve some of these marital issues in our societies. Under this topic the Marriage Act, 1884-1985 Cap. 127 as used as a case.

### **The concept of the civil marriage ceremony**

To bring uniformity into marriage and its related matters, the State has taken centre stage to help avert all the issues that are centred on marriage contraction. According to Crawford (2013), traditionally, in the times past the extended family was seen or recognized as the third party in Ghanaian (Akan) marriages. The family is seen as a strong force on which the culture of family ideals concerning marriage revolve. This comes with its assorted perceived subjugating positions of women in a patriarchal society (Dankwa, 2018). This draws the State into the affairs of marriage processes for its inhabitants.

According to Crawford (2013), the State is considered to be the third party to all marriages contracted in Ghana. This means that the State has assumed an important position on the issues concerning marriage and its contraction. The State now being the third party has to be involved in the marriage contraction process directly or indirectly. This is because the State through the law courts has the power to adjudicate marital cases based on existing laws. Also, when the family is not able to stand in for the couple in case of demise or mishandling of any of the couple and the children in the union, the State assumes the position of the family to help such individuals. According to Graphic Online (2020, Aug., 01), individuals can register their marriages in court with the consent of their parents. Also, it can be done, especially when the parents are not in agreement with the union. This example has it that the State has become a key agent in the marital process of her citizens.

### **The Effects of the Performance of Parallel Marriage Ceremonies on Marriage**

Marriage rite performance in the context of the existing marriage has some elements which in one way or the other have affected the institution as a whole. In this work, the effects of parallel marriage ceremonies are looked at in two ways. The positive and negative effects of the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies are discussed below.

#### **The positive effects of the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies**

The parallel marriage ceremonies in one way or the other have come to contribute to the stability of the society. This is evident in the enactment of the PNDCL 111. The law was then promulgated to have solved the partner dying intestate. For the problems of who takes what at the end, the State enacted the laws to first protect the partners, especially, the women and children after the demise of their husbands. In African and some Western societies, marriage is a recognized institution that confers or is seen as a means of providing legitimacy for children (Jarnkvist, 2019; Twene, 2019). So, at marriage, the performance of the customary marriage (which is purely polygamous) before the ordinance makes the customary marriage laws defiant. This means the customary marriage has been converted into ordinance marriage.

These new marriage laws, thus, the ordinance of marriage give protection to the partner and the children. This to the Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) 2019 conference report, the marriage certificate issued serves as legal proof of the couple's union. It can be used by women to protect their property and inheritance rights, as well as their social security in the event of their spouse's death or divorce (Silva et al., 2019). These arguments attest to the importance of would-be couples wanting to undergo parallel marriage ceremonies.

### **The negative effects of the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies**

Marriage as an institution has been affected negatively due to the parallel nature of the ceremonies involved. One major impact the parallel marriage ceremonies have had on the institution of marriage is the issue of cohabitation. Cohabitation is a relationship where the would-be couple consents to be roomies for some time before going through the customary, religious or civil marriage formalities. This situation is influenced by many factors. According to McCafferty (2011), financial difficulty is a major factor that influences cohabitation.

Many would-be couples who want to marry but lack the financial resources to hold parallel marriage ceremonies may end up cohabiting for some time before they officially marry. According to Oppenheimer's Marital Time Theory, unemployment, insecure and low-status jobs, and the expense of living have all contributed to the cohabitation situation among would-be couples (Calves, 2016). Cohabitation has influenced the marriage formation process making it complex (Thornton et al., 2007). Even though cohabitation is frowned upon in Ghanaian society, "mpena aware" as popularly known, Twene (2019) attested that most young people prefer that because of the high cost of performing parallel marriage ceremonies.

Also, according to Agboka (2008), marriage has simply become too expensive for many young people to venture into. Erdei (2018) argued that, in rare situations, some wedding ceremonies might cost more than a small country's GDP. Weddings for the elite, according to Erdei (2018) should be rich and grand. The marriage institution which was and is still considered to be an important societal institution has now been viewed as an expensive venture. Agboka (2008) said that the process leading to the marriage is just as costly as the one following the wedding, hence the lavish party to commemorate the occasion, for instance, the pre-wedding pictures and decorations. According to Lynch (2021), some individuals believe that you need to spend extra money on details like decorating and dressing up in costume to make the experience even more unique and personalized. Agboka (2008) asserted that some people believe that the marriage ceremony, particularly the wedding, is a once-in-a-lifetime event, therefore one should not care about how much money is spent organizing it. Meaning, that spending much in organizing your marriage ceremony shows the importance you accord the ceremony. This is an issue that is worth discussing. Couples contracted loans for weddings, only to end up paying it in years, thereby bringing in its wake challenges for the immediate



and the extended families. This becomes an issue because they find it difficult to cater for themselves as they have to depend on friends and family support to move on.

Many people, especially the youth, face the dilemma of not getting married as soon as they would like, but instead risk meeting the enormous expectations set by society (Agboka, 2008). This has led some to take loans to organize lavish marriage ceremonies which later burdens the couple (Agboka, 2008). Even for low-income families, he believes that costly weddings have virtually become a necessity.

Finally, the celebration of marriage has become more fashionable neglecting the significance of the union and the vows (Mensah, 2013). The fashionable nature of the occasion has taken the significance people attached to the marriage institution these days (Mensah, 2013). Many young people prepare towards the occasion rather than the marital life they will live after the event.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on the epistemological branch known as interpretivism. The interpretivist research paradigm states that reality is multi-layered and complex. The interpretivists believe that people are creative and actively construct their social reality. The interpretivist further notes that the social world should be studied in the natural world, through the eyes of the participants, without the intervention of the researcher (Dammak, 2013). Interpretivists believe that understanding the context in which any form of research is conducted is critical to the interpretation of data gathered (Willis, 2007). According to Willis (2007), interpretivism usually seeks to understand a particular context, and the core belief of the interpretivism paradigm is that reality is socially constructed.

Qualitatively, the research adopted a case study design. It is believed that reports of past studies allow the exploration and understanding of complex issues. This helps to explain both the process and outcome of a phenomenon through complete observation, reconstruction and analysis of the cases under investigation (Tellis, 1997).

The setting for this research is Winneba, the capital of the Efutu Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. Winneba is a town with a population of 55,331 and is known traditionally as Simpa. It is a fishing community in southern Ghana, lying on the south coast, 140 kilometres (90 mi) east of Cape Coast, and 56km (35 mi) of Accra. It coordinates 5° 21'00" N 0° 37'30" W/5.35000°N 0.62500°W. The population for the study comprised fifteen people in Winneba in the Efutu Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. The fifteen (15) people chosen consist of two (2) opinion leaders, two (2) parents, two (2) marriage counsellors, five (5) married individuals who have performed parallel marriage ceremonies, and four (4) unmarried adults who have reached their marital age.

The purposive sampling technique was employed in carrying out this research work. Purposive sampling is used when a researcher identifies characteristics of the population of interest and selects the elements or subjects with those characteristics. This criterion dictated the usage of this technique. The convenience sampling technique was also employed in selecting the individuals who got married through the parallel marriage ceremonies, adults who were yet to be married, parents whose child/children have had dual marriage experience or matured and are yet to, and opinion leaders who are pastors.

Again, the sample for the marriage counsellors selected for the study was done through a critical case sampling technique. "Critical case sampling is where you collect samples that are most likely to give you the information you are looking for. This type of sampling is particularly useful if a small number of cases can be sampled" (Palinkas, 2015). The sampling technique was well-thought-out because marriage counsellors can professionally voice out the issue under consideration.

The instrument for data collection was mainly conducted through interviews. This was done using a semi-structured interview guide. The trustworthiness of the data collection instrument was tested. Speziale and Carpenter (2011) "describe trustworthiness as establishing the validity and reliability of qualitative research. Qualitative research is trustworthy when it accurately represents the experiences of the study participants." The four elements used to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research were taken into consideration. "Credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability are the four criteria used to measure the trustworthiness of data" (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). According to the authors, the criteria are employed to "evaluate the study's overall truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality." This typical benchmark was ensured in determining the trustworthiness of this qualitative research.

Data analysis was thematically carried out. This was done by taking into consideration the occurring themes that popped up during the transcription and coding of data using Atlas.ti software. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), "Qualitative research entails a continuous interplay between data collection and data analysis. As a result, after the first interview, the data was analysed. This helped in discovering patterns and further data collection was carried out making it easier." Pennames were given to the interviewees for the analysis.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This segment for findings and discussion is divided into two parts. The first section concentrates on the biographic characteristics of the participants, whilst the second section focuses on the findings and discussion of the effects of dual marriage ceremonies. The data was gathered through a semi-structured interview guide. The interview data was collected through one-on-one interviews with 15 interviewees. Participants were assigned numbers from 1-15.

The biographic characteristics of the fifteen participants interviewed comprise eight (8) males and seven (7) females representing 53% and 47% respectively. Concerning their ages, the lowest age bracket of participants was between the ages of 20 and 30, whilst the highest age bracket was between 50 years and 60 years. About their academic qualification, one (1) was a PhD holder, three (3) were master's degree holders, six (6) were graduates, whilst six (5) were students. The calibre of participants for the study enables the researchers to obtain the needed data for the research. The point of saturation was reached when the fifteenth participant was interviewed. As a result of their educational and maturity level, the participants were able to provide value-laden outcomes worthy of contributing to knowledge of the concept of parallel marriage.

The second section focuses on the effects of parallel marriage ceremonies on marriage as an institution. The data was analysed, and results were presented and discussed hinging on the objective of the study which is to examine the effects of the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies.

### **The Effects of Parallel Marriage Ceremonies**

The interview data gathered was to ascertain the effects of the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies on the institution of marriage. Several themes emerged from the data and these include; the positive effects of parallel marriage ceremonies on marriage and the negative effects of parallel marriage ceremonies on marriage. Each of them has several subthemes emerging from it.

#### **Positive effects of parallel marriage ceremonies**

Although all the people interviewed complained bitterly about the parallel marriage ceremonies, some of them expressed the positive effects the ceremonies have had on marriage. Most of them talked about how it is helping partners to be faithful and also to get them and their children secured. These very responses run through among those who talked about the positiveness of the parallel ceremonies. These are some of the responses:

*I think parallel marriage ceremonies are impacting the marriage institution positively. This is because it makes the partners not to misconduct themselves after marriage. Thus, you will not think of marrying another wife or husband. Had it not been for the registration of marriage, hmmm, I would not have known what Ghana would have been like. Because of the way some married men are over-marrying different women in our society! hmmm. It's well. So, I have not regretted doing the two. (Participant 6)*

Another participant has this to say:

*In addition, it will help me secure the legitimacy of my children so that when I am no more, no one will take their possessions from them as it happens in some marriages contracted under the customary laws.*

The responses above have shown some of the perceptions people have going into the parallel marriage ceremonies. But the records should be set straight for the upcoming couples to understand that it's not only the parallel marriage ceremonies that will prevent their partners from cheating. Also, there are laws to "protect the interest of the couple and their children even when one of the partners or both are no more" (PNDCL 111, 1985 cited in Dankwa et al., 2022, p. 35).

### **Negative effects of parallel marriage ceremonies**

The outcome of the data collected revealed that the effects of parallel marriage ceremonies are numerous. However, a few of the themes that emerged from the data were; the fear of going into marriage and cohabitation.

#### ***The fear of entering into marriage***

All the participants talked about the perception people are developing about marriage being an expensive venture. Virtually, this has created a type of fear among all those who were yet to get married individuals who were interviewed. Also, the married, the parents, opinion leaders and the counsellors expressed their displeasure about the increasing concern about the expensive nature of marriage ceremonies these days. One of the participants expressed how he has to raise three thousand Ghana Cedis (GH¢ 3,000.00) to pay for the video coverage and the pictures that were taken.

These are a few of the many comments raised by the participants:

*It indirectly takes away the joy couples anticipate having in marriage. Because after the ceremony some partners begin to blame each other for their frustrations in marriage. The frustration couples go through during the ceremony affects them in the early stages of their marriage. (Participant 11)*

Participant 3 said:

*Another negative impact is fear of marrying. Many young people think that if you go ahead with the ordinance of marriage and the person is disturbing you the laws do not allow for a simple break up and you also have no option to get an additional wife who may come in to comfort you.*

Another participant added:

*Most of the young people are afraid of going into marriage. One major issue I have been faced with is the expensive nature of the ceremonies. Most of the young men in my church for instance are not serious about getting into marriage. This is because of the high cost involved in the performance of the dual ceremonies. This even barred them from talking about marriage in their daily conversations. Some of the females have come to me personally about how silent their guys are on issues of marriage. My frequent meetings with them made me aware of their fears. It seems I understand better why most of them choose to cohabit. (Participant 9)*

All the data gathered gives us a picture of what some would-be couples go through in their quest to get married. Also, some of the young people expressed their fears of getting married because of the amount of money they see others pump into the organisation of their weddings. This is one of the numerous reasons partners choose to cohabit. This has created some kind of fear in them knowing that they are not gainfully employed. The outcomes from the interviewees attest to Oppenheimer's Marital Time Theory which stipulates that unemployment, insecure and low-status jobs, and the expense of living have all contributed to the cohabitation situation among would-be couples (Calves, 2016). In this same wavelength, Agboka (2008) agreed that marriage has simply become too expensive for many young people to venture. This is making many people, especially the youth, face the dilemma of not getting married as soon as they would like.

### ***Cohabitation***

According to the data gathered, one of the silent or least talked about effects of parallel marriage ceremonies on marriage emerged. This is with the issue of cohabitation. Why would people who claim to love themselves cohabit for years without going through the procedures for marriage to be recognized as husband and wife? Although Lindsay (2000) cited in McCafferty (2011) considers the transition into cohabitation for many couples to be unplanned and simply happens, the data shows that a lot of factors contribute to this situation. The responses of the interviewees made it clear that the performance of the parallel marriage ceremonies also contributes to the cohabitation situation in our societies. Some of the participants had this to say:

*I see one negative effect of parallel marriage ceremonies on the marriage institution to be the issue of cohabitation. I have tried to talk to most of the cohabiting couples in our church but all their problem is money. Most of them are not gainfully employed but they have gotten to their marital age. Because of that, they have agreed to cohabit and help raise the children they have given birth to. Some have informed me that they have gone home for the "knocking" (formal introduction of the groom's family to the family of the wife-to-be) but they cannot tell when the marriage will be officially performed. (Participant 15)*

Another participant added:

*It has affected marriage negatively 'papa.' Those days you go home to see the parents of the woman with a drink and you are through but now it is a different thing altogether. These double ceremonies made me and my wife cohabit for a few years before we got married. I wanted to do the customary marriage and go for the court registration but the parents said no so, while we were here, we were still together. They did not know. So, when all was set, I went home for the necessary rites and she officially moved into my house. (Participant 4)*

The data collected revealed the negative effects the performance of parallel marriage ceremonies is having on the individual and the family. Cohabitation, a practice that

society was against years ago is now accepted and endorsed by people for some of the reasons espoused in the aforementioned discourse. Cohabitation in society was and is against societal norms but the dynamics involved in getting married these days have made the marriage institution opaque. Most people are afraid to inquire to know if there are other means they can get their marriages done without going through the same difficulties others have been through.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The performance of parallel marriage ceremonies has contributed to the problems in marriage than it was ever imagined. Marriage is seen to be an expensive venture by most of the unmarried individuals. This perception has created fear in the hearts of many unemployed and ungainful employed young individuals who have found their love but have no means to tie the knot. This is because of the huge sums of money involved in the organisation of the parallel marriage ceremonies. In addition, the notion that marriage is an expensive venture has contributed to the rising nature of cohabitation in our society. People who are not gainfully employed to save towards the performance of the parallel marriage ceremonies mostly prefer to live together for some time to enable them to save towards the organisation of the ceremonies. Cohabitation which was considered to be against societal norms many years ago, is now accepted and endorsed by society due to the rigorous dynamics involved in getting marriage these days.

It is, therefore, inferred from the conclusion and recommended that the State and other agencies should come together to find better ways through which the undesirable effects of parallel marriage ceremonies on individuals and families can be reduced or eradicated. Also, the youth should be encouraged and be well-informed about the Marriage Act as well as the pros and cons of choosing to perform parallel marriage ceremonies. The youth getting empowered through this will help them to control and eradicate the extravagant expenditure involved in the dual ceremonies and rather focus on preparing towards marriage life.

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