

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Healthy marriages are the foundation and backbone of healthy families and healthy societies. Hanna (1995:359) compares marriage to a highway that needs to be upgraded, maintained and even rebuilt; the process is never finished. Hanna (1995:359) suggests that because the probability of attaining marriage success has declined in recent years, measured by numbers of intact marriages and reported levels of satisfaction, marriage enrichment, which is the process of making a good marriage better, deserves priority. Hanna (1995:359) states further that a realisation that neglect of a marriage can lead to unhappiness and even the death of the marriage can motivate couples to pay more attention to the enrichment of the marriage.

Brown and Brown (2002:196) state that all couples need support and that the meeting of this need is critical to the well-being of the marriage. Marriage enrichment groups can be an important source to provide support to married couple relationships.

According to Hunt, Hof and DeMaria (1998:7) man is currently living in a throw – away society where marriages are being thrown away nearly as soon as they begin. Couples enter marriage with the idea that they can get out of it if it does not work. The authors state that sometimes, marriages don't work simply because of a lack of effort and commitment. Married couples do not even realise that they give up too quickly. However, the authors maintain that marriage, as a legal institution, is here to stay. According to Hunt, Hof and DeMaria (1998:xii) marriage appears in some form in every culture and society. In every generation the vast majority of adults

do marry (at least once), which points to the important place of marriage in the networks of every society.

Hunt, Hof and DeMaria (1998:xi) state that through society's sanctioning marriage provides for the following:

- It structures how men and women will satisfy their most intimate sexual desires;
- It provides for mutual support and nurture around life's most essential transitions (such as births, deaths, crises, illnesses);
- It forms the basis for establishing a home/residence;
- It is the basis for identifying parental responsibilities for children; and provides for the transmission of property, money, and other real resources of life.

Hunt, Hof and DeMaria (1998:19) emphasise marriage enrichment as a preventative approach that attempts to reach couples before they become mired in dysfunctional patterns and while they are still motivated to seek improvement. Marriage enrichment enables couples to gain perspective and discover any existing problems early. It calls for prevention and for helping couples discover their strengths and enhance these before reaching the clinical stage (Denton, 1986:3).

Marriage enrichment is not a substitute for marital and other types of therapy, but provides a paradigm shift from the traditional, medical model of providing remediation or repairing broken marriages to providing preventative services in this area of service delivery. The impetus of this research study is to explore the need for a locally developed marriage enrichment programme and describe the contents of such a marriage enrichment programme.

1.2. MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The motivation for this study emanated from researcher's experience of working

with married couples and families during the past fifteen years of practical experience in the field of social work. The researcher has worked as a social worker at a Child and Family Welfare Society, the Department of Social Welfare and Population Development in Kwa Zulu Natal and at the South African Police Service. During her experience she found that the majority of clientele seeking social work services experience severe breakdown in marital and family relationships. However, experience has shown that the possibility of attaining a lasting success at repairing such broken relationships, when they have reached a clinical stage, through marital and family therapy is not guaranteed.

Denton (1986:3) developed what he calls a “pre-conflictual” approach to marital intervention. This approach emphasises prevention of major interpersonal problems through relationship skill-building, empathic development between marriage partners and a basic philosophy which emphasises the strengths of the marriage system. Denton (1986:3) emphasized the importance of enhancement and enrichment, and an approach that calls for prevention, for helping couples to discover their strengths and enhance these. This research is based on the call for preventative services to be rendered in the area of marriage relationships.

Rubin and Babbie (2001:6) describe the distinctive character of social work research as follows: “Social work research seeks to accomplish the same humanistic goals as social work practice; and like practice, social work research is a compassionate, problem solving, and practical endeavour.” Problem solving is thus stressed here within the context of preventative social work practice.

1.3. PROBLEM FORMULATION

Social workers practice their profession in a rapidly changing society. Clinical practice or advanced social work has shifted to a broader generalist orientation, and practitioners are required to apply very advanced techniques. Research establishes

the most efficient and effective approaches with an emphasis on brevity/briefness (Maguire, 2004).

Social workers have also recognised and are dealing with the fact that certain populations are at greater risk than others. Furthermore, that the diversity of race, religion, culture, sexual orientation and other factors require new skills that necessitate the questioning of social workers' personal and professional values and ethics (Maguire, 2004).

Clinical practice must be based on solid research, be sensitive to the reality of multiple causes and a wide variety of systems and be clear in its description of highly advanced techniques with individuals. Social workers are expected to perform at a high level of expertise and responsibility (Maguire, 2004).

For the purpose of this study it will be accepted that an important problem relating to marital breakdown is a lack of preparedness of people entering into the responsibilities and roles demanded from them in marriage life (Hinckley, 1996:3). This then results in a large percentage of married couples seeking divorce due to irreconcilable differences between the spouses.

According to Cowan and Kinder (1987:5), relationships do not typically unravel because of major conflicts. Most relationships die slowly and without the conscious awareness of either party. There is a fine line between a relationship that moves in a positive direction and one that slips silently into apathy or the slow accumulation of disappointments and resentment. If marital neglect has already led to apathy and boredom, or if chronic criticism and self-righteousness have taken a toll, a couple can still revitalise their relationship (Hanna, 1995: 363). Couples benefit from deciding that enrichment has a high priority for their marital survival, and from then committing themselves to achieving it.

As in all aspects of life, couples needs to focus more on the positive than on the

negative in order to enhance a relationship. Improving the vital areas of communication and conflict management is enriching for any marital relationship. The challenge that faces helping professionals is to provide preventative services that would help prevent the breakdown of marriages, whenever possible, and to render services that will help make good marriages better.

The researcher has found from experience that services that are currently being rendered in the field of marriage and relationship problems, appear to be focused on therapeutic counseling practice only. Very little or no emphasis seems to be placed on preventative programmes. Marriage enrichment presently appears to be limited to a very few church organizations only. This limits the accessibility of marriage enrichment programmes only to a few church-going couples. The need for marriage enrichment as a preventative service to be rendered by social welfare agencies, as well as a description of the contents of a proposed marriage enrichment programme is therefore researched in this study.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTION

The research questions that are addressed in this study are:

- How can marriage problems experienced by married couples be addressed preventatively?
- What is the need for developing a marriage enrichment programme?
- What contents would be suitable for a locally developed marriage enrichment programme?

1.5. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to identify and describe the content of a marriage enrichment programme.

1.5.2. Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study will be:

- To explore the need for a marriage enrichment programme by means of perusal of available literature and an empirical study.
- To explore the elements that will comprise the content of an enrichment programme by means of qualitative research using different focus groups.
- To provide themes for the development of an enrichment programme.
- To formulate guidelines, conclusions and recommendations based on the results of the study.

1.6. RESEARCH PLAN

1.6.1 Research Design

According to De Vos (2002:137) the research design is the overall plan whereby the research objectives are carried out. The type of research design chosen for a particular research project is determined by the rationale, the aims and the objectives of the study. Grinnel (1993) states that qualitative research is rich in description. Furthermore, the author asserts that qualitative research focuses more on discovery as it gives rise to new insights. It provides the researcher with research questions rather than hypotheses to be tested.

The qualitative method of social research will be used for the purpose of this study. According to De Vos (2002:79), the qualitative paradigm stems from an anti-positivistic, interpretative approach, is idiographic and thus holistic in nature. Creswell (1998:51) offers the following reasons for undertaking a qualitative study:

- The nature of the research question relates to “how” or “what”.
- A topic needs to be explored.

This study seeks to explore the need for a marriage enrichment programme and to describe the elements that will form the content of the enrichment programme. This study will thus use a qualitative approach. The exploratory and descriptive designs of social research will be used to gather information related to the need for a marriage enrichment programme.

According to De Vos (2002:108) the goals of research are regarded as either basic or applied. Neuman (2000:22) states that basic (or pure) research seeks empirical observations that can be used to formulate or refine theory. It is not concerned with solving the immediate problems of the discipline, but rather with extending the knowledge base of the discipline. Applied research, however, is aimed at solving specific problems or at helping practitioners accomplish tasks. The goal of this study is therefore to use applied research because it seeks to solve the immediate problem related to marital breakdown and divorce.

1.6.2. Population and Sampling

Babbie (1995:193) defines population as the collection of elements from which the sample is drawn. On the other hand, population can be defined as all possible cases and subjects of what the researcher is interested in studying. De Vos (2002:198) states that population sets boundaries on the study unit. In this study the population is the social workers who are employed in the Johannesburg area.

Babbie (1995:188) defines sampling as the process of selecting part of the group being studied. De Vos (2002:199) states that the major reason for sampling is feasibility. A complete coverage of the total population is seldom possible, for example the whole population of social workers in Johannesburg cannot possibly be reached. Sampling is thus done to increase the feasibility, cost-effectiveness, accuracy and manageability of the study.

The purposive sampling method was used to select participants for the purpose of this study. According to De Vos (2002:207) this type of sampling is based entirely on the judgement of the researcher. A sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of the population.

The sample of participants were selected from two organizations, the Department of Social Development (6 social workers) and the South African Police Service (6 social workers) that employ social workers, and who work with married couples. The sample comprised of a total of 12 social workers that are working in the Johannesburg area. The sample will be discussed further in chapter three.

1.6.3. Data Collection

Data was collected by the use of focus groups. Focus groups were used to obtain the perceptions of social workers on the topic of marriage enrichment. The focus group sample consisted of different focus groups of social workers in the field who work with or have worked with married couples. The sample consisted of a representative sample of social workers who are presently working in the field of social work and who have a varying number of years of experience. A structured interview schedule was used as the data collection tool that will be used to guide the focus group discussions. This information will be clearly outlined in chapter three.

1.6.4. Data Analysis

Detailed notes were taken during the focus group sessions. The sessions were recorded by a tape recorder. According to De Vos (2002:318) analysis of the data begins by going back to the purpose of the study. The aim of analysis is to look for trends and patterns that reappear within a single focus group or among the various focus groups. The basis for analysis was the use of transcripts, tapes, notes and memory (De Vos, 2002:318).

Qualitative methods of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing were used. The approach to data analysis as described in De Vos (2002) was used in this study. This process is clearly outlined in chapter three.

1.7. THE VALUE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

Mouton and Marais (1990:156) state that a researcher must be able to answer the question: “For what purpose will the findings be used?”

The findings of this research will be used for the following purpose:

- It will provide a conceptual framework of the knowledge of how marriages can be enriched.
- Due to the rapid demise of marriages within our society and the high number of couples seeking divorce, a study of this nature that seeks to address the question of “What can be done to prevent this?” is both appropriately important and relevant within the current societal context.
- It will thus set a theoretical base for further research within the context of marriage enrichment across the different cultures.
- This study further aims to produce themes and guidelines that can be used through further research to develop a marriage enrichment programme.

1.8. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

The following concepts that are central to this study will be defined:

1.8.1. Marriage

Davidson and Moore (1996) define marriage as a legally binding contract between a man and a woman that convey certain rights and privileges, including sexual

exclusivity, legitimation of any children born of the union, and economic responsibilities.

According to Gelles (1995) marriage is a socially approved and institutionalized union of some permanence between two persons.

Hanna (1995:338) defines marriage as a legal institution. Marriage is more than love and intimacy. Marriage is a state of interdependence in which the partners lose neither their identities nor their sense of autonomy. Sociologically, marriage is a socially approved mating arrangement, usually involving sexual activity and economic cooperation. Commitment is a central issue in marriage and is often used in defining what marriage is. Commitment includes mutuality of purpose, a willingness to put forth effort, and a pledge of fidelity.

According to Brown and Brown (2002:3), a marriage represents not only the establishment of a new relationship but the creation of a new couple identity and a whole new set of social relationships with spouses, parents, relatives and friends.

For the purpose of this study, marriage is thus seen as the civil or customary union between a man and a woman within a socially acceptable institution that has specific rights and responsibilities for both spouses and provides for the rearing of children, distribution of assets and for support, nurturance and affection.

1.8.2 Marriage Enrichment

Hanna (1995:359) defines marriage enrichment as the process of making a good marriage better.

According to Davidson and Moore (1996:146) marriage enrichment has emerged as a preventative approach to assist couples trying to make their marriages better.

Hunt, Hof and DeMaria (1998:14) define marriage enrichment as an educational and preventive approach to couple relationship enhancement.

According to Brown and Brown (2002:189) the primary goals of marriage enrichment groups are to promote self-awareness, empathy, self-disclosure, increased intimacy, and development of communication and problem solving skills with ongoing group activities.

Marriage enrichment, therefore, can be described as a preventative intervention that develops and builds on the couple's own resources and strengths, and teaches couples social and interpersonal skills in order to enhance and improve their marital relationship. Marriage enrichment is about helping make a good marriage better.

1.9. OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The topics of this report are presented in the following manner:

- Chapter 1- Orientation of the study: Introduction to the research study
- Chapter 2- Literature review on marriage enrichment and marriage enrichment programmes
- Chapter 3- An overview of the research methodology to be used in this study
- Chapter 4- Presentation of the results of the study
- Chapter 5- Literature control
- Chapter 6- Guidelines, conclusions and recommendations

Chapter one focuses on the general orientation of the study. The motivation for the study as well as the problem formulation, aim and objectives, value of the research project, the research plan, definition of main concepts are discussed.

Chapter two provides a literature review on the different marriage enrichment programmes currently available.

Chapter three is a discussion of the research methodology to be used in this study.

Chapter four deals with the presentation of the results of the study based on data analysis.

Chapter five will conduct a literature control for the purpose of validation.

Chapter six will pay attention to guidelines, conclusions and recommendations for future research.

1.10. SUMMARY

This chapter focused primarily on giving a detailed outline of the research to be carried out for the purpose of this study. The aims, objectives and motivation for this study are clearly stated so as to give direction to the research that will be implemented. The research plan is outlined and the key concepts are defined.