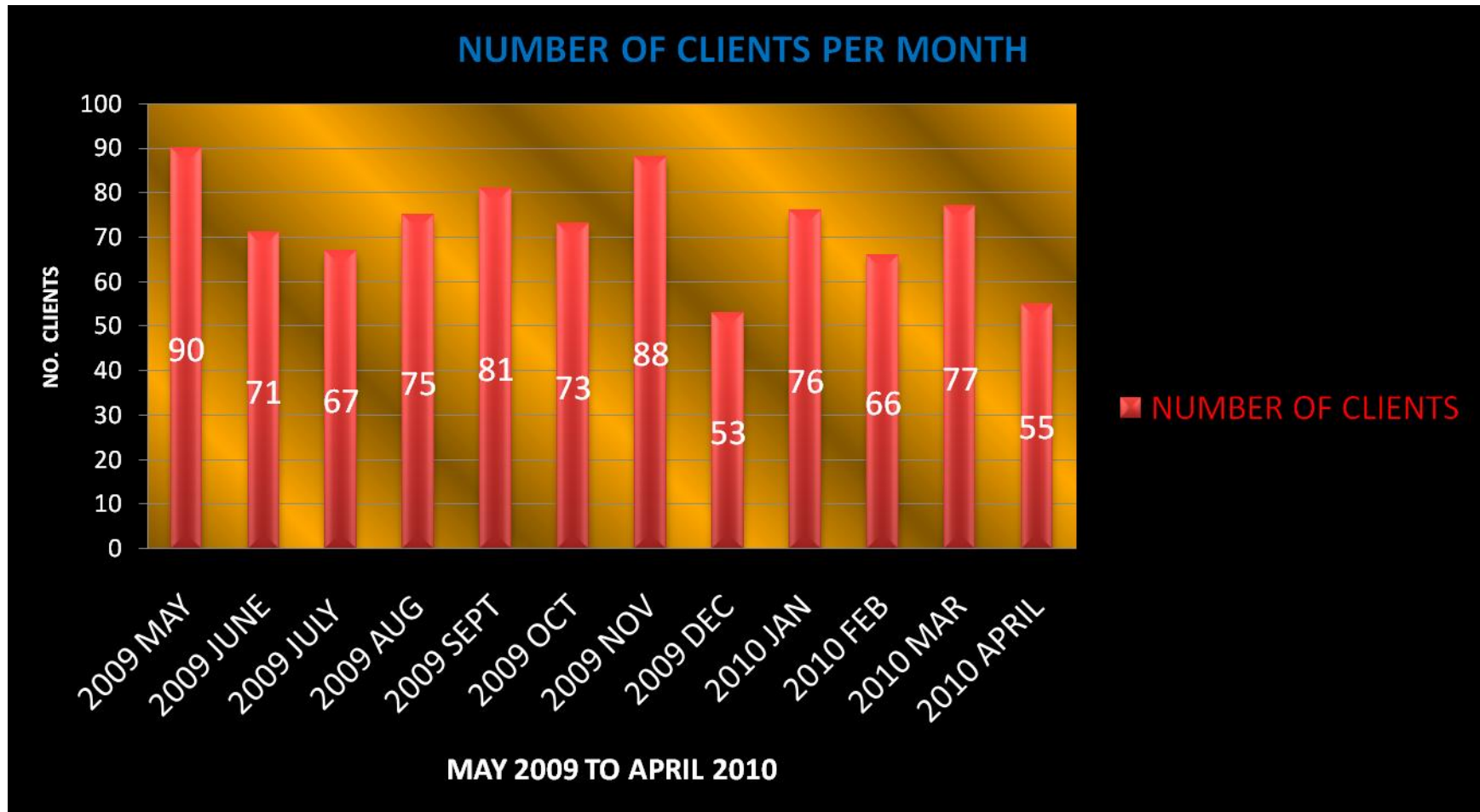


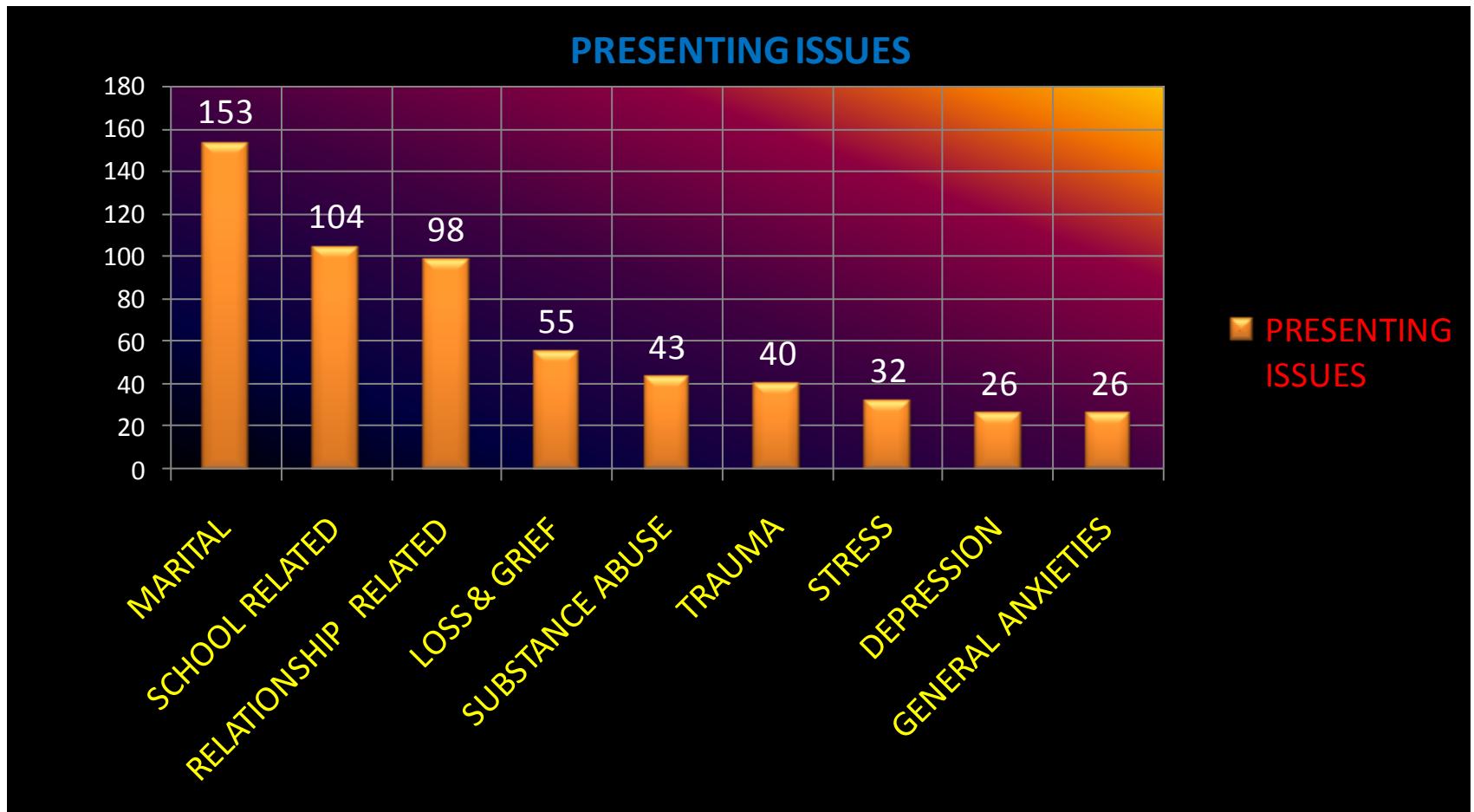
**TITLE:**  
**A HEURISTIC REFLECTION ON MY  
EXPERIENCES WORKING WITH 11  
HETEROSEXUAL COUPLES IN  
COUPLES THERAPY AT AMANI  
COUNSELLING CENTRE, NAIROBI.**

**BY JOHN GACHERU GAITI**  
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# Amani Counselling Centre and Training Institute had a total of 872 new clients in the year 'May 2009 to April 2010'.

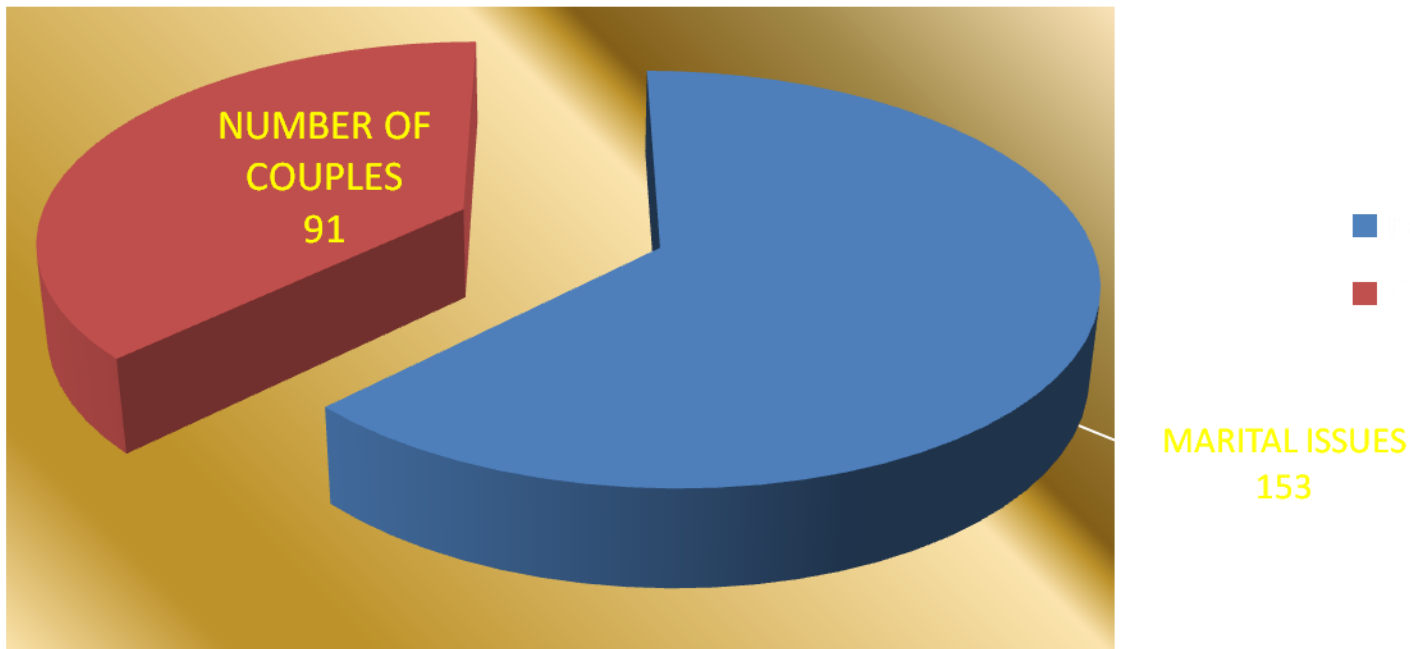


# The major issues presented by clients at Amani counselling centre were as follows:



A sizeable portion of marital issues(40%) were not presented by couples.

**MARITAL ISSUES**



# PRESENTING ISSUES

Between May 2009 and April 2010, 91 couples underwent counselling at Amani counselling centre. I worked with 11 of those couples on an average of 6 sessions per couple.

Issues presented included;

- Sex-related issues,
- Parenting issues,
- Constant quarrelling,
- Loss of love and affection,
- Addiction to alcohol
- Infidelity, and;
- Interference by members of extended family.

As I look back over what transpired between us, I have identified several significant observations that I made as a therapist:

# 1. Couples expectations and misperceptions of therapy:

- It is a quick process
- It is like being in a classroom receiving a lecture
- It is moralistic-the therapist will prescribe a code of do's and don'ts
- The therapist must judge, evaluate and advise
- Couples find it strange when I encourage them to talk to each other rather than only talking directly to me the therapist.
- Couples get surprised when I do not lecture them on how to relate but rather I facilitate dialogue between them helping them to learn how to communicate effectively and negotiate.

## 2. Assumptions and misconceptions that Couples bring to the therapy process:

- That there is an offending partner who must be identified
- That it is that 'one' partner who has the 'problem'
- That their problems arise from failing to 'understand' each other
- That the counsellor will 'fix' the offending partner and that will really solve all their problems
- That therapy involves the counsellor listening to each partners' side of the story and then stating who is right and who is wrong after the discovery
- That the therapist will be more impartial if he does not share similar gender with the offending partner; thus they each try to endear the therapist to their position.



# 3. Couples' own diagnosis of what causes problems in their marriage:

- Lack of communication—however, this is a misnomer because no communication is still communication
- Personality incompatibility: it seems yesterday's lover has become today's villain!
- One partner's pathology: a belief that one partner has a deep inner personality problem
- Female emotionality: males think that females are negatively emotional
- Male insensitivity: females believe that the male 'can't' understand her feelings
- Female nagging: males interpret female persistent requests as naggings
- Male infidelity and inability/ unwillingness to be sexually –exclusive

## 4. Couples expectations of the therapist and the therapy session:

- The counsellor will tell them what to do, how to do, when to do and what to say
- The counsellor will quickly see each partner's point of view and agree with it
- That the therapist will convince the offending partner to own up and take responsibility for his/her behaviour
- That the solution will come easily and quickly

# 5. My conceptualization of the source of couples problems:

- Unrealistic expectations
- Narcissistic tendencies in female partner
- Patriarchal hangover due to socialization in males
- Disillusionment
- Lack of true empathy towards each other

## 6. Theoretical concepts I identified that related to my experiences:

- ❑ Circular causality (systems interdependence and reciprocity): Goldenberg,(2008).
- ❑ Homeostasis (structural resistance to change): Minuchin,(1994).
- ❑ Loyalty to Family of origin: Bowen,(1978).
- ❑ Undifferentiated ego mass: Haley,(1980).

# CONCLUSION

- Couples counselling is an enriching experience for both the couple and therapist
- Couples counselling is unique and require tailor-made skills and interventions
- Couples counselling is markedly different from individual (one-on-one) session
- The therapist requires creativity when dealing with couples in therapy

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**THANK YOU.**

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