

Effect of Early Marriage on Girl-Child’s Further Education in Okpokwu Local Government Area, Nigeria: Implications for Counseling

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Abstract. This study investigated the impact of early marriage on girl-child’s further education in Okpokwu Local Government Area, Nigeria. It employed a descriptive survey design. Two research questions were asked and two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The sample size of 300 females was employed using the specification of Research Advisor (2006). A self-developed instrument titled, “Impact of Early Marriage Scale (IRMGCFES)” was adopted for the study. The instrument was administered by the researcher by personal visit to the sampled schools. The data collected were analyzed using chi-square statistics tested at 0.05 level of significance. The results showed that early marriage has a significant impact on girl-child’s further education in Okpokwu Local Government Area, Nigeria. The study recommended that awareness about the issue should be raised, and the government should make the laws concerning it stricter.

Keywords: Early marriage, Girl-child, Further education, Okpokwu Local Government Area.

1. Introduction

The term early marriage, which is also known as child marriage is used to refer to both formal marriages and informal unions in which a girl lives with a partner as if married before age of eighteen (UNICEF, 2005). Jain, Bisen, Singh

and Jain (2011) and UNFPA (2013) define early marriage as any marriage carried out below the age of eighteen years, before the girl is physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing. Child marriage involves either one or both spouses being children and may take place with or without formal registration, and under civil, religious or customary laws. Most early marriages are arranged and based on the consent of parents and often fail to ensure the best interests of the girl child. Early girl-child marriage is a barbaric act, man’s inhumanity to man, is a common practice in most developing countries. Every minute a girl-child is married off against her will, education attainment terminated and dreams aborted by this reoccurring act. This has called for a clarion call and a serious concern to the international community at large.

Oxford Dictionary defines a child as a young human being below the age of puberty or legal age. UNICEF further states that early girl-child marriage is a violation of fundamental human rights. The Nigerian child Right Act 2003 defines a child as a person who has not attained the age of eighteen years. Throughout the world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life. Sadly, the practice of early marriage gives no such cause for celebration. All too often, the imposition of a marriage partner upon a child means that a girl’s

childhood is cut short and her fundamental rights are compromised (UNICEF, 2001). Young girls are robbed of their youth and required to take on roles for which they are not psychologically or physically prepared. Many have no choice about the timing of marriage or their partner. Some are coerced into marriage, while others are too young to make an informed decision.

Premature marriage deprives the girl-child of the opportunity for personal development as well as rights to full reproductive health and wellbeing, education, and participation in civic life. Early marriage contributes to a series of negative consequences both for young girls and the society in which they live. Besides having a negative impact on girls themselves, the practice of early marriage also has negative consequences on their children, families and society as a whole. In agreement with the above statement, UNICEF (2000) argues that it is not only girls that pay for early marriage but also the society as a whole. Population pressure, health care costs and lost opportunities of human development are just a few of the growing burdens that society shoulders because of teenage pregnancies. Early marriage also undermines international efforts to fight against poverty in developing countries.

According to UNICEF (2005), globally 36% of women aged between twenty and twenty were married or in union before they reached eighteen years of age. UNESCO (2012) also states that globally, thirty nine million girls aged fourteen and fifteen in developing countries do not reach secondary education due to several reasons that include early marriage. Sweetman (2006), states that up to half of the girls in developing countries are mothers before they turn eighteen years. Nigeria, as one of the developing countries is experiencing similar cases of early girl-child marriage. There is much concern over the involvement of girls who are married before the national maturity age of eighteen years since they still have dreams of acquiring educational achievements and finding employment to end the cycle of poverty in their families. The affected children experience a lot of problems ranging from social, psychological, educational, emotional and even physical. Many of them

usually die before they reach the age of forty five years (Sweetman, 2006).

In Nigeria, early girl-child marriage is prevalent. According to Afri-Dev-Info 2015, Nigeria was ranked 10th country with 43% out of 20 countries, with the high rate of child marriage. Association for Reproductive and Family Health (ARFH) affirms that child marriage affects a child's physical development in which the aftermath is early pregnancy, school dropout, health issues, domestic violence, zero level of empowerment and segregation from social life. Child marriage in Nigeria is one of the most painful and disturbing problems in the poor region where people force their young children, especially daughters to get married, quite often to a total stranger. In Nigeria, especially Okpokwu Local Government Area, a lot of fourteen and fifteen year old girls, whose reproductive system is not ready for intimate activities and childbirth yet, are forced by their parents into marriage. They are stopped from going to school and getting an education. They are exploited for serving their husbands and giving birth to children themselves for serving their husbands and giving birth to children. Considering that they are still children themselves, it is absolutely unacceptable, as it kills their future and entire life, exposing them to adulthood so early.

Despite the fact that countries are legally prohibited, child marriages are prevalent in Nigeria, especially in the rural areas and within Muslim community. Child marriage has many causes, such as cultural, social, economic and religious. In many cases, a mixture of these causes results in the imprisonment of children in marriages without their consent. According to the official statistics, child marriage rate has been reduced by 9% since 2003, but it is still a problem. Child marriage is driven by poverty and has many effects on girls' health, such as increased risk for sexually transmitted diseases, cervical cancer, death during childbirth, and obstetric fistulas. Girls' off springs are at increased risk for premature birth and death as neonates, and so on. Most of the young girls who are forced into marriage by their parents are completely banned by their parents from going

to school. Usually, there is a large age gap between a girl and her husband, which can subject her to domestic violence and psychological abuse.

2. Causes of Early Marriage

According to Jain, Bisen, Singh and Jain (2011) and Nzenwata (2018), early marriage can arise due to a number of reasons such as:

- To raise the economic and social status.
- Religious hurdles and barriers.
- Gender bias promotes early marriage of girls.
- Lack of education.
- Myths and misconceptions about early marriage.
- Insecurity.
- Pressures from older members of the family and community.
- Provision for heirs to the throne.
- Hatred for girl-child in a patriarchal society and
- A kind of disobedience.

3. Harmful Effects of Early Marriage

Many researchers, such as UNICEF (2009); WHO (2009) and (2011); and Nzenwata, (2018) believe that early marriage can cause severe problems like the following:

- Domestic violence
- Illiteracy
- Early pregnancy
- Health risk
- Social stigma

Others include:

- Psychological and emotional stress like forced sexual relations, denial of freedom and personal development as household chores now become a priority.
- Denial of personal development and education
- Maturity levels become an issue as the little girl is now expected to play the role of a mother.

- Girl-children undergo severe health problems like pregnancy and childbirth.
- Girl brides are also involved in early childhood care.
- Threat to contracting sexually transmitted diseases increases when girl children are exposed to such an environment.
- As girl children are still vulnerable and submissive, they can be subject to the atrocities of domestic violence and abandonment.
- Mental and emotional stress in girl brides is high because they are not old enough to cope with maternal, marital or in law issues.

4. Impact of Early Marriage On Girl Child Education

The school is the most importance institution outside the family involved in socializing young people into all dimensions of adults' roles and responsibilities. More years of schooling have been associated with many positive outcomes, including later ages of marriage, lower fertility and healthier and better educated children, economic development. However, early marriage inevitably devices children of school age their right to the education they need for their personal development their preparation for adulthood, and their effective contribution to the future weltering of their family and society.

Personal development of a girl-child education is aborted when her education is terminated for marriage. This does not only affect the girl but also affects the community and the future generation. According to Klasen and Pieter (2012), child marriage affects female labour force participation in the area of returns when they are actively employed. This is due to lack of education which has contributed to the increase in unpaid housework. While Chaabn and Cumingham (2011) further opined that female decrease in labour force participation has negative effects on the economic growth of the societies, as well as the women and their families.

Indeed, married girls who would like to continue schooling may be both practically and legally

excluded from doing so. The essence of the rights to education and health is that they facilitate and ensure the effective enjoyment of other human rights. Early marriage perpetuates the cycle of illiteracy and poverty. Around the world, more girls are enrolled in school than ever before. These girls are much likely to be married at an early age. However, sadly, school enrolment drops sharply after five or six years of schooling (WHO, 2009). Child marriage often results in girls leaving school, reducing their opportunity to learn and to gain skills that would enable them to start an income generating activity or to find a job. It thereby increases the likelihood of low levels of education and employment (UNICEF, 2011).

For a number of poorer families, the potentials rewards of educating daughters are too far off and therefore their education is not recognized as an investment. Families perceive that a girl's education will only benefit her husband's household, and not her parents. Additionally, some parents believe that girls do not need an education for their roles as wives and mothers, that education undermines cultural practices and it teaches the girl to reject tradition

However, there is a saying that when you educate a woman you educate a nation. Education, even at basic level, is not only about livelihood and technical skills but more importantly provides social connectedness or aptitude which enables one to access key resources to alleviate poverty. By interacting with others, individuals acquire the social skills and personal capacities needed to access resources and opportunities, and to form social networks or support and assistance when required in the future.

Low participation in labour force increases poverty level of a family likewise a decrease in the household contribution to the economic growth of the society. Poverty limits the capability of the individual in the society, there is no access to education in their predicaments. There is the saying that information is knowledge or wealth, due to poverty their access to information is limited this is as a result of lack of education. The effect of early marriage on a girl child is also transferred to their children,

they lack the basic capacity to build and train a child, and poverty is automatically transferred to the children. It also contributes to increased early marriages for their girl child which poverty is the architect that lures them to repeat the same mistake made by their parents.

Khanna, Verma and Weiss (2013) opine that depriving a girl of the opportunity to learn limits her prospects for employment and her ability to gain useful skills. A marriage of a girl – child aborts her educational attainment and future dreams, education is the basic and formal skills required to be productive in the society. Skills acquired increases empowerment and it also plays a significant role in the success of ones carrier in life, its impact to the growth of individual and the economy are enormous. However, lack of education limits a child's social network achievement which has a psychological impact that traumatizes them in life. The study, based in Okpokwu Local Government Area of Benue State of over 4,320 girl children, is an investigation of the impact of early marriage on girl child's further education.

5. Purpose of the study

- To find out the causes of early marriage on girl child's further education.
- To ascertain the impact of early marriage on girl child's further education.

6. Research Question

This study guided by the following research questions:

What are the causes of early marriage on girl child's further education?

What is the impact of early marriage on girl child's further education?

7. Research Hypotheses

Early marriage has no significant impact on girl child's further education.

Early marriage has no significant impact on girl child's acquisition of formal skills.

8. Methodology

The researcher adopted a descriptive survey method because it involves assessments of public opinion on the impact of early marriage on girl child’s further education from a sample of female students they are well over 114 secondary schools, both government and private in Okpokwu Local Government Area with an average total population of 4320 students. A sample size of 300 female students was selected for this study. This sample was considered appropriate for an approximate population of students that is about 4320 according to the specifications of the research advisor (2006). The instrument of this research was a questionnaire titled “impact of Early marriage on Girl Child’s Further Education

Scale” (IEMGCFES). The questionnaire was structured to elicit responses based on modified Likert scale of Strong Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) options. The questionnaire was presented to three experts in which their inputs helped in rephrasing as well as removing the irrelevant information in the items. About 2 items were removed and 8 items validated for use. The researcher administered the instrument to the randomly sampled respondents with the help of two research assistants after seeking the permission from school authorities. Since the instrument of data collection is designed to be a rating scale, the researcher used Chi – square statistics to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

9. Results

The results are presented based on hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance

Hypotheses one: Early marriage has no significant impact on girl child’s further education in Opokwu Local Government Area of Benue State.

Table 1: Chi square statistics on impact of early marriage on girl child’s further education.

S/No	Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	DF	x ² cal	P value	Decision
1	No education	19	19	172	76	0				
2	School dropout	167	84	28	5	2	12	355.10	0.00	Rejected H ₀
3	Lack of personal development	166	83	27	4	6				
4	High level of poverty	168	85	27	1	5				

X²cal = 3.55, P-value = 0.00 df = 12 P = 0.05 > 0.000

Table 1 shows that the chi – square calculated value of 355.10 is greater than the chi Square critical value of 19.7 checked at 12 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that there is a significant impact of early marriage on girl child’s acquisition of formal skills.

Hypotheses two: There is no significant impact of the early marriage on girl child’s acquisition of formal skills

Table two: Chi – square analysis of girls perceived early marriage as having significant impacts on girl – child’s acquisition of formal skills

S/No	Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	DF	x ² cal	P value	Decision
1	Lack of skill	163	82	28	8	5	12			
2	Less productivity	1	26	18	16	7	74	389.09	0.00	Rejected H ₀
3	Lack of personal development	164	85	28	7	2				
4	High level of poverty	163	81	28	7	7				

X²cal = 389.909, df = 12, P = 0.05 > 0.00

Table 2 reveals that the chi – square calculated value of 389.09 is greater than the chi – square critical value of 18.5 checked at 12 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that there is a significant impact of early marriage on girl child’s acquisition of formal skills.

10. Discussion

Research question one found out that the causes of early girl – child marriage include financial constraint, lack of education, religious/traditional belief, gender inequality and insecurity. This finding is an agreement with Jain, Bisen, Singh and Jain (2011) and Nzenwata (2018), who mentioned that early marriage can arise due to lack of education, gender biasness, religious hurdles, traditional belief and poverty. Among other reasons for the continuance of the practice are family and societal pressures. Also, based on the view that virginity is essential in a bride, girls are married off at a very young age. As a result those girls are traumatized by sex and are forced to bear children much before their bodies are fully mature UNICEF (2014) observes that poor families may regard a young girl as an economic burden and her marriage as a necessary survival strategy for her family. UNICEF is also of the opinion that her parents may think that early marriage offers protection from the dangers of sex assaults, and has an strategy to avoid girls becoming pregnant outside marriage.

Research question two and hypotheses one found out that there is a significant impact of early marriage on girl – child’s further education. This means that early marriage affects girl child’s further education, causing lack of education and personal development, school dropout and high level of poverty. This finding is in accordance with Nzenwata (2018), who found that a girl child’s education is terminated, dreams cut short due to early marriage. She also believes that personal development of a girl child is aborted when her education is terminated for marriage, which does not affect the girl alone but also affects the community and the future generation.

According to Klasen and Pieter (2012), child marriage affects female labour force participation in the area of returns when they are actively employed. This is due to lack of education which has contributed to the increase in unpaid house work. While Chaaban and CUMINGHAM (2011) further opine that female

decreases in labour force participation have negative effects on the economic growth of the woman, families and societies.

In consonance with the study, Jain, Bisen, Singh, and Jain (2011), asserts that early marriage inevitably denies children of school age their right to the education they need for their personal development their preparation for adulthood, and their effective contribution to the future well-being of their family and society. Indeed,, married girls who would like to continue schooling may be both practically and legally excluded from doing so.

The present study revealed that early marriage impacts significantly on girl-child’s acquisition of formal skills due to lack of education. In a supportive view, WHO (2009) reports that school enrolment drops sharply after five or six years of schooling due to early marriage. Early marriage often results in girls leaving school, reducing their opportunity to learn and to gain skills that would enable them to start an income generating activity or to find a job. It thereby increases the likelihood of low levels of education and employment (UNICEF, 2011). Importantly, child marriage often results in separation from family and social networks which has a psychological impact that traumatizes girls in life. WHO (2006) in agreement with this, says that it reduces the girls’ possibility to obtain practical and emotional support and to participate in community activities with important consequences for their sense of wellbeing. Due to lack of education, the girl-child’s access to information is limited, there is a saying that information is knowledge or wealth. As a result of lack of acquisition of formal skills, there is low participation in labour force which increases poverty level of a family and economic growth o the society. Khanna, Verma and Weiss (2013) also opine that depriving a girl of the opportunity to learn limits her prospects for employment and her ability to gain useful skills.

11. Counseling Implications

Rehabilitation counseling centers should be put in place to resuscitate the psychological effect of early marriage on young girls who married early.

The services of social workers will also be needed in assisting the girls recuperate back to the society.

Empowerment centers for skill acquisition in entrepreneurial opportunities can be established to help alleviate poverty aspect.

Micro-credit programs should be provided for women and girls to improve their economic resources.

There is great need to make it mandatory that every girl-child must attend and attain secondary education which will make her concentrate on school work, socialize and gain life skills for economic growth and sustainable development.

12. Conclusion

Early marriage is intrinsically linked to low levels of education, high levels of violence and abuse, social isolation, severe health risks and harmful power dynamics and results in increased gender inequality and vulnerability to poverty for girls, families and the society as a whole. Educating girls seems to be the ideal solution to early marriage, since when you educate an entire family. Education is the only tool with which a girl/woman can empower herself and eventually her family. It is an important foundation to improve the status of women and has also been recognized as a fundamental strategy for development. Education also helps their self-confidence and self-esteem.

13. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher made the following recommendations:

- The government should make provision for the employment of counseling psychologists and social workers in all levels of education.
- Special interventions need to be designed to address learning needs of

girls and relating education to their life. Empower girls with information, skills and support networks.

- There should be more community awareness and empowerment programs and follow-up by the government through the use of mass media.
- Law makers should put in place and enforce laws that prohibit marriage before the age of 18. That is, encourage supportive laws and policies.
- There is need to increase education opportunities for girls. Enhance girls' access to a high-quality education.
- There is also a need to work with all stakeholders to challenge and change norms around early marriage.

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