
**The Issue of Child Marriage: An Assessment of the Global Practices and the
Implications as Perceived by Akwa Ibom People**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to assess the level of practices and implications of child marriage globally as perceived by Akwa Ibom people. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State. The population of the study comprised all social scientists in Akwa Ibom State. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 180 social scientists, which constituted the sample size used for the study. The instrument titled “Global Practices of Child Marriage Questionnaire (GPCMQ)” was used for data collection. Face validation of the instrument was carried out to ensure that the instrument had accuracy, appropriateness and completeness. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the level of the reliability of the instrument. In this case, the reliability coefficient obtained was 0.91 and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics used in answering research questions and simple regression in testing the hypothesis. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha level. The study concluded that Child marriage has existed for centuries as caused by high rate of Poverty, traditional beliefs and norms and many more. The study also revealed the implications of child marriage to include a higher risk of pregnancy-related injuries such as fistula faced by girls under 18, discontinuity in education by child brides among others. Finally, strategies that need to be implemented to mitigate child marriage were numerous including organization of public vigils to end child marriage, use of religious media, such as radio and television, to disseminate the message that child marriage is a violation of human rights and it needs to end and many more. One of the recommendation made was that NGOs should continue providing information via media and outreach to parents and young people in communities where early marriage appears to be prevalent as television may be effective for communicating information about rights to women and girls who are isolated.

KEYWORDS: Child marriage, Implications, Global practices, Mitigation Strategies.

Introduction

Child marriage is a widespread violation of human rights. It is an impediment to social and economic development, and it is rooted in gender inequality (Parsons, Edmeades,

Kes, Petroni, Sexton and Wodon, 2015). The low value placed on girls and women perpetuates the act and acceptability of child marriage in societies where the practice is common. United Nations International Children Fund (UNICEF, 2005), describes early marriage as both formal marriage and informal unions in which a girl before the age of 18 lives with a partner as if married. Also it can be defined as any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years; before the girl is physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready for the responsibilities of marriage and child bearing. In most cases, it is always a young girl married to a matured man. Sometimes, the man can be twice her age. According to UNICEF, (2014) child marriage is as a fundamental violation of human right. Child marriage also means increased health risks for young girls (Anthony, 2013). Several factors may lead to early marriage ranging from cultural and social pressure, persecution, forced migration and slavery, financial challenges, religion (Aduradola, 2013); poverty and economic transactions, notions of morality and honour (Adebambo, 2010); parental desire to prevent sexual relations outside marriage and the fear of rape, a lack of educational or employment opportunities for young girls, and the traditional notions of the primary role of women and girls as wives and mothers (UNICEF, 2005). Erulkar and Bello (2007), opined that the basis for acceptance of early marriages particularly in the northern parts of Nigeria is to preserve the value of virginity, to reduce promiscuity of the girl child, and other socio-cultural and religious norms. Early marriage also undermines international efforts to fight against poverty in developing countries. Bunch (2005) makes it clear that the widespread of practice of child marriage makes it increasingly difficult for families to escape poverty in the developing world, thereby undermining critical international effort to fight poverty, HIV/AIDS and other development challenges, and making billions of dollars in development assistance less effective.

Statement of the Problem

Child marriage is still a massive problem in many developing countries. The issue is more concentrated in Sub Saharan Africa and other part of the world. In early days, parents used to arrange the betrothal of their infant children as a means of uniting two families. In present days, the practice of early marriage is use as a means of poverty and economic transactions common in rural areas. This practice have undermined international efforts to fight against poverty, HIV/AIDS and other development challenges in developing countries.

Research Objective

The purpose of the study was to explore the prevalence of child marriage and the global practices in general. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Assess the causes of child marriage in our society
2. Examine the implication of child marriage as perceived by the Nigeria people
3. Determine the mitigation strategies to child marriage.

Research Question

1. What are the causes of child marriage in our society?
2. What is the perceived influence of child marriage on the educational affairs of children?
3. What strategies can be implemented to mitigating child marriage?

Conceptual Review

Concept of Marriage

Marriage according to Haviland (2000) is a relationship between one or more men (male or female) and one or more women (female or male) recognized by society as having a continuing claim to the right of sexual access to one another. In modern times, the most important aspects of marriage are social, religious as well as legal. Britannica (2019) noted that marriage, a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman, that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring. The universality of marriage within different societies and cultures is attributed to the many basic social and personal functions for which it provides structure, such as sexual gratification and regulation, division of labour between the sexes, economic production and consumption, and satisfaction of personal needs for affection, status, and companionship. According to Haviland, Prins, McBride and Walrath (2011), marriage, also called matrimony or wedlock, is a culturally recognised union between people, called spouses, that establishes rights and obligations between them, as well as between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws. Marriage can be recognized by a state, an organization, a religious authority, a tribal group, a local community, or peers. It is often viewed as a contract. It usually creates normative or legal obligations between the individuals involved (Wikipedia, 2017).

Concept of Child Marriage

Child or early marriage according to UNFPA (2012), is the union of two persons, officially or unofficially, at least one of whom is under 18 years of age. By virtue of being children, child spouses are considered to be incapable of giving free and full consent, meaning that child marriages are a violation of human rights and the rights of the child. Today, child marriage is relatively rare, but it continues to be practiced among certain communities and/or ethnic groups. Child marriage is a gendered phenomenon that affects girls and boys in different ways. Overall, the number of boys in child marriages around the world is significantly lower than that of girls (UNFPA, 2014). Girl child spouses are also vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual abuse within relationships that are unequal, and if they become pregnant, often experience complications during pregnancy and childbirth, as their bodies are not ready for childbearing. Upon marrying, both boys and girls often have to leave education to enter the workforce and/or take up domestic responsibilities at home (Entre Nous, 2012). Furthermore, Verveer (2010) stated that about 25,000 girls become child brides every day. It is also estimated that out of seven girls one marries before she turns fifteen in the developing world (Rodgers, 2012). If child marriage occurs, the girls should have to physically and mentally prepare for childbearing. UNICEF (2011) highlighted that, Child marriage is a major social concern and a violation of children's rights – whether it happens to a girl or a boy – as it denies the basic rights to health, nutrition, education, freedom from violence, abuse and exploitation and deprives the child of his/her childhood. Therefore, child marriage not only denies the fundamental rights of the children but also stolen their childhood (Mahato, 2016).

Causes of Child Marriage

Gynecol cited in Mahato (2016) highlighted that there were three forces major that improve child marriages i.e. poverty, the need to reinforce social ties and the belief that it offers protection. He mentioned that parents have to ensure their daughter's financial security as well as to reduce the economic burden of daughter's place on the family. He added that girls

are taken as pricey in terms of feed, and clothe and finally there was no any output from girls to the family after leaving the household. Gumbonzvanda (2015) noted that early marriage and child marriage robs their future. Girls lose the opportunity for education. They lose the opportunity to choose their partner and must live with that pain for the rest of their lives.

The major causes of child marriage are outlined below:

- ❖ High rate of Poverty
- ❖ Isolation from families and friends
- ❖ Traditional beliefs and norms
- ❖ Lack of proper education

Often, girls are married early to provide protection, security and the support of a male guardian. The question of “honour” is considered by parents and relatives, who may want to make certain that the girls are married early to grooms approved by the families (Ahmed, 2015). According to a report by Girls Not Brides, “poverty is one of the most powerful drivers of the harmful practice. Girls are thought of as an economic burden by parents who believe they will be more financially secure once their daughters are married off and out of their responsibility. Poor families want to reduce the number of children to feed, clothe and educate (Girls Not Brides, 2015). Families may agree to child marriage because of community pressures and norms. Sometimes children who refuse to marry or choose a marriage partner against the wishes of their family may be punished or even killed (BBC, 2012).

The Prevalence of Child Marriage

Globally 39,000 girls under the age of 18 years are married daily and 14.2 million girls annually (WHO, 2019). More than 700 million women alive worldwide were married before age 18. The highest prevalence of girl-child marriage is in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, 2014; Mobolaji, Fatusi and Adedini, 2020). Early marriage violates the human rights of the girl-child, increases her risk of maternal morbidity and mortality, and robs her of educational and developmental opportunities (Santhya, 2011; Nour, 2006). There is a global consensus to end girl-child marriage and Target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to “eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations” by 2030 (UNDP, 2019). Ending girl-child marriage has the potential to contribute to eight SDGs, including those addressing poverty (goal 1), good health and well-being (goal 3), inclusive and quality education (goal 4), gender equality (goal 5), and economic growth (goal 8) (Girls Not Brides, 2019). Progress in reducing child marriage rate has so far been quite slow in sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, 2014). Nigeria, with over 3.5 million under-18 girls currently married (UNICEF, 2019) has the highest number of child brides in Africa and the third highest number in the world (Girls Not Brides, 2019). The rate of child marriage varies significantly by geo-political zones in Nigeria, ranging from 39.0% to 67.6% for the Northern zones compared to the much lower rates of 13.9-21.6% for the Southern zones (UNICEF, 2015). According to Save the Children (2016) noted that in Nigeria 39% of girls are married off before age 18 and 16% are married before they turn 15 years old. However, according to the NDHS 2013, the number of Nigerian girls that are married before their 18th birthday is as high as 58.2%. The prevalence of child marriage varies widely across the country, but figures are as high as 76% in the North West region, compared with 10% in the South East.

Global Practices of Child Marriage

Child marriage occurs in practically every region of the world, (United Nations, 2011) but it is most common in South Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Africa. More than 70 percent of girls under the age of 18 are married in Niger, Chad and Mali (Girls Not Brides, 2015). Nearly half of all Indian daughters become child brides. World Bank (2017) noted that child marriage can be found in every region of the world, regardless of culture or ethnicity, and the practice persists even though no religion formally endorses it. This persistence is striking given that child marriage is inconsistent with the fundamental values of religious communities: enhancing the moral, physical and psychological development of children as they transit to adulthood (Mathur et al., 2007).

The table 1 depicts the situation globally

Rank	Country Name	% Girls Married before 18
1	Niger	75
2	Chad	68
3	Central African Republic	68
4	Bangladesh	66
5	Guinea	63
6	Mozambique	56
7	Mali	55
8	Burkina Faso	52
9	South Sudan	52
10	Malawi	50
11	Madagascar	48
12	Eritrea	47
13	India	47
14	Somalia	45
15	Sierra Leone	44
16	Zambia	42
17	Dominican Republic	41
18	Ethiopia	41
19	Nepal	41
20	Nicaragua	41

Source: UNICEF State of the World's Children, 2013 - data from UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and other national surveys, and refers to the most recent year available during the period 2002-2011.

Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women UNFPA (2014) states that “No girl should be robbed of her childhood, her education and health, and her aspirations. Yet today

millions of girls are denied their rights each year when they are married as child brides” (Nour, 2006). Once a girl is married at an early age she is deprived of her education and the opportunity to equip herself with life skills. She becomes a child mother before her body and mind are ready for this experience. The ill effects child marriage is reflected in the statements of Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF: “Child marriage is not only wrong, it is dangerous. It exposes a young girl to profound health risks from early pregnancy and difficult childbirth and it exposes her baby to complications of premature birth” (UNFPA, 2013).

The Implications of Child Marriage

Child marriage is a phenomenon that affects girls and boys in different ways. Overall, the number of boys in child marriages around the world is significantly lower than that of girls (UNFPA, 2014). Girl child spouses are also vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual abuse within relationships that are unequal. If they become pregnant, they often experience complications during pregnancy and childbirth, as their bodies are not ready for childbearing. Upon marrying, both boys and girls often have to leave education to enter the workforce and/or take up domestic responsibilities at home (Entre Nous, 2012). The consequences of child marriage can include domestic violence (including isolation from friends and family),

- Girls under 18 face a higher risk of pregnancy-related injuries such as fistula
- Child brides are likely to discontinue their education
- Child marriage increases the likelihood that a girl will give birth at a young age and that childbearing will continue uninterrupted throughout reproductive age
- Complications in pregnancy
- Lack of access to employment opportunities
- Divorce
- Child brides face a higher rate of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted

According to UNICEF (2012), Girl child spouses are often economically dependent on their husband’s family, and have little decision-making power within the household, where husbands and fathers-in-law tend to take decisions. This can place them in an even weaker position and can be a sign of other forms of domestic violence (Criminal code of Kosovo, 2008). Finally, a child bride could get pregnant, which is extremely risky at such a young age. A girl who gets pregnant before her body is fully developed faces grave health risks and is far more likely to die during childbirth. Additionally, once a child is born, the girl’s hopes of returning to school are all but dashed.

Mitigation Strategies to Child Marriage

During the past 10 years, the international community has documented and evaluated a number of programs that were created to end child marriage. The assessments all say the same thing: Ending child marriage requires governmental commitment and societal commitment (United Nations, 2011). In 2011, the International Center for Research on Women conducted a meta-evaluation of child marriage prevention programs and it found that “a set of strategies focusing on girls’ empowerment, community mobilization, enhanced schooling, economic incentives and policy changes have improved knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour related to child marriage prevention” (ICRW, 2006).

In a small village outside Sylhet, Bangladesh, a 17-year-old boy named Dipko has been going door-to-door to convince families to find alternatives to child marriage. Each door and each conversation is part of his mission to help girls and women in his community. Dipko first began his work as an activist when a social worker told him about a local adolescent club that

focuses on literacy, health education, and the risks of early marriage. The club — one of around 6,000 in Bangladesh funded by UNICEF — empowers children to become activists for their own rights.

Below are some strategic actions to mitigating child marriage:

- Organize public vigils to end child marriage.
- Use religious media, such as radio and television, to disseminate the message that child marriage is a violation of human rights and it needs to end.
- Work with leaders and advocates from other religious communities, government and civil society to issue joint statements and commitments on ending child marriage.
- Lead discussions with children and adolescents about their hopes and aspirations, and ask them to consider how they may jeopardize these aspirations if they marry before 18.
- Provide material, spiritual and emotional support to families who are struggling in the face of adversity
- Promote the discussion of delaying marriage to 18 (or older). Get parents, and your community, to consider delaying marriage to adulthood.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The population of the study comprised all social scientists in Akwa Ibom State. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 180 social scientists which constituted the sample size used for the study. The instrument titled “Global Practices of Child Marriage Questionnaire (GPCMQ)” was used for data collection. Face validation of the instrument was carried out to ensure that the instrument had accuracy, appropriateness and completeness. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the level of the reliability of the instrument. In this case the reliability coefficient obtained was 0.91 and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics used in answering research questions and simple regression in testing the hypothesis. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha level.

RESULTS

Research Questions One: The research question sought to find out the causes of child marriage in our society. To answer the research percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 1).

Table 1: Percentage analysis of the causes of child marriage in our society

CAUSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
High Rate of Poverty	118	65.56**
Traditional Beliefs and Norms	42	23.33
Lack of Proper Education and	14	7.78
Isolation from families and friends	6	3.33*
TOTAL	180	100%

** The highest percentage frequency

* The least percentage frequency

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 1 presents the percentage analysis of the causes of child marriage in our society. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the tagged “high rate of poverty” (65.56%) rated the highest percentage affirmed by the respondents of the causes of child marriage, while the “isolation from families and friends” (3.33%) rated the least percentage of the causes of child marriage in our society.

Research Questions Two: The research question sought to find out the implication of child marriage as perceived by the Nigeria people. To answer the research percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 2).

Table 2: Percentage analysis of the implication of child marriage as perceived by the Nigeria people

IMPLICATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Discontinuity in education by child brides are likely	38	21.11
Girl giving birth at a young age and childbearing continuing uninterrupted throughout reproductive age	22	12.22
Higher risk of pregnancy-related injuries such as fistula faced by Girls under 18	48	26.67**
Complications in pregnancy	25	13.89
Lack of access to employment opportunities	19	10.55
Divorce	11	6.11*
Child brides facing a higher rate of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted	17	9.44
TOTAL	180	100%

** The highest percentage frequency

* The least percentage frequency

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 2 presents the percentage analysis of the implication of child marriage as perceived by the Nigeria people. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the tagged “higher risk of pregnancy-related injuries such as fistula faced by Girls under 18” (26.67%) rated the highest percentage affirmed by the respondents of the implication of child marriage, while the “Divorce” (6.11%) rated the least percentage of the implication of child marriage as perceived by the Nigeria people.

Research Questions 3: The research question sought to find out the mitigation strategies to child marriage. To answer the research percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 3).

Table 3: Percentage analysis of the mitigation strategies to child marriage

MITIGATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Organize public vigils to end child marriage	32	17.78
Use religious media, such as radio and television, to disseminate the message that child marriage is a violation of human rights and it needs to end	34	18.89
Work with leaders and advocates from other religious communities, government and civil society to issue joint statements and commitments on ending child marriage	46	25.56**
Lead discussions with children and adolescents about their hopes and aspirations, and ask them to consider how they may jeopardize these aspirations if they marry before 18	28	15.56
Provide material, spiritual and emotional support to families who are struggling in the face of adversity	24	13.33
Promote the discussion of delaying marriage to 18 (or older). Get parents, and your community, to consider delaying marriage to adulthood	16	8.89*
TOTAL	180	100%

** The highest percentage frequency

* The least percentage frequency

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 3 presents the percentage analysis of the mitigation strategies to child marriage. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the tagged “work with leaders and advocates from other religious communities, government and civil society to issue joint statements and commitments on ending child marriage” (25.56%) rated the highest percentage affirmed by the respondents of the mitigation strategies to child marriage, while “Promote the discussion of delaying marriage to 18 (or older). Get parents, and your community, to consider delaying marriage to adulthood” (8.89%) rated the least percentage of the mitigation strategies to child marriage.

Conclusion

The study concluded that Child marriage has existed for centuries as caused by high rate of Poverty, traditional beliefs and norms and many more. The study also revealed the implications of child marriage to include a higher risk of pregnancy-related injuries such as fistula faced by girls under 18, discontinuity in education by child brides among others. Finally, strategies that need to implemented to mitigate child marriage were numerous including organization of public vigils to end child marriage, use of religious media, such as radio and television, to disseminate the message that child marriage is a violation of human rights and it needs to end and many more.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion stated above, the following were recommended.

1. NGOs should continue providing information via media and outreach to parents and young people in communities where early marriage appears to be prevalent as television may be effective for communicating information about rights to women and girls who are isolated.
2. Awareness-raising about rights and options outside violent domestic relationships should target society in general, with the aim of preventing domestic violence and reaching out to survivors with information about assistance.
3. Families should be encouraged to support their children's education.

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