

THE IMPACT OF EARLY MARRIAGE ON THE EDUCATION OF GIRL-CHILD AND ITS IMPLICATION ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN BILLIRI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF GOMBE STATE

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated the impact of early marriage on the education of the girl-child and its implication on economic development in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State. Four research questions were formulated to facilitate the finding of the study. The survey research design was adopted in the study and the questionnaire was used for the purpose of the data collection. The data collected was analysed using simple percentages. From the analysis of data collected, it is discovered that early marriage has negative impact on the education of the girl-child. It leads to poor academic performance of female students, poor learning in school and eventual dropout from school. Similarly, early marriage has negative implication on economic development; it leads inability of the girl-child to contribute her quota maximally to economic advancement due to limitations and restrictions within marital confinements. Therefore, it was concluded in this research that early marriage should be discouraged in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that education should be made free at all levels to encourage parents to send their female children to school rather than handing them over for marriage and government should enact a law against the marriage of girls under eighteen in Nigeria

Keywords: Impact, Early Marriage, Girl-child, Education, Economic Development.

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INTRODUCTION

Early marriage is a violation of human rights, compromising the development of girls and often resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation. Young married girls face onerous domestic burdens, constrained decision-making and reduced life choices (Jonanson, 2017). Birth, marriage and death are the standard trio of key events in most people's lives. But monogamy is a matter of choice. The right to exercise that choice was recognized as a principle of law even in Roman times and has long been established in international human rights instruments. Yet many girls, and a smaller number of boys, enter marriage without any chance of exercising their right to choose. Some are forced into marriage at a very early age. Others are simply too young to make an informed decision about their marriage partner or about the implications of marriage itself. They may have given what passes for 'consent' in the eyes of custom or the law, but in reality, consent to their binding union has been made by others on their behalf. The assumption is that once a girl is married, she has become a woman even if she is only but a child. Equally, where a boy is made to marry, he is now a man and must put away childish things. While the age of

marriage is generally on the rise, early marriage (marriage of children and adolescents below the age of 18 is still widely practiced) (Adewale, 2016).

While early marriage takes many different forms and has various causes, one issue is paramount. Whether it happens to a girl or a boy, early marriage is a violation of human rights. The right to free and full consent to a marriage is recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and in many subsequent human rights instruments consent that cannot be 'free and full' when at least one partner is very immature. For both girls and boys, early marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts, cutting off educational opportunity and chances of personal growth. For girls, in addition, it will almost certainly mean premature pregnancy and childbearing, and is likely to lead to a lifetime of domestic and sexual subservience over which they have no control. Yet many societies, primarily in Africa continue to support the idea that girls should marry at or soon after puberty. Their spouses are likely to be a few years older than they are, but may be more than twice their age. Parents and heads of families make marital choices for daughters and sons with little regard for the personal implications. Rather, they look upon marriage as a family-building strategy, an economic arrangement or a way to protect girls from unwelcome sexual advances (Haruna, 2017).

Known to be one of the best investment in development, girls' education has become a major issue in most developing countries. Especially in sub-Saharan Africa, a large number of young girls still do not attend school. The global figure for out-of-school children is estimated at 121 million, 65 million being girls. Over 80 per cent of these girls live in Sub Saharan Africa (Musaazi, 2022). In Nigeria, girls' access to basic education, especially in northern states, has remained low. As few as 20 per cent of women in the North West and North East of the country are literate and have attended school. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) revealed a net enrollment ratio of 80.6% suggesting that a substantial proportion (19%) of primary school age population (6-11 years) are not enrolled in school in Nigeria. This implies that over 5 million Nigerian children aged 6-11 years old that do not have access to primary education. In northern part of the country, the number of children out of school is particularly high and the proportion of girls to boys in school ranges from 1 girl to 2 boys and even 1 to 3 in some states (UNICEF, 2019).

During the past decade, the movement for 'Education for All' has stressed the need to enroll more girls in school and to keep them from dropping out before completion. In this context, the custom of early marriage is acknowledged as one of the reasons for girls' exclusion from school, especially in cultural settings where girls are raised for a lifetime confined to household occupations and are expected to marry very young. Very recently, the situation of children in need of special protection, notably girls vulnerable to sexual abuse and HIV/AIDS, suggests that early marriage is being used as a strategy to protect girls from sexual exposure, or to pass the economic burden for their care to others. Thus, early marriage lingers on as a culturally and socially sanctioned practice among most traditional societies in northern Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Over the past decades, there has been serious outcry on the poor standard of girl-child education in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State. A good number of girls in Billiri Local Government Area are not enrolled in school. Even among those in school, it is observed that

many of girls drop out of school before reaching primary class five and sent into marriage by their parents (UNICEF, 2019).

Based on the above problem, this study was therefore prompted to examine the impact on education of the girl-child and its implication economic development in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State. Despite the efforts of reformers in the early part of the 20th century, early marriage has received poor attention from the Nigerian government as a social menace, hence the need to interrogate the issue thoroughly.

Research Questions

To facilitate this research study, the following research questions are formulated:

- What is the rate of occurrence of early marriage of a girl-child in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State?
- What are the causes of early marriage of a girl-child in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State?
- What are the implication of early marriage on the education of the girl-child in Billiri Local Government Area?
- What are the implication of early marriage on economic development of Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State?

METHODOLOGY

The design for this research is survey research design and it is meant to investigate the impact on girl child education in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State. The population for this research covered all the female students, their parents and teachers in the secondary schools in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State. The sample of this research consists of a total of one hundred (100) students, twenty (20) teachers and thirty (30) parents, thus giving a total of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents from Billiri Local Government Area

In selecting the sample schools for this research, the researcher made use of the simple random sampling technique. The instrument used in this research for the purpose of data collection was questionnaire. Furthermore, the data collected in this research was subjected to analysis through the use of simple percentages and frequency tables.

RESULTS

Research Question One: To what extent is early marriage rampant among young girls in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State?

Table 1: Prevalence of early marriage among young girls in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State

s/n	Item	SA	A	%	UND	%	D	SD	%
1.	Early marriage is very rampant among girls in my community	20	30	33.3%	30	20%	50	20	46.7%
2.	There are high incidences of under aged girls (below) eighteen getting married in my	30	-	20%	-	-	100	20	80%

community									
3.	There are few incidences of under aged girls (below) eighteen getting married in my community	100	20	80%	-	-	30	-	20%

Table 1 shows the responses of the respondents to the extent to which early marriage is rampant among young girls in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State. From the item on whether early marriage is very rampant among girls in my community, 20 respondents and 30 respondents representing 33.3% of the respondents strongly agree and agree respectively. 30 respondents representing 20% were undecided while 50 respondents and 20 respondents representing 46.7% disagree and strongly disagree. From the item on whether there are high incidences of under aged girls (below) eighteen getting married in my community, 30 respondents representing 20% strongly agreed while 100 respondents and 20 respondents representing 80% disagree and strongly disagreed respectively. From the item on whether there are few incidences of under-age girls (below) eighteen getting married in my community, 100 respondents and 20 respondents representing 80% agree and strongly agreed respectively while 30 respondents representing 20% strongly disagreed.

Research Question Two: What are the causes of early marriage in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State?

Table 2: Causes of early marriage in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State

s/n	Item	SA	A	%	UND	%	D	SD	%
4.	Poverty is a major cause of early girl child marriage	60	30	60%	-	-	10	50	40%
5.	Custom and tradition is a major cause of early girl child marriage	60	-	40%	30	20%	-	60	40%
6.	Early pregnancy is a major cause of early girl child marriage	100	20	80%	-	-	-	30	20%
7.	Broken homes is a major cause of early girl child marriage	75	25	76.7%	10	6.7%	30	10	26.6%
8.	Religious factor is a major cause early girl child marriage	85	20	70%	5	3.3%	10	30	26.7%

The table above shows the responses of the respondents to the causes of early marriage in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State, 60 respondents and 30 representing 60% respondents strongly agree and agree while 10 respondents and 50 respondents representing 40% disagreed and strongly disagreed. From the item on whether early pregnancy is a major cause of early girl child marriage, 100 respondents and 20 respondents representing 80% strongly agree, and agree while 30 respondents representing 20% strongly disagreed. From the item on whether broken homes is a major cause of early girl child marriage, 75 respondents and 25 respondents representing 66.7% strongly agree and agreed, 10 respondents representing 6.7% were undecided while 30 respondents and 10 respondents representing 26.6% disagree and strongly disagreed. From the item on whether religious factor is a major cause early girl child marriage, 85 respondents and 20 respondents representing 70% strongly agree and agreed, 5 respondents representing 3.3% while 10 respondents and 30 respondents representing 26.6% disagree and strongly disagreed.

Research Question Three: What impact does early marriage have on the education of the girl-child in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State?

Table 3: Impact of early marriage on the education the girl child in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State

s/n	Item	SA	A	%	UND	%	D	SD	%
9.	Early marriage leads to poor academic achievement of the girl child in school	95	45	93.3%	4	2.7%		6	4%
10.	Early marriage leads to the girl child dropping out of school	50	100	100%	-	-	-	-	-
11.	Early marriage has negative impact on the education of the girl child	100	45	96.7%	5	3.3%	-	-	-
12.	Early marriage leads to poor girl child education and low life skills literacy	100	50	100%	-	-	-	-	-

The table above shows the responses of the respondents to the impact of early marriage on the education of the girl-child in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State. From the item on whether early marriage leads to poor academic achievement of the girl child in school, 95 respondents and 45 respondents representing 93.3% strongly agreed and agreed, 4 respondents representing 2.7% were undecided while 6 respondents representing 4% strongly disagreed. From the item on whether early marriage leads to the girl child dropping out of school, 50 respondents and 100 respondents representing 100% strongly agreed and agreed. From the item on whether early marriage has negative impact on the education of the girl child, 100 respondents and 45 respondents representing 96.7% strongly agreed and agreed that while 5 respondents representing 3.3% were undecided. From the item on whether early marriage leads to poor girl child education and low life skills literacy, 100 respondents and 50 respondents representing 100% agreed and strongly agreed.

Research Question Four: What are the implication of early marriage on economic development of Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State?

Table 4: Implication of early marriage on economic development of Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State

s/n	Item	SA	A	%	UND	%	D	SD	%
13.	Early marriage increases poverty rate	100	20	80%	-	-	30	-	20%
14.	Early marriage leads to population explosion	100	50	100%	-	-	-	-	-
15.	Early marriage leads to increase in illiteracy level	95	45	93.3%	-	-	-	10	6.7%
16.	Early marriage leads to low per capita income	50	100	100%	-	-	-	-	-

Table 4 above shows the responses of the respondents on the implication of early marriage on economic development of Billiri Local Government Area. 80% of the respondents agreed that early marriage increases poverty rate while 20% of the respondents disagreed. 100% of the respondents agreed that early marriage leads to population explosion. 93.3% of the respondents agreed that early marriage increases the illiteracy level in the society while 6.7% of the

respondents disagreed. 100% of the respondents agreed that early marriage leads to low per capita income.

DISCUSSION

Research question one on the extent is early marriage rampant among young girls in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State was analysed and the results revealed that early marriage is not a very prevalent problem among young girls in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State, although there are some few cases. This finding is in conformity with the findings of Agu (2023) who discovered a high prevalence of early girl-child marriage in northern Nigeria. He discovered that over 67.7% of girls are sent into marriage in northern Nigeria before the age of fifteen.

Findings from the analysis of research questions two revealed that the causes of early marriage in northern Nigeria include poverty, custom and tradition, early pregnancy and religious factor. This finding is in consonance with the findings of Alike and Egbochuku (2017) who discovered that religious and cultural beliefs are the leading factors responsible for early girl-child marriage in Northern Nigeria.

Research question three which investigated the impact of early marriage has on the education of the girl-child in Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State is analysed from the analysis of responses collected, it is discovered that early marriage leads to poor academic achievement of the girl child in school, it leads to the girl-child dropping out of school and has general negative impact on the education of the girl child. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Nnaka and Okeke (2017) who discovered negative significant impact of early marriage on girl-child education in Northern Nigeria.

Findings from the analysis of research question four revealed that early marriage increases the poverty level in the society, it leads to population explosion, low literacy rate and low per capita income. This finding is in tandem with the findings of Adewale (2016) who discovered a negative impact of early marriage on economic development

CONCLUSION

Early marriage has negative impact on the education of the girl-child and economic development of Nigeria as a country. It is a violation of human rights, compromising the socio-economic development of girls and often resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation. Young married girls face onerous domestic burdens, constrained decision-making and reduced life choices. Enlightening the society against early marriage of the Girl-child is very necessary if the standard of girl-child education and economic development of Nigeria is to improve.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research study, the following recommendations are made:

- Parents should accord equal priority to the education of both boys and girls in the home as the all equal beings before the law
- Education should be made free at all levels to encourage parents to send their female children to school rather than handing them over for marriage.
- Government should enact a law against the marriage of girls under eighteen in Nigeria

- The media and indeed the educational sector should enlighten parents and the whole society on the negative impact of early girl child marriage.

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