

Perception of Residents in Selected Compounds in Amassoma towards Early Marriage in Southern-Ijaw Local Government Area, Bayelsa State

Azebri Pereotubo Beauty¹, Lawrence Arunibebi Lamawal², Oweibo Sunday³

¹Department of Maternal and Child Health Nursing, Faculty of Nursing, Niger Delta University, Amassoma, Nigeria

²Department of Public Health Nursing, School of Public Health Sciences, Bayelsa State College of Health Technology, Otuogidi-Ogbia, Nigeria

³Faculty of Nursing, Niger Delta University, Amassoma, Nigeria

Abstract: *Early marriage is referred to as child marriage and defined as any marriage that a girl child below the age of 18 years is given out, before the girl is physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing. Although early marriage is frowned at in Nigeria, it has been observed that, the practice of child marriage is deeply entrenched in tradition, culture and religion. This study seeks to evaluate the perception of people toward early marriage among residents of Amassoma community, in Southern-Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa state. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, with a target population that includes both teenagers from 15 years and adults up to 60 years of age. 120 participants were selected by simple random technique for the study. A researcher self constructed questionnaire was used for data collection. Data collected were presented in frequency tables and analyzed using simple percentage, results from the study shows that, majority of respondents 112 (93.3%) don't like early marriage. Perceived causes of early marriage were attributed to poverty 53 (44.2%), lack of parental care 110 (91.7%), lack of educational experience 107 (89.2%), parent desire for grand children 66 (55%), and poverty 106 (88.3%). Findings from this study have shown that people don't like child marriage even though it is still been practiced, which is strongly associated to poverty, lack of education experiences, parents encouraging their children for desire of having grand children early, and so on. The perceptions of people most have a positive molding if these practices most stop.*

Keywords: Early Marriage, Child Marriage, Perception, Poverty, Education

1. Introduction

Marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life throughout the world ^[1]. As a social practice entered into through a public act, religious or traditional ceremony, it reflects the purposes, character, and customs of the society in which it is found ^[2].

Early marriage which is referred to as child marriage and is common all over the globe and has inflicted dangerous and devastating effects on young children (especially females) who are compelled to tie the knot in most cases ^[1]. Getiye (2014)^[3], defined Early marriage as any marriage that a girl child below the age of 18 years is given out, before the girl is physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing. This practice is both globally and regionally known and practiced, and therefore has major consequences for public health, national security, social development, human rights, economic development and gender equality ^[4].

Bunting (1999)^[5] states that in both the developed and developing countries, early marriage continues to increase daily in spite of the awareness being created by governmental and nongovernmental agents over the dangers of early marriage which poses problem to the entire society. Every society and culture has some basic norms and beliefs that guide the people ^[6]. The International Center for Research on Women (2007) ^[7] argued that poverty is related to culture to a certain degree, more often than not, child

marriage takes place due to poverty. This is due to the fact that some people do not work hard and have cultivated the spirit of dependence. Where there is acute poverty, a young girl may be seen as an economic burden, when purchased will relieve the family financially and socially Hence, marriage is considered a transaction, a significant economic activity. In most African communities, bride wealth is linked with marriage. In the context of Poverty, therefore, this practice encourages child marriage. In addition, some communities do not regard the education of the girl highly as that of the boy. The girls are married off early and are seen as a source of wealth ^[7].

In Nigeria, a researcher observed that, the practice of child marriage is deeply entrenched in tradition, culture and religion and the country has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with estimated 42 percent of girls married before 18 years; and while this is found among many ethnic groups across the country, its predominance is clearly in the northern part of the country ^[8]. Erulkar and Bello (2007)^[9] argued that the reason for acceptance of early marriages among Northern region is to preserve the value of virginity, fears about pre-marital sexual activity, to reduce promiscuity of the girl-child, and other socio-cultural and religious norms. In India girls grow up with the normative expectation of marriage within a socially determined social frame. Indeed, this shows that culture is rooted in the societal structures ^[10]. A research carried out on issue of early marriage in sub-Saharan Africa opined that early girl marriage is a barrier to girl's education as young girls drop out from school to get married which impacts negatively on

the community^[11]. Also a group of researchers conducted a study in Gombe, Nigeria, and recorded that, of data obtained from 200 young mothers aged 15-24 years, more than 60 percent had only primary education, indicating that they had very little educational experience^[12]. Another study in Bayelsa State, Nigeria listed factors promoting early marriage in Ekeremor and Aleibiri Communities such as; financial difficulties and socio-economic background of parent, lack of educational and exposure, pre-marital sex amongst youths, parents desire for grand children, lack of premarital support and moral decadence in the society^[13].

In contemporary Nigeria society, early marriages are frowned at and needs to be addressed as a problem on concern. The objective of this study seeks to evaluate the perception of Amassoma resident towards early marriage. Although, studies on early child marriage have been carried out extensively, very few studies is known in communities of Bayelsa State, and none that the researchers are aware off, up to the time of this study in Amassoma, Southern-Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

It is no longer new in our society that young adolescent and teenagers girls are given out to marriage by their parents for some reasons. The researcher has particularly observed that, there seem to be some occurrence of adolescent marriage, looking at the age of teenagers registering for antenatal care services. The question then is; what is the perception of people living in Amassoma towards early marriage? Findings from this study will help to enlighten parents, adolescents and educators on the issue of early marriages by discouraging early girl marriage, and encouraging parents to give out their children when they get to the legal recommended age of getting married.

2. Methodology

A descriptive survey was adopted for this study in Amassoma Community in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The Community is made up of (20) twenty compounds, out of which (12) twelve compounds were selected for the study. They are: Ebilade-Ama, Azene-Ama, Wademo-Ama, Bitebi-Ama, Okoloba-Ama, Ogbopina-Ama, Goin-Ama, Wapere-Ama, Furo-Ama, Ogun-Ama, Agbe-bi-Ama and Sadiemo-Ama. It is an Izon speaking community in Bayelsa State, Southern Nigeria and has a water way as the major link with neighbouring communities, with only the Amassoma-Tombia Bridge linking it with the State Capital city (Yenagoa). According to (NPC, 2006); it has a total population of 155,000 people with 84,234 males and 70,766 females. Majority of this population are indigenes, although residents from other tribes such as Igbo, Yoruba and Hausas are also present in the Community. It is a sub-urban community with most of its population being civil servants, students, traders, farmers, hunters and fisher's men/women in occupation.

The population of the study comprised of all teenagers of 12 years and adults up to 60 years of age. A simple random technique, was used to select both the names twenty compounds and the participants of this study. 120 teenagers and adults were selected for the study comprising of 10 participants each compound (12 x 10 = 120).

A self constructed questionnaire was used for data collection, and was sectioned into two sections with both open and closed ended questions. Section A was on demographic data for the participants, and section B questions on perception of early marriage. The data was collected using a structured questionnaire and administered directly by the researcher. Data collected were presented in frequency tables and analyzed using simple percentages.

3. Results

Table 1 shows the socio demographic data of respondents, age indicates that 23 (19.2%) of the respondents were aged 12-17 years, 18 (10.0%) were 19-25 years, 38 (31.7%) were 26-35 years, 26 (21.7%) were 36-45 years old while 15 (12.5%) were 46 years and above. On their sex, 68 (56.5%) were female while 52 (43.3%) were male. Their marital status showed that 63 (56.7%) were married while 57 (47.5%) were single. Their educational qualification showed that 21 (17.5%) had FSLC, 49 (40.8%) had SSCE, 33 (27.50%) had B.Sc while 19 (15.8%) had other educational qualification. For occupation, 30 (25%) were traders, 12 (10.0%) were farmer, 30 (25%) were students while 48 (40%) were civil servants. The tribe showed that majority of the respondents 96 (80%) were Ijaw, 12 (10%) were Igbo, 4 (3.3%) were Hausa, 7 (5.8%) were Yoruba while 1 (0.8%) were from other tribes. Their religious affiliation showed that 114 (95%) were Christians while 6 (5%) were Muslims.

Table 2 showed that majority of the respondents 112 (93.3%) don't like early marriage while very few 8 (6.7%) do. Does who like early marriage gives the following reasons for their decision, 38% said they like it because they want to have children early, 38% said they want grand children early while 25% said they want to save their virginity for their husband and don't want to fornicate. 53 (44.2%) said that poverty is a cause of early marriage while 67 (55.8%) said that it is not a cause. Majority of the respondents 110 (91.7%) said that lack of parental care is a cause of early marriage while 10 (8.3%) said it is a cause of. Greater proportion of the respondents 107 (89.2%) said that lack of educational experience is a cause of early marriage while 13 (10.8%) said it is not. 66 (55%) agreed that parent desire for grand children is a reason for early marriage while 54 (45%) said that parent desire grand children is not a reason for early marriage. Majority of the respondents 106 (88.3%) said that poverty is an effect of early marriage while 14 (11.6%) said that poverty is not an effect of early marriage. 105 (87.5%) said that early marriage should be encouraged in the community while 15 (12.5%) said it should not be encouraged.

The results in table 3 shows that a good number of the respondents 63 (52.5%) correctly agree with the statement that divorce is an effect of early marriage, 25 (20.8%) strongly agreed, whereas 18 (15%) disagreed while 14 (11.7%) strongly agreed. For child abandonment 34 (28.3%) indicated agreed, 16 (13.3%) strongly agreed, whereas 9 (7.5%) disagreed while a greater proportion of the respondents 61 (50.8%) reported that they strongly disagreed that child abandonment is never an effect of early marriage. The data also reveals that 67 (55.8%) reported agreeing, 29 (24.2%) strongly agreed that low education standard is an

effect of early marriage, while 14 (11.7%) indicated disagreement and the remaining 10 (8.3%) stated strongly disagreed. 41 (34.2%) indicated correctly agreement and 18 (15%) stated strongly agreed while 36 (30%) reported disagreement and 25 (20.8%) strongly disagreed that poor health is not an effect of early marriage. A little above half of the respondents 53 (44.2%) indicated agreement, and 24 (20%) correctly stated strongly agreed that over population is an effect of early marriage while 23 (19.2%) reported disagreeing and the remaining 20 (16.7%) strongly disagreed to the statement. This implies a negative attitude of the majority of the respondents toward early marriage.

4. Tables

Table 1: Demographical Data of Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age:		
12-17	23	19.2
18-25	18	10.0
26-35	38	31.7
36-45	26	21.7
46-60	15	12.5
Total	120	100
Gender		
Male	68	56.7
Female	52	43.3

Marital status			
Single	63	52.5	
Married	57	47.5	
Religions			
Christians	114	95.0	
Muslims	6	5.0	
Others	-		
Tribe			
Ijaw	96	80	
Igbo	12	10	
Hausa	4	3.3	
Yoruba	7	5.8	
Others	1	0.8	
Educational qualification			
FSLC	21	17.5	
SSCE	49	40.8	
B.Sc	33	27.50	
Others	17	14.2	
Occupation			
Trader	30	25	
Farmer	12	10	
Student	30	25	
Civil servant	48	40	
TOTAL	120	100	

Table 2: Perception of Respondents on Early Marriage

ITEMS	YES	%	NO	%	TOTAL (%)
Do you like early marriage	8	6.7	112	93.3	100
If yes, why; please specify					
• I want to have children early (38%)					
• I want grand children early (38%)					
• I want my virginity for my husband, I don't want to fornicate (25%)					
Is poverty a cause of early marriage	53	44.2	67	55.8	100
Does lack of parental care a cause of early marriage?	110	91.7	10	8.3	100
Does lack of educational experience a cause of early marriage?	107	89.2	13	10.8	100
Does parent desire for grand children reason for early marriage	66	55	54	45	100
Poverty is an effect of early marriage	106	88.3	14	11.6	100
Should early marriage be encouraged in Amassoma?	105	87.5	15	12.5	100

Table 3: Statement of Opinion on the Effect of Early Marriage

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Divorce is an effect of early marriage		
Agree	63	52.5
Disagree	18	15.0
Strongly agree	25	20.8
Strongly disagree	14	11.7
Total	120	100
Child abandonment is an effect of early marriage		
Agree	34	28.3
Disagree	16	13.3
Strongly agree	9	7.5
Strongly disagree	61	50.8
Total	120	100
Low educational standard is an effect of early marriage		
Agree	67	55.8
Strongly agree	29	24.2
Disagree	14	11.7
Strongly disagree	10	8.3
Total	120	100
Poor health is an effect of early		

marriage	41	34.2
Agree	18	15
Strongly Agree	36	30
Disagree	25	20.8
Strongly disagree	120	100
Over population is an effect of early marriage		
Agree	53	44.2
Strongly Agree	24	20
Disagree	23	19.2
Strongly Disagree	20	16.7
Total	120	100

5. Discussion

This study shows a majority of the respondents 112 (93.3%) that don't like early marriage while very few 8 (6.7%) do. This is related to the religious affiliation of participants of this study of 114 (95%) who are Christians, compared to those who are Muslims 6 (5%). This is in line with a study and observing that, in Nigeria, the practice of child marriage is deeply entrenched in tradition, culture and religion and the

country has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with estimated 42 percent of girls married before 18 years; and while this is found among many ethnic groups across the country, its predominance is clearly in the northern part of the country that is populated by Muslims^[8]. Erulkar and Bello (2007)^[9] argued that the reason for acceptance of early marriages among Northern region is to preserve the value of virginity, fears about marital sexual activity, to reduce promiscuity of the girl-child, and other socio-cultural and religious norms.

Out of the 8(6.7%) who agreed to like early marriage gives the following reasons for their decision, 38% said they like it because they want to have children early, 38% said they want grand children early while 25% said they want to save their virginity for their husband. This is in line with a researcher who stated that; getting a daughter married early may be seen as a means of ensuring her and families safety, sexual abstinence and virginity are also considered important values that if not protected will affect the family honor^[3].

53 (44.2%) said that poverty is a cause of early marriage while 47 (55.8%) said that poverty is not the cause of early marriages and also poverty is an effect of early marriage as majority of the respondents 106 (88.3%) agreed while 14 (11.6%) do not. According to research in Ethiopia, female child early marriage is seen as a way to improve the economic status of the family, and to strengthen ties between families^[3]. The International Center for Research on Women, (2007)^[7] confirmed that child marriage takes place due to poverty, poverty is related to culture to a certain degree. This is due to the fact that some people do not work hard and have cultivated the spirit of dependence. They further argued that, where there is acute poverty, young girls may be seen as an economic burden, when purchased will relieve the family financially and socially^[7].

Majority of the respondents 110 (91.7%) said that lack of parental care is a cause of early marriage while 10 (8.3%) said it is a cause of. 66 (55%) agreed that parent desire for grand children is a reason for early marriage while 54 (45%) said that parent desire grand children is not a reason for early marriage. Greater proportion of the respondents 107 (89.2%) said that lack of educational experience is a cause of early marriage while 13 (10.8%) said it is not. Agreeing with Bayisenga (2012)^[11] on issue of early marriage in sub-Saharan Africa, he opined that early girl marriage is a barrier to girl's education as young girls drop out from school to get married which impacts negatively on the community. Also, a group of researchers in Gombe, Nigeria, recorded that, of data obtained from 200 young mothers aged 15-24 years, more than 60 percent had only primary education, indicating that they had very little educational experience^[12].

The data in table 4 shows the respondents perceived effect of early marriage, effects such as divorce were strongly agreed with 63 (52.5%) respondents correctly agreeing; child abandonment 34 (28.3%) indicated agreed, 16 (13.3%) strongly agreed, whereas 9 (7.5%) disagreed while a greater proportion of the respondents 61 (50.8%) reported that they strongly disagreed that child abandonment is never an effect of early marriage. A statement by UNICEF (2001)^[14]

expressed that some desperate girls and women who have been forced into marriage try to run away or take other avenues to leave their spouses; others are abandoned by their spouses. However, the girls are usually left with the responsibility of raising the children without the husbands or family's financial support, thus making them more likely to live in poverty. In many cultures, husbands are often many years older than their young brides, and consequently die while the girl is still young. Traditionally, the girls are not allowed to remarry or were passed into their dead husband's brothers. Further, the girl's families are unlikely to accept her back once she has become widowhood^[14].

The data also reveals that 67 (55.8%) reported agreeing, 29 (24.2%) strongly agreed that low education standard is an effect of early marriage, this is in line with a report stating that, if children are given in marriage it would certainly affect their level of education^[6].

On health status, 41 (34.2%) agreed and 18 (15%) strongly agreed while 36 (30%) reported disagreement and 25 (20.8%) strongly disagreed that poor health is not an effect of early marriage. And a little above half of the respondents 53 (44.2%) agreed, while 24 (20%) strongly agreed that over population is an effect of early marriage. The health problems linked to early marriage not only affect the pregnant mother and the fetus, but also continue after child birth. The consequences reach beyond the lives of young married girls themselves to the next generation. The immaturity and lack of education of a young mother undermines her capacity for nurture evidence shows that infant mortality among the children of every young mother is higher - sometimes two times higher - than among those of older peers^[14].

6. Conclusion

It has been shown in literatures that the practice of early marriage is both globally and regionally known and practiced, and therefore has major consequences for public health, national security, social development, human rights, economic development and gender equality. Findings from this study have shown that people don't like child marriage even though it is still been practiced, which is strongly associated to poverty, lack of education experiences, parents encouraging their children for desire of having grand children early, and so on. The perceptions of people most have a positive molding if these practices most stop. Therefore, the following recommendations that sex education should be included in the school's curriculum; as this will develop a positive perception of people towards early marriage and prevent its occurrence, and also government and the non-government organizations should see the need to provide public education and awareness on the effect of early marriage as to put a stop to this public health concern. will help to enlighten parents, adolescents and educators on the issue of early marriages by discouraging early girl marriage, and encouraging parents to live up to their responsibility.

References

- [1] S.O. Nasrin and K.M. Mustafizur Rahman. Factors affecting early marriage and early conception of women: A case of slum areas in Rajshahi City, Bangladesh: *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* Vol. 4(2), pp. 54-62, 2012
- [2] Pathfinder International. "Report on the Causes and Consequences of Early Marriage in Amhara Region, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia", Pathfinder International, 2006.
- [3] G.D. Kibret, W.M. Sileshi, and D. Genet, Perceptions and Practices of Early marriage of female child from 2009 to 2013 in Sinane district Northwest Ethiopia. *International Journal of Biomedical And Advance Research*; 05 (11), 2014
- [4] J.A. Walker, S. Mukisa, Y. Hashim, H. Ismail, Mapping Early Marriage in West Africa: a scan of trends, interventions, what works, best practices and the way forward Lagos: Ford Foundation, West Africa Office; September 2013.
- [5] A. Bunting, Particularity of rights, diversity of contexts: women, international Human Rights and the case of Early Marriage, Doctorate Thesis, *University of Toronto, Faculty of Law*. 1999
- [6] V.K. Gimba and A. Joseph, The Socio-Economic Effect of Early Marriage in North Western Nigeria *MCSE Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences Publishing, Rome-Italy, Vol 5(14): 2014*
- [7] International Center for Research on Women. How to End Child Marriage Action Strategies for Prevention and Protection. New Delhi, India. 2007.
- [8] B.A. Abdallah, Girl Child Marriage and Women Development in Nigeria: Contemporary Issues", *Journal of Development and Psychology* 14(9): pp.248-259. 2011
- [9] A. Erulkar, and G. Bello, The Experience, of Adolescence in Rural Amhara Region Ethiopia. UNFPA, UNICEF, and 'Population Council. Population Council: New York. 2004
- [10] J. Birech, Child Marriage: A Cultural Health Phenomenon. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*; Vol. 3 (17): 2013
- [11] J. Bayisenge, "Early Marriage as a Barrier to Girl's Education: A Developmental Challenge in Africa", *Journal of Social Psychology* 12(6): pp. 23-48. 2012
- [12] G.N. Adedokun, H.E. Tochukwu, and O.O. Adedeji, "Early Childhood Marriage and Early Pregnancy as a Risk to Safe Motherhood", A Report on the Regional Conference on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children in Africa, 19-20 Nov. ICA. 2012
- [13] B.Y. Fuoseidei Problem of early marriage, a case study of Ahonda West, Rivers State. 2011
- [14] UNICEF Research Centre Early marriage child spouses. Florence, Italy: (2001): Available at www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/pdf/digest/e.pdf