

Awareness about the Consequences of Early Marriage Amongst Amassoma Residents in Southern-Ijaw Local Government Area, Bayelsa State

Lawrence, Arunibebi Lamawal¹; Azebri, Pereotubo Beauty², Amakoromo, Tari³, Igbans, Rejoice Obele⁴

¹Department of Public Health Nursing, School of Public Health Sciences, Bayelsa State College of Health Technology, Otuogidi-Ogbia, Nigeria

²Department of Maternal and Child Health Nursing, Faculty of Nursing, Niger Delta University, Amassoma, Nigeria

³Department of Community Health Nursing, Faculty of Nursing, Niger Delta University, Amassoma, Nigeria

⁴Department of Community Health, School of Public Health Sciences, Bayelsa State College of Health Technology, Otuogidi-Ogbia, Nigeria

Abstract: Early marriage, defined as marriage before the age of 18 has numerous challenges both at global and regional level, and therefore has major consequences for public health, national security, social development, human rights, economic development and gender equality. This study seeks to evaluate awareness about 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 and chi square, results from the study shows that, Most of the respondents 72 (60%) reported that they knew that early marriage has an effect on the couples; 28 (38.3%) specified divorce, 15 (20.8%) specified poverty, 24 (33.3%) specified family conflict while 5 (6.9%) specified child abandonment. Majority of the respondents 108 (90%) knew that some families give out their teenage daughters in marriage. Majority of the respondents 117 (97.5%) know that any marriage below 18 years of age is an early marriage. The fight against early marriage seems more like a “socially accepted crime”. Therefore, it is a task for nurses in community health setting to set up a health promoting and awareness programmes. Through community mobilization that can be instituted in order to address these problems. Nurses should also realize that collaborative actions are required in order to address these problems.

Keywords: Awareness, Consequence, Early Marriage, Poverty.

1. Introduction

Early marriage has numerous challenges both at global and regional level [1], and therefore has major consequences for public health, national security, social development, human rights, economic development and gender equality [2]. Moreover, public health officials generally believe that girls in early adolescence are developmentally and physiologically too young to make marital, sexual and reproductive transitions [3].

Child marriage, defined as marriage before the age of 18 [4], for both girls and boys, early child marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts, cutting off educational and employment opportunities and chances of personal growth [5], but affects girls to a far greater extent than boys [4].

In the world, it has been estimated that about 10 million girls under the age of 18 marry each year [6]. West Africa has one of the world's child marriage hot spots, with five of the 10 countries with the highest rates of child marriage [7]. Walker (2013) [8] in 2011, of 14.9 million females in West Africa between the ages of 20 and 24 years, 42%, were married before the age of 18. With 167 million people, Nigeria has the largest population of married girls in Africa:

39.4% of all females in Nigeria between the ages of 20 to 24 were married before the age of 18 by 2011.

The causes of child marriage are varied and complex within countries, with cultural factors, social practices, and economic pressures interacting with poverty and gender inequality to drive children into marriage. Legal protection against early marriage is uneven and weakly enforced [9]. These days, the devastating impact of female child marriage continues to be ignored in the developing world. Girls are either seen as an economic burden or valued as capital for their exchange value in terms of goods, money or livestock that is for economic and social reasons, controlling girls “sexuality”, which is directly linked to family honor and status for strong social pressure on families to either conform or face ridicule, disapproval or family shame for traditional practices [10]. In Bangladesh, most of the girls are dropout from school, especially, in cultural settings where girls are raised for a lifetime confined to household occupations and are expected to marry very young.

Erulkar and Muthengi, (2009) [11] stated that in addressing the economic and social factors that promote early marriage, and provides girls with alternative pathways through educational development. Such approaches have tremendous

potential in settings where large numbers of girls are married before age 15 and do not attend school.

Early marriage is destroying on a vast scale the most precious asset held by the world's poorest nations - the human potential of their children. For countries, as well as people, the early marriage epidemic is a barrier to prosperity and poverty reduction, and therefore, must be stopped [9].

In stopping this practice Nahid Ferdousi, (2014) [12] stated that, it is time to raise consciousness about the comprehensiveness of child marriage and its negative impacts. It is needed to create awareness among people, particularly the marginal groups. He recommended that, to prevent child marriage a wide range of individuals and organizations, from community leaders to international bodies, must take action. Actions needed to create awareness among people, particularly the poor, by use of the media (radio, television etc.) which plays a vital role in broadcasting different programs about the adverse effect of early marriages that rural people can understand since most of them are illiterate. Media can convince them through different programs against early marriage.

The literatures on early child marriage in Africa is largely dominated by works which explores the harmful effects of this practice on young victims as well as on family, society and the economy. The harmful effects of early marriage on the girl child is explored through five interwoven themes in the literature starting with the harmful effects on girls' health and moving on to examine harmful effects on psychological development, human rights and girls' economic survival [13]. Very few studies are known to address awareness of people in the communities about early marriage, and none that the researchers are aware of, up to the time of this study in Amassoma, Southern-Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Therefore, the objective of this study is to assess the level of awareness about early amongst Amassoma people.

The researchers has particularly observed that, there seem to be some level of practice of early marriage, looking at the age of teenagers registering for antenatal care services, mostly accompanied by an elderly relative. Are residents in Amassoma aware about the consequences of early marriage? Findings from this study will help to enlighten parents, adolescents and educators on this gap, and thereby, 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. Amassoma 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 and Chi-square statistical tool for testing of the hypothesis at a significant level of 0.05.

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 shows that majority of the respondents 111 (92.5%) have heard about early marriage while 9 (7.5%) have not. Most of the respondents 98 (81.7%) said that early marriage is still taking place in the community while 22 (18.3%) said it is not. Majority of the respondents 101 (84.2%) knew that some of the girls were deceived by men into early marriage while 19 (15.8%) did not. Most of the respondents 72 (60%) reported that they knew that early marriage has an effect on the couples 28 (38.3%) specified divorce, 15 (20.8%) specified poverty, 24 (33.3%) specified family conflict while 5 (6.9%) specified child abandonment. Majority of the respondents 108 (90%) knew that some families give out their teenage daughters in marriage while 12 (10%) did not know. 15 (12.5%) said that it is right for parents to give out their teenage daughters in marriage while 105 (87.5%) said

it is not right. Majority of the respondents 117 (97.5%) know that any marriage below 18 years of age is an early marriage while 3 (2.5%) did not know. The calculated chi square (χ^2) 24.26 at $D_f = 3$, p-value = 0.001 at a level of 0.05 significant. There is a significant relationship between educational status of respondents and awareness of effect of early marriage hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

4. Tables

Table 1: Demographical data of the 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

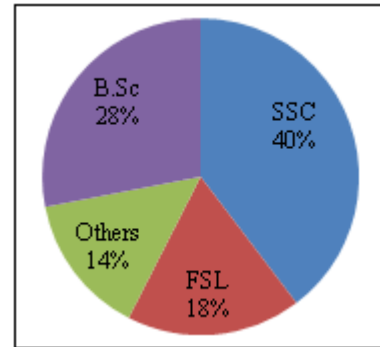


Figure 1: Respondents educational status

Table 2: Awareness of Early Marriage

ITEMS	YES	%	NO	%	TOTAL (%)
Have you heard about early marriage	111	92.5	9	7.5	100
Does early marriage still take place in this community?	89	81.7	22	18.3	100
Do you know that some of the girls were deceived by men into early marriage	101	84.2	19	15.8	100
Do you know that early marriage has an effect on the couples?	72	60	48	40	100
If yes, specify					
Divorce	28	38.3			
Poverty	15	20.8			
Family conflict	24	33.3			
Child abandonment	5	6.9			
Do you know that some families gives out their teenage daughters in marriage?	108	90	12	10	100
Is it right for parents to give out their teenage daughters in marriage?	15	12.5	105	87.5	100
Do you know that any marriage below 18 years is an early marriage?	117	97.5	3	2.5	100

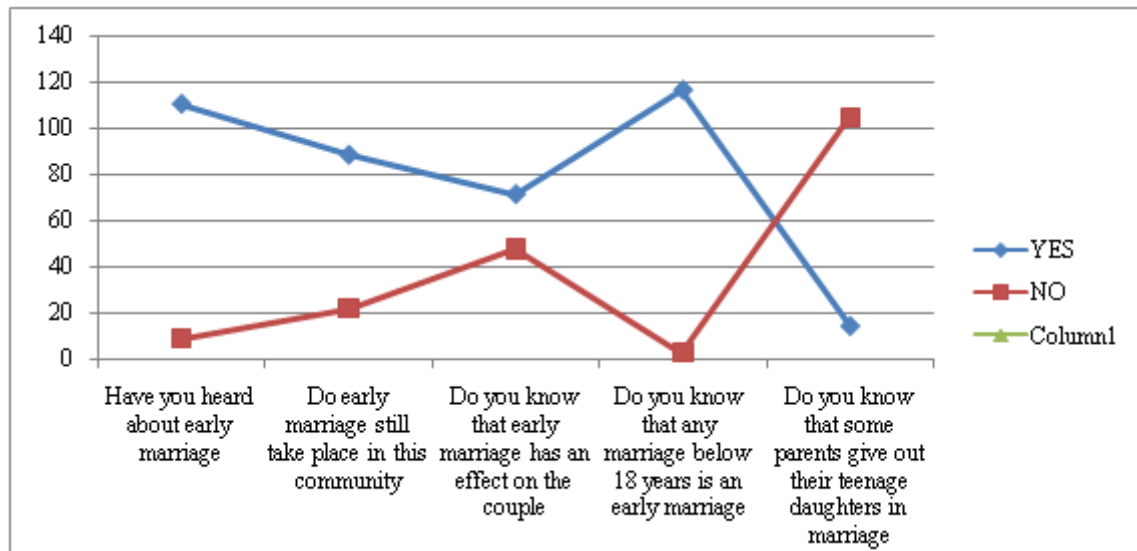


Figure 2: Shows respondents' awareness of early marriage

Table 3: There is no significant relationship between respondent's educational status and respondent's awareness on the effect of early marriage

Educational status	Do you know that early marriage has an effect on the couples		Df	X ²	p-value
	Yes	No			
First leaving school certificate	5	18	3	24.26	0.0001
Senior secondary school certificate	22	12			
Bachelor of science	35	8			
Others	10	4			

5. Discussion

Early child marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts, cutting off educational and employment opportunities and chances of personal growth [5], and affects girls to a far greater extent than boys [4].

From table 4.2 shows that majority of the respondents 117 (97.5%) know that any marriage below 18 years of age is early marriage, also majority of respondents 111 (92.5%) have heard about early marriage, still most respondents 98 (81.7%) said that, early marriages is still taking place in the community; as majority of respondents 108 (90%) noted that they know of some families that have given out their teenage daughters in marriage, while 15 (12.5%) said that, it is the right of parents to give out their teenage daughters out for marriage.

In stopping this practice Nahid Ferdousi, (2014) [12] stated that, it is time to raise consciousness about the comprehensiveness of child marriage and its negative impacts. It is needed to create awareness among people, particularly the marginal groups. He recommended that, to prevent child marriage a wide range of individuals and organizations, from community leaders to international bodies, must take action. Actions needed to create awareness among people, particularly the poor, by use of the media (radio, television etc.) which plays a vital role in

broadcasting different programs about the adverse effect of early marriages that rural people can understand since most of them are illiterate. Media can convince them through different programs against early marriage.

Majority of the respondents 101 (84.2%) knew that some of the girls were deceived by men into early marriage, most respondents 72 (60%) reported that they knew that early marriage has an effect on the couples: 28 (38.3%) specified divorce, 15 (20.8%) specified poverty, 24 (33.3%) specified family conflict while 5 (6.9%) specified child abandonment. The causes of child marriage are varied and complex. They vary across and even within countries, with cultural factors, social practices, and economic pressures interacting with poverty and gender inequality to drive children into marriage. Legal protection against early marriage is uneven and weakly enforced [9]. These days, the devastating impact of female child marriage continues to be ignored in the developing world. Girls are either seen as an economic burden or valued as capital for their exchange value in terms of goods, money or livestock that is for economic and social reasons, controlling girls' sexuality which is directly linked to family honor and status for strong social pressure on families to either conform or face ridicule, disapproval or family shame for traditional practices [10]. The harmful effects of early marriage on the girl child is explored through five interwoven themes in the literature starting with the harmful effects on girls' health and moving on to examine harmful effects on psychological development, human rights and girls' economic survival [13].

6. Implication to Nurses

This study has revealed the poor health, infection, divorce as an implication of early marriage. Therefore, it is a task for nurses in community health setting to set up a health promoting and awareness programmes, aimed at informing parents and young people about the negative implications of child marriage. Through community mobilization that can be instituted in order to address these problems. Also; nurses should also realize that collaborative actions are required in order to address these problems.

7. Conclusion

Early marriage, defined as marriage before the age of 18 has numerous challenges both at global and regional level, and therefore has major consequences for public health, national security, social development, human rights, economic development and gender equality. The fight against early marriage seems more like a “socially accepted crime”. Therefore, to prevent child marriage, everybody from all works of life, background and religion need to work together to stop early marriage. Education is the key in this process. Therefore parents should have to give priority to education of the girl-child. In creating awareness, all of us need to work together relentlessly, utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to the rights construct, to ensure justice for children.

Reference

- [1] 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
- [2] Judith-Ann Walker, with Sarah Mukisa, Yahaya Hashim and Hadiza Ismail, Mapping Early Marriage in West Africa: A Scan of Trends, Interventions, What Works, Best Practices, and the Way Forward: Ford Foundation, (2013).
- [3] R. Dixon-Mueller, How Young is 'too young'? Comparative Perspectives on Adolescent Sexual, Marital, and Reproductive Transitions, *Studies in Family Planning*, 39(4): 2008: 247–262.
- [4] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Early Marriage: Child Spouses*, Florence, Italy: UNICEF, 2001.
- [5] V.K. Gimba and A. Joseph, The Socio-Economic Effect of Early Marriage in North Western Nigeria *MCSEER Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences Publishing, Rome-Italy, Vol 5(14): 2014*
- [6] D. Assefa, E. Wassie, M. Getahun, M. Berhaneslassie, A. Melaku. Harmful Traditional Practices for the Ethiopian Health Center Team; 2005.
- [7] International Committee for Research on Women, “How to End Child Marriage: Action Strategies for Prevention and Protection” (Washington, DC: ICRW, 2007).
- [8] Judith-Ann Walker (2013), Why Ending Child Marriage Needs to Be an Education Goal: The Case for Improved Coordination between Ending Child Marriage and Girls' Education Movements in West Africa. Available at: http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2013/12/improving%20learning%20outcomes%20girls%20africa/walker_girls_education.pdf
- [9] B. Gordon Out of wedlock, into school: combating child marriage through education London EC2P 2JF 2012. Available at: <http://www.educationpanel.org/brownchildmarriage/Gordon%20Brown%20Child%20Marriage%20Report.pdf>
- [10] J. Bayisenge. Early and Forced Marriage and Girls' Education. A Developmental Challenge in Africa. 2011.
- [11] A.S. Erulkar and E. Muthengi, Evaluation of Berhane Hewan: A Program to Delay Child Marriage in Rural Ethiopia Volume, *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 35(1): 2009, 6–1
- [12] N. Ferdousi, Child marriage in Bangladesh: Socio-legal analysis *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*: Vol. 6(1), pp. 1-7, 2014
- [13] Judith-Ann Walker Early Marriage in Africa – Trends, Harmful Effects and Interventions *African Journal of Reproductive Health 2012 (Special Edition)*; 16(2): 231