

Endogenous Strategies to Ending the Nexus between Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Wa West District, Ghana

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Abstract: *Teenage pregnancy and child marriage have become major child welfare topics of discussion in Ghana, and the Wa West District gained media attention with high incidences on both topics. The study established a nexus between child marriage and teenage pregnancy, and identified strategies of ending the nexus between child marriage and teenage pregnancy in the Wa West District which majorly resulted from irresponsible parenting disguised as poverty. Qualitative data was collected from 5 communities and 20 respondents purposively sampled, as well as 10 key informants. The results explained factors that create a nexus teenage pregnancy and child marriage in the district to be implanted in culture. The Study recommends collaborative team efforts by community members and development partners to support efforts towards ending teenage pregnancy and child marriage.*

Keywords: Child marriage, Teenage Pregnancy, Endogenous strategies

1. Background

Children need to be protected and taken care of by the state, especially in the developing countries (UNDP, 2004). Children in developing countries are faced with development problems such as poverty, harmful traditional practices, child trafficking, child labour, and diseases hence need protection and care from the state. Children welfare is paramount in any nation because they are the bearers of the future. The government of Ghana over the years have tried to protect the welfare of children in Ghana starting with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, Child Rights Regulation 2002, The Juvenile Justice Act 2003, and the Human Trafficking Act 2005 (Frimpong-Manso, 2014). Children in Ghana still suffer from many rights abuse imbedded in cultural practices such as Trokosi, Female Genital Mutilation, abandonment due to disabilities, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy. These are not peculiar to Ghana or any region in Ghana but are deepened by poverty and rurality. The most pressing problems of children welfare in Ghana currently are child marriage and teenage pregnancy. These problems have pushed the government of Ghana and its development partners in recent to design and implement the National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage in Ghana (2016 – 2026), and the Five-year Strategic Plan to Address Adolescent Pregnancy in Ghana (2018 – 2022).

Teenage pregnancy is both a cause and consequence of child marriage (World Vision, 2015). In many developing countries teenage pregnancies results from girls who are married (Ayuba II, 2012) and given pressure to conceive as a norm (Alemayehu, Haider & Habte, 2010), and according to Tsekpo, Afram, Boateng & Sefa-Nyarko (2016), teenage pregnancy ties teenage mother to the father of the children leading to child marriage.

According to Oni (2017: 25), “teenage pregnancy is seen as a blessing because it proves the young woman is fertile”.

Culture influences our social, and economic behaviors. Marriage and pregnancy (family making) forms the largest portion of the African sociocultural life and it is the most valuable as aspect of adult life. This is mostly predominant in the poor, marginalized and illiterate communities especially in rural areas (Mahato, 2016).

Millions of girls between the ages of 10-19 give birth each year (WHO, 2012). Ghana has an adolescent population of 22.4% (GSS, 2011) which accounts for 9.1% of fertility in Ghana (GMHSR, 2014). According to Yussif, Lassey, Ganyaglo, Kantehardt, and Kielstein (2017), 30 percent of the total births registered in 2014 in Ghana were adolescents and 16 percent of them were below age 15. Teenage pregnancy is a development challenge in both developed and developing countries, it is therefore a major concern to many stakeholders concerned with the welfare of children (Alhassan, 2005 & Qolesa, 2017).

Teenage pregnancy and child marriages are a derailing threat to children's welfare in the Ghana but especially the Wa West District and the Department of Children in the Upper West Region. Endogenous Development Service (2014) in a survey of child marriage in Upper West Region rated the Wa West District with the highest incidence of child marriage in the Region. Also, in a press release by the District Health Director of the Wa West District, teenage pregnancy and its consequent health challenges were outlined as the leading health menace in the district (GNA, 2019 10 16). Other stakeholder groups such as the CAMA of CAMFED have noted and confirmed data from Ghana Health Service indicating Wa West District has the highest incidence of child marriage in the Upper West Region having recorded over 3,000 cases of teenage pregnancy since 2012 (GNA, 2019 07 08).

This study therefore sets out to establish and examine the nexus between teenage pregnancy and child marriage in the Wa West District, and identify endogenous

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strategies of handling these menaces to protect the future of children in the Wa West District of Ghana.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- 1) To establish and examine the nexus between child marriage and teenage pregnancy in the Wa West District.
- 2) To identify endogenous strategies of ending child marriage and teenage pregnancy in Wa West District.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Child welfare should be paramount in any community that anticipates development. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2014), Wa West District has been classified as the one of the poorest districts in Ghana with over 92.4% poverty index. The district has a large population of children, who can champion the development of the district in a few years if they are well supported through education or other development initiatives. Child marriage and teenage pregnancy hinders the chances of such development hence, the need to find the connection between the two which can help in successfully handling them. Also, literature on child marriage and teenage pregnancies centers on causes and its effects on education and health such as Anane-Agyei, 2011; Gyan, 2013; Yussif, et al, 2017 and Amponsem-Boateng, Acheampong, Ganu & Amponsah-Gyan, 2018. Few studies have fairly examined the relationship between child marriage and teenage pregnancy especially in Northern Ghana. Hence this study will explore the depth of interrelatedness between teenage pregnancy and child marriage in a largely patriarchal society to fill the gap in literature.

2. Literature Review

According to Malhotra (2010), in developing countries millions of girls marry each year but many against their will. Child marriage like teenage pregnancy transcends geographical and cultural boundaries (Lemmon & ElHarake, 2014) however, it is more common in rural areas because rural people are highly involved with tradition (Kosiki, 2016). Child marriage has dire consequences, often crippling girls' ability to realize a wide range of human rights including the right to live (HRW, 2013) and depriving them of their future prospects of contributing to national development (UNFPA, 2016).

There is a possible nexus between child marriage and teenage pregnancy because marriage and pregnancies are bed partners, turned either ways, one becomes an end and the other a means. Some studies have scratched the tip of relationship without further details but available literature explored establishes this relationship.

The notion of honour associated with marriage has gone deep in the veins of the rural poor especially (Nour, 2006). According to Mahato (2016), parents feel proud among their folks when they marry off their daughter to a "good" family in terms of social status. These discriminatory gender roles and social pressures which drives child marriage, denies the girl child the right to choose a life partner (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Pregnancy without marriage attracts social

ridicule and shame to the girl and her family (Bayisenge, 2010 and Adedokun et al, 2016). To avoid this disgrace, they ultimately support and encourage child marriage (Fant, 2008).

Most adolescents are vulnerable to early and unplanned pregnancies (UNFPA, 2017) because of pressures from parents and society on the married children to ensure that they give birth once they are married. These pressures and expectations of the family of the newly married child discourages the use of contraceptives (Adjei, 2015) hence leading to teenage pregnancies immediately after marriage, or be faced with shame of unfruitfulness. Adesegun, Adekunle & Emmanue (2016) rejects shame of unfruitfulness as a valid reason, they hold that, early marriages expose the child to unexpected pregnancy, abortion and sometimes untimely deaths. Bayisenge (2010) found that this persists because most of the husbands are usually older and expects the girls to follow tradition by playing their roles as a wife which is getting pregnant once they are married.

Women earn respect and honour in society through marriage and child birth irrespective of the age and status. This antagonistic patriarchal idea, view men to be stronger while women are frail and requires protection and support to survive. In addition, prevailing gender roles in any country shape women's social life and restrict them to traditional roles (Yuksel-Kaptanoglu & Ergocmen, 2014). These endorse the practices in many communities to be valid hence, its persistence.

3. Methodology

A research design is the assumptions about knowledge claims that operates at a more applied level. They are strategies of inquiry that provide specific direction for the research procedures (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological research design was adopted for this study on the basis of the nature and purpose of the study. Phenomenologist search for the invariant structures of individual experience. Phenomenology provides a rich and complete description of human experiences and meanings. Findings are allowed to emerge rather than being imposed by an investigator therefore a researcher who places themselves within this design must put away all prejudices, preconception and judgement towards the topic.

Qualitative research approach was adopted because it is more flexible and allow for deeper and better understanding of the driving practices or conditions of child marriage and teenage pregnancy of the girl child in the Wa West District. Qualitative research produces descriptive data in the respondents own written or spoken words. The key to understanding qualitative research approach is that the meaning is socially constructed and should be investigated by paying attention to the subjective perspectives of respondents (Stakes, 2010).

3.1 Sampling Size and Composition

Communities (N=5; Ga, Nyoli, Gurungu, Wechiau and Dorimon) were purposively sampled for the study because they were according to the District Assembly, communities

with evidently high incidence of child marriage and teenage pregnancy in the district. And out of these communities' respondents (N=20) consisting of 15 female and 5 males were purposively sampled because they once were, or are victims of teenage pregnancy and, or child marriage hence has knowledge and experiences relevant to the study. Also, using key informant interview, data was collected from 10 key informants: 5 assembly members, and an officer each from the Department of Children, District Education Office, District Police Office, Plan Ghana and SLIDEP.

3.2 Study Context

The Wa West District was carved out of Wa District has Wechiau as its administrative capital. The total area of the District is approximately 1492.0 square km. The population size of Wa West District is 81,348, males constitute 49.5 percent while the females constitute 50.5 percent, and children between the ages of 0-19 years account for 57.1 percent of the population in the district, out of which 53.4% are males and 46.5% are females. The district's household heads composition is 23.2 percent for males whilst 5.6 percent are female. The District is made up of mainly the Mole-Dagbani group with the main religion being African Traditionalist Religion. The district's economy is predominantly based on agriculture (86.0%). The people of Wa West are largely a heterogeneous group and they are basically polygamous which occurs based on economic or cultural reasons. Child betrothal, elopement and early marriage are a part of the people's culture.

4. Findings Presentation

The findings are discussed in three parts, the first being how teenage pregnancy in some communities of Wa West District leads to child marriage, the second part being how child marriage leads to teenage pregnancy, and the last part being the second objective, outlined and discusses endogenous ways of ending child marriage in Wa West District. The figure below illustrates findings presented and discussed below. It indicates that, the factors that cause child marriage leads to teenage pregnancy, and the factors that cause teenage pregnancy also leads to child marriage in the Wa West District.

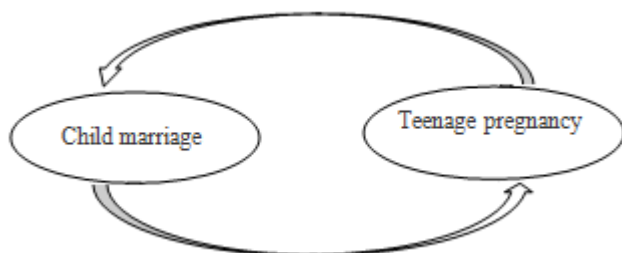


Figure 1: The nexus between teenage pregnancy and child marriage

Source: Authors construct, 2019

4.1 Teenage Pregnancy as a Cause Child Marriage in the Wa West District

All respondents in the study except the key informants had been victims of, or responsible for teenage pregnancy. From a key informant interview with the Department of Children,

teenage pregnancy was identified as the biggest contributor to child marriage in the Wa West District. It was explained the district like any other district in the region, practices patrilineal inheritance system which means that every child must belong to male lineage to be able to get any inheritance to his name especially for boys. For this reason, children born out-of-wedlock are worthless and seen as a disgrace to their mothers' family. To avoid such disgrace and shame, pregnant girls are quickly and quietly married to the men responsible for the pregnancy. According to an Assembly member;

...Children are now very promiscuous, and before you know it, they are pregnant. As parents, when such occur and the person responsible accepts to marry and take care the pregnant girl, you marry the girl off before such information becomes public to avoid any stigma in the community (Key informant Interview, 02. February, 2019)

Also, the study found that some parent in an attempt to teach the pregnant teenager and other children a hard lesson against promiscuity and teenage pregnancy, they drive the pregnant teenager into child marriage. Most respondents who were victims of teenage pregnancy explained they were sent out of the house by parents or guardians to go to whoever made them pregnant, to support them through their pregnancy as they cannot watch over such in their homes. Key informants also added that, in this the parents are hoping that they will starve or suffer, become apologetic and come sorry. To serve as a deterrent to her younger sisters. However, it was noted that this manner lesson does not work because;

...they get to the boy's house and everyone there supports them to get through with the pregnancy which they count as a blessing from God. Meanwhile the girl is practicing and perfecting her skills as a wife during the period of her pregnancy. After delivery she is happy to be a mother and a wife which leads to marriage (Key Informant Interview, 08. February, 2019).

It was found also, that 93 percent of the female respondents have married out of teenage pregnancy while all the child grooms married because of teenage pregnancy. According to a respondent;

... "I used to help him cook and clean and in return support my family when we were in need, so when I got pregnant for him, my parents said I should just go and stay with him so that if he likes me he will marry me after I give birth and he did" (F-14 years, 02, 2019).

The study realized that, parents because of their ego will cease any opportunity to marry off their girl child so that they do not give birth to 'bastards' in their houses. This supports Tsekpo, Afram, Boateng & Sefa-Nyarko (2016) conclusion that, teenage pregnancy has high chances of tying teenage mother to the father of the children. The researcher finds reasons for which teenage pregnancy leads to child marriage to be imbedded in poverty and rurality, and supports Oni (2017), who noted that, these same conditions which are absent in more developed or urban areas, children who give birth are supported by their family and in many

cases sent back to school. Hence indicating that in more urban and developed areas which people have a lower level of poverty, teenage pregnancy may not necessarily lead to child marriage. Findings from Wallace-Bruce (2010) also contravenes the study findings noting that, teenage pregnancy does not usually lead to child marriage. Research based on Wallace-Bruce conclusion and the findings of this study, notes that in matrilineal societies where the children belongs to woman, teenage pregnancy may not necessarily lead to child marriage as compared to cases in a patrilinear society.

4.2 Child Marriage as a of Teenage Pregnancy in the Wa West District

The ages of respondents ranged from 14 to 69 years, except for the key informant, they had all being married as children, some forced while others were glad to be married. The study found that, marriage of any age is viewed to be a successful marriage when after nine months of marriage there is a naming ceremony. Respondents who married as child noted that they could not wait to be pregnant to fully accepted as complete women. This social pressure on pushes child bride to conceive leading to child marriage. According to a key informant;

...even as a grown man when I married my wife and we decided that she should learn a trade before we start giving birth because I was not yet employed. She changed her mind after a year because she was called "man-woman" at the borehole (Key Informant Interview 05, February, 2019).

Child brides in the study explained that, the pressure of getting pregnant and having a baby to prove a point prevents them from taking contraceptives or protecting themselves in way during sex. Others added that, if its even found out that you are deliberately avoiding pregnancy you will be maltreated in your husband house. A respondent who got married at age 12 go had a devastating account of how the pressure to have a child after marriage destroyed her;

...any time I got pregnant, it resulted in a miscarriage after the fifth one the nurse told my husband that he should wait for some time and try again because my bones have not yet matured but he refused. After 4 months of my sixth pregnancy, the baby spoiled my womb and now that I cannot give birth again, my husband married another wife (F-34 years. February, 2019).

This indicates that marriage and pregnancy are necessary complements that are chosen together or rejected together. This finding reechoes the finding of Alemayehu, Haider & Habte (2010) and Adjei (2015) that pressure is given to married children to conceive as a norm.

4.3 Endogenous Strategies to Ending Child Marriage

Respondents in this study were required to recommend best strategies within their community that can be executed with difficulty towards controlling to reduce or eliminate child marriage and teenage pregnancy in their communities. A number of strategies were identified and outlined by

respondents and key informants', and these are discussed below.

Respondents who blamed parents extensively for child marriage and teenage pregnancy recommended that, parents should take up their responsibilities as parents in providing children both their material and non-material needs. They believe that if parents are able to meet the needs of their children, children in return will be dependent on their parents which will give parents the power and authority to be able to control and groom them in their likeness hence, insulating them from peer pressure, promiscuity and teenage pregnancy. Generally, many respondents noted that, parents abused them verbally or rained curses on them many times they requested for their needs or counsel from their parents, this pushed them to seek this from friends and boyfriends. A respondent noted that;

... I used to cry a lot over my missing or broken pencils when I was in school because whenever I went to my father to ask for one, he will insult me from one place to another. Saying that, upon all what he is giving me I will not go anywhere but end up pregnant like her sister (F- 28 years, February, 2019).

A key informant added that, parents need to build a trust relationship with their children so that, children can open up to parents when unscrupulous people make advances towards them. These are basic parenting skill within the reach of parents which can be adopted to end teenage pregnancy and hence child marriage.

Some respondent also believes that, in the spirit of communism where a child belongs to the whole community, neighbours and other community members owe a responsibility to protect children against teenage pregnancy and child marriage. They believe that, community leaders should enact by-laws for the welfare of the children in the community.

... Parents and community members should set up by-laws in the community that will say that children cannot go out in the night after 8pm. So that those children that are spoiled will not spoil the rest of the children in the community (F-19. February, 2019).

Others also recommend that, communities should set up child protection teams or committees in the various communities and empower these teams or committees to control and protect children's activities in their communities. However, a majority of respondents and key informants recommended a stakeholder collaboration with the government efforts to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy in Ghana. Some of these collaborative strategies include;

... The religious leaders in church and mosque should teach parents in their sermons to be responsible in their actions and inactions towards their children (F-31 year. February, 2019).

... Child marriage requires a whole community with all its institutions such as the family, police and law court and

people playing their roles efficiently in promoting child protection in our society (Key Informant Interviewee 02, February, 2019, F).

.... No one person can fight child marriage, it is a collective responsibility of all institutions responsible for children's rights and welfare, we have to sensitize and empower the ignorant ones on the rights of children's (Key Informant Interviewee 08, February, 2019, M).

.... There is the need for stake holder education because most people do not know their role in the fight, they set down with power waiting to be invited to the table when they have to bring their own chair and take their places (Key Informant Interviewee 05, February, 2019, M).

.... Community members must desist from shielding criminals especially the perpetrators of child marriage since they are harming the progress of our community (Key Informant Interviewee 04, February, 2019, M).

From the statements above, no one agency can effectively fight child marriage hence all must be educated and empowered to fight or defend the girl-child. These findings are supported by Bayisenga (2010) that, trickling the challenging phenomenon of child marriage, requires a joint effort to formulate and implement policies and strategies. Respondents agreed that children were a responsibility of the whole community hence encouraged that community members be their neighbor's keeper by helping control and protect their children.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

A cyclical nexus is created between teenage pregnancy and child marriage by the culture of honour in society in the Wa West District. This consistently results in high incidence of child marriage and teenage pregnancy; each one leading to the other. This nexus between child marriage and teenage pregnancy can be broken through collaborative efforts of responsible parenting, committed community members, and effective institutions as well as support from all other stakeholders and development partners.

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