

## FACTORS INFLUENCING CHILD BRIDE PRACTICES IN ANAMBRA STATE

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### ABSTRACT

*Child bride is an age long problem that education and other agent of socialization has wiped off in most parts of the world, but unfortunately it has persisted in Nnewi communities of Anambra State. Factors responsible for it's perpetuation there becomes of great concern.*

*The researcher employed survey research method and a sample of fifty (50) women were selected using multistage sampling technique from Nnewi main town. A questionnaire was used in data collection and data collected were subjected to simple frequency counts and percentage.*

*The result obtained revealed that majority of Nnewi women were ignorant of the consequences of child bride on the health and economic attainment of the women. Factors such as parental occupation, level of income, number of children in the family and custom influenced its perpetuation. Based on these findings, it is recommended that all educational stakeholders should enlighten the masses and intervene using educational media by subsidizing the cost of education within the Local Government. These will enable younger generation acquire basic knowledge on life issues and contribute meaningful to the economy of the society. Also efforts should be made to educate traditional leaders and family health on the ills of child bride so that such a practice can be abolished in future.*

### INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a union of a man and a woman, who are age, and who have freely consented as prescribed by law to be joined together to live as a family, and has equal right during- marriage and it's dissolutions. This union of the man and woman as husband and wife, has it's aim as living together for security, love, companionship, procreation as well as sexual satisfaction. Marriage can be contracted in different ways as dictated by culture, religions race, ethnicity among others ((Universal declaration of human rights 1948, Heborn, 1972).

Early marriage, other wise known as child marriage refers to any marriage of a child younger than 18 years old (article 3, child right 1989). No marriage is expected to be entered by any person under this age; but unfortunately the reverse is the case for female children in Nnewi Local Government Area of Anambra State, who are betrothed at the of one month to 2 years of age and are finally handed over to the spouse who are usually much older before they get to age of 18 years. The custom and cultural beliefs of the people of this local government area have remained persistent in spite of contrary trend worldwide. Child marriage was a world wild phenomenon in the past. Africa and southern Asia among others were noted for the predominance of this practice. In recent decades this has reduced due to civilization and education of the people about the effect of this unhealthy act (Unicef, 2005), Child marriage is a violation of human right and it is prohibited by a number of international conventions and other instruments (African Charter on rights, 1990).

The practice of child marriage in Nnewi local government area hide under the guise of custom and culture but the reality of the causes of early marriage in other parts of the word in the past are readily seen in these communities. The causes among others are poverty and economic transactions. Poverty is a critical factor contributing to child marriage and a common reason why parents encouraged their child to get married (Paye, 1979). Where poverty is acute, a young girl is regarded as economic burden and her marriage to a much older or elderly man is believed to benefit the child and her family financially and socially. In communities where child marriage is practiced, marriage is regarded as a transaction often representing a significant economic activity for a family. A daughter may be the only commodity a family has left to be traded on; and sometimes girls can be used as currency to settle debts (Omokodion, 2006). A girl's marriage may also take place as a perceived means of creating stability in times of uncertainty like poor harvest condition or war. A family may believe that they can ensure the economic "safety" of their daughter and family by giving their girl child to marry an elderly rich man. In Nnewi the monetary value of

bride price is negotiated according to the groom's wealth, Bride price is a sum, either in cash or kind used to purchase the bride for her labour and fertility.

Another factor that makes parents to send their female children into early marriage, may be the notion of morality and honour. Parents are influenced by great importance placed on maintaining "family honor" and the high value placed on a girl's virginity. It is considered that shame would be cast on a family if their daughter was not a virgin when she marries; therefore to ensure that a girl's virtue remains intact, girls are made to marry earlier. Child marriage is also encouraged due to the perception that an older husband will be able to act as a guardian against behaviour deemed immoral and inappropriate.

Child marriage for any reason is illegal. Articles 3 of centre for Right Crusader (C.R.C., 1989) stated that in all actions concerning children, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration. Article 19; stated that "the right to protection from all of physical and emotional violence, injury, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse while in the care of parents, guardian or any person is prohibited". Article 24, the right to health and access to health services and to be protected from harmful traditional practices was stated. The right to the protection from all forms of exploitation, prejudicial to any aspect of the child's welfare was included.

Beside violation of the law, child marriage has it irreversible consequence on both health and economic attainment of its victim (Ipaye, 979). Child marriage according to Omokodion, (2006) is a forced marriage. This is because it is often conducted with out the female child's opinion or consent. It is a marriage in which violence whether physical or emotional is a factor. It is obvious that every child marriage is a forced marriage in that, even though the child appears to give her consent, any one under the age of 18 years is not able to make a full informed choice, whether or not to marry. This is why early marriage must be viewed in the context of force and coercion, involving pressure and emotional scores. Early marriage is associated with physical, development and social economic implication.

These may include the following:

When a child bride is married, she is likely to be forced into sexual activities with her husband at an age where the bride is not physically and sexually matured. This has severe health consequences. Child bride becoming pregnant at an early age has a high correlation with child mortality (Rolfes, 2002). Young mothers face higher risks during pregnancies including complications such as heavy bleeding, Fistula infection and eclampsia which contribute to higher mortality rate of mother and child. At a young age, a girl under child birth can develop distracted labour and obstetric fistula. Obstetric fistula can occur as a result of early sexual relations associated with child marriage which may even take place before menarche. Child marriage can also reduce the girl's bride freedom to movement and autonomy. That may not be able to access health services because of expense or the need to obtain permission from their spouse and this aggravates the risk of acute complication and death of pregnant child bride. Early marriage may also expose a child bride to being vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. This is because the spouse which is much elderly would have been involved in sexual relationship before meeting her. (Uko-Aviomoh and Ajuluchu 2010). The disparity in age between a child bride and her elder husband in addition to her low economic autonomy further increase girls vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. She does not have the boldness to make or negotiate sexual decision on whether or not to engage in sexual activities, discuss issues relating to the use of contraception and condoms for protection against HIV/AIDS infection or demand fidelity from her husband. Child bride marriage has an acute effect on social development of the child, in terms of low level of education, poor health, and lack of personal autonomy (Omokodion 2006). It was also established that these elements are linked with gender inequalities and low self worth which grooms believe is necessary to be moral and submissive wife; thereby limited bride's development to only reproductive roles (Unicef, 2005).

Studies has shown that women who married at very young ages are more likely to belief that it is sometimes acceptable for a husband to beat his wife and suffer domestic violence themselves. Such violence may include force sexual acts, threatening to divorce the wife and the bride often become a domestic slave to her husband and in-laws (Unicef, 2005) early marriage has also led to wife abandonment and increased level of divorce and separation. A child bride also faces the risk of being widowed by her husband who is considerably older. This leads to more serious problems such as being denied of her husband's property at bereavement. Early marriage has untold effect on the females involved and the cases of female children in Nnewi Local Government area is no exception. However it is the interest of this

study to limit its scope to health and economic attainment. Having gone through the consequence of early marriage on the physical development and socio economic aspect of life, it is of interest to bring to our knowledge, that child brides' education and other means of acquiring skill are brought to an end as soon as they leave for their husband's house. In our society today the importance of education can not be pushed over because, it determines the level of civilization and economics power as well as effective survival of the individual in all areas of life. And the situation where these girls are married, at the age where they have barely completed their primary education, their economic capability is reduced to nothing; thereby making them to become predominately peasant farmers who can hardly make ends meet and contribute meaningfully to the economy of the society.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The causes and consequences of child marriage are intrinsically linked to poor health status and low socio-economic status among others (Omokodion, 2007). Local and international organization of woman right and gender equality crusaders has developed programme aimed at eradicating this practices and actualizing the rights of the girl child. In several African countries and specifically, Northern Nigeria, Unicef has established clinics to treat girls and women with obstetric fistula and income generating schemes and other initiatives to improve on their social economic status and well being of these women who were victims in the society. Lessons learnt from such programmes have highlighted the importance of a holistic approach to addressing the practice of child marriage, necessitating integrated education on health, economic and in spite of these moves the incidence of child marriage continues to thrive in Nnewi L.G.A. participatory community development programmes (Unicef 2005). The question therefore is "why is child marriage still practiced in Nnewi Local Government Area of Anambra State? Should it be lack of knowledge on the consequences of this practice or other factors that may be peculiar to the society?

### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The main purpose of the study is to determine the factors responsible for the perpetuation of child marriage practices in Nnewi Local Government Area of Anambra State.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The findings of this study will highlight the under minding factors that perpetuate early marriage practices among the people of Nnewi which will pave way to strategizing on what do to eradicate this ugly practice. The study will be useful to health practitioners, educational stakeholders and human right activists.

### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The study covered villages and towns within Nnewi Local Government area of Anambra State. It also covered all the married and unmarried females from Nnewi North and South senatorial district.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- 1) What factors contribute to child marriage in the communities?
- 2) Do the citizen of Nnewi communities have basic knowledge of the consequences of child marriage?

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

The researcher employed survey research method to assess the level of knowledge of the citizens of Nnewi communities and factors that may contribute to the perpetuation of child bride practice.

#### **Population of the Study**

All married, divorced and widows (women) in Nnewi communities.

### Scope and Sampling Technique

Multistage sampling technique was employed for the study. Nnewi north is made up of 19 wards. Two (2) out of the 19 wards were picked through balloting. Fifty (50) respondents were randomly selected from a population of about 500 women (married, divorced or widowed).

The researcher used a structured questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, the first section sort for information on the background and socio economic status of respondents while the second section dealt with the factors that influence practices.

The instrument was validated by there experts in the filed of sociology and Home Economics based on its content and face value to obtaining meaningful data.

### Instrument reliability

The questionnaire was administered to twenty (20) respondents in Nnewi main town outside the study area and administered again after two weeks interval and data obtained were subjected to spearman (r) Correlation Co-efficient analysis and the result obtained was 0.76 indicating high reliability.

### Data collection procedure

The researcher administered the questionnaire personally to the respondents who filled the questionnaires and returned them back on the spot.

### Data analysis techniques

Data collected were subjected to frequency counts and simple percentages.

### Results

The results from the study was analysed based on research questions

**Research question 1:** Do people of Nnewi have basic knowledge of the consequences of early marriage on child bride

**Table 1:** Level of knowledge of the Nnewi Communities on the consequence of early marriage and child bride.

Items	RESPONDENT			
	True	%	False	%
1. Early marriage can lead to child pregnancy that increases the death of mother and child during delivery.	18	36	32	64
2. Early marriage can make a girl not to complete her educational carrier and gaining a white curler job .	24	48	26	52
3. Early marriage of a girl can increase the chances of being widow and facing the responsibility of training her children	17	34	33	56
4. Early marriage can lead to low economic power of women in the community	19	38	31	62
5. Early marriage can cause damage for child bride maternal organs during child delivery.	16	32	34	68

Result on the table shows that in all the consequence of child bride used in the study, respondents scored low on their level of knowledge. This is seen when child pregnancy and increase in death of mother

scored 36% increase in dropout of girl child 48%, early widowhood 34%, low economic power of women 38% and change of maternal organs of the girl child 32%.

**Research question 2:**

What factor contribute to the perpetuated child bride practices

**Table II: Factors influencing the perpetuation of child bride practices in Nnewi**

Items	RESPONDENT			
	True	%	False	%
1. Parental pressure leads to child bride	30	60	20	40
2. Parental level of believe leads to child bride	27	54	18	16
3. Family size leads to child bride	28	56	22	44
4. Educational level contributes to child bride	25	50	25	50
5. Customs and traditions contributes to child bride	42	84	23	46
6. Sexual promiscuity contributes to child bride	10	20	40	80
7. Girl-child level of education before marriage	31	62	19	38

Results from this study shows that among the factors considered out, custom and tradition ranked highest (84%) followed by girl-child level of education before marriage (52%) then parental pressure (60%), family size (56%) parental income (54%) and the lowest was sexually promiscuity of the child bride (20%).

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The present study “child bride practices;; consequences and factors influencing this practices in Nnewi Local Government area of Anambara State revealed that most of the people living in the Nnewi communities are ignorant of the consequence of child marriage on woman’s health and economic attainment in the society. This finding is in line with Unicef (2005) document, which said that the primary root of primitive practices is inadequate knowledge; hence they advocated for the right of every child to education with its offshoot in universal basic education” where every child is expected to enjoy at least free primary education.

Other factors such as parental level of income, number of children in the family, custom, girl child level of education before marriage among others showed high influence on the perpetuation of child bride practices within Nnewi community. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Celestine, (1998) where he argued that child marriage of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are common and thrives in societies where acute poverty,, illiteracy, uncontrolled child birth among other factors prevail, Celestine, (2007) argued that in Ibo land, children are seen as wealth and this has a significant influence on people having more than they could adequately cater for, hence majority of the children end up illiterates and school dropout.

**CONCLUSION**

The causes and consequences of child bride all over the world are synonymous. The factors that influence such practices are not much different from one community to another, hence the result of this research work is in agreement with other research conducted in other conducted in other societies where child marriage was practiced.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the result of the data collected, the following recommendations are made.

- Health practitioners, educational stakeholders and human right activists should provide educational programmes through health centers, education centers among others, where the consequences of child bride on women's health and economic attainment will be emphasized.
- Health practitioners, educational stakeholders, and human right activists should also device a means of subsidizing cost of education within the communities so that many children whose parents cannot afford to send them to school because of the low level of income and number of children in the family can be helped to become educated. Thereby improving their level of knowledge and economic attainment that will enable them contributes to the society's economy in the nearest future.
- Parents should be enlightened on the consequences of child bride practices.
- Traditional rulers and family heads should be educated on the consequences of child-bride practices thereby changing their mindset and custom of their people.

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