
PROBLEMS OF TEENAGE MARRIAGE AND THEIR EFFECTS ON GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the problems of teenage marriage in Northern and their effects on the education of the girl-child. Causes of early marriage were traced in this paper, their negative implications on the education of female children were also examined, and finally, findings were deduced from the study which gave a ground for possible recommendations. The recommendations were made as weapons to arrest the situation with, and suggestions were made for further study into the same or slightly different area.

Key terms: Problems, Teenage Marriage, Girl-Child, Education.

Though the age at which a girl should be given out for marriage depends on one community to another, and also on social conditions obtainable in the given community of reference, which include religion, tradition and cultural- background. But the age at which girls are married keep increasing all over the world except in countries like Nigeria, and particularly the north where the case has been recorded as 'slow' for the fact that a large proportion of girls are given out for marriage during their childhood or adolescence, and whether they like it or not. The inauguration of marriage institutions as earlier mentioned must not lack a base from social conditions within the community in question and these marriages serve the same purposes among which include procreation in form of socialization, politico- economic development, and many more.

The child right act, passed in 2003 raised the minimum age marriage to 18 for girls. However, Federal law may be implemented differently at the state level. Therefore, it is envisaged that any girl that is given out for marriage below the prescribed age of 18 is said to have experienced 'child marriage'.

Chibuzo O. Dalmeida

Child marriage often means the end of education for the girls. It is closely linked to girls dropping out of school, denying children their right to the education they need for their personal development, their preparation for adulthood, their ability to contribute to their family and community. Adebusey (2006) maintained that the problems of early marriage in northern Nigeria is significant. The trend is highly in Northern Nigeria as oppose to any other state in the federation.

Teenage Marriage: Causes and Problems

Generally, there is no clear specification concerning the age at which 'a girl can be given out for marriage, but since the age of 18 has been specified by law as the age at which a girl attains the age of puberty the law may now consider it as average but the girl should be allowed to take decision on the matter of her marriage without pressure even though some psychologists assert that at the age of 18/19, girls are not emotionally and psychologically ready to carry out responsibilities of marriage or parenting to children. The UMCEK (2005) suggested that Early Marriage violates the following rights.

- The right to education
- The right to be protected from mental and physical abuse
- The right to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health
- The right to achievement and vocational information and guidance.
- The right to rest and leisure etc United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) 2003.

The following are among the causes of early marriage as identified by UNICEF:-

- **Poverty:** for many poor families, marrying their daughters at an early age essentially is a strategy for economic survival: it means one less person to feed, clothe and educate.
- **Limited Education and Economic option:** little or no schooling strongly correlates with being married at a young age. Conversely, attending school and having higher levels of education protects girls from the possibilities of early marriage.
- **Insecurity in the Face of Conflict:** when families live in unsafe regions, parents may generally believe that marrying their daughter is the best way to protect them from danger.
- **Tradition and religion:** in many societies parents are under pressure to marry off their daughters as early as possible in an effort to prevent them from becoming sexually active before marriage.

A Few Problems of Child Marriage

Child marriage is not only wrong but dangerous for it exposes young girls to profound health risks from early pregnancy and difficult childbirth and exposes her baby to complications of premature birth. The problems associated with child marriage according to UNICEF include:

Problems Of Teenage Marriage And Their Effects On Girl-Child Education In Northern Nigeria

- **Domestic Violence:** the big gap between the girl and her husband reinforces the inferiority status, increasing the risk of the girl being subjected to domestic violence.
- **Premature Pregnancy and Maternal Mortality:** child-wives almost always bear children before they are physically or emotionally ready, and girls younger than 15 are five times more likely to die during child-birth or in pregnancy than older women.

Source: UNICEF (2005) state of the world's children.

Early Marriage: the Case in Northern Nigeria

A survey conducted by population council in Northern Nigeria, which reveals that the percentage of girls who are married by age 15, is much more in the north than in the south. For example North- west alone has 35.8 %, north-east has 24.9 %, north-central has 7.7 % while south-west has 0.7%, south-south has 2.4 % and south-east has 0.4 % Furthermore, most of the marriages done with girls before 18 years of age in Northern Nigeria are forced marriages, and most of the victims are less educated. They lack opportunities and skills for income[^] generating activities and above all, lack adequate knowledge of productive health and issue related to STD/HIV, and most of these marriages are polygamous with an average age of 18years between the husband and the wife.

Government and other institutions have been doing their best to control the situation. For instance, there is this popular court, ruling titled 'Hauwa Abubakar'

"A Famous ruling by the high court of Kaduna upheld the right of a father to "compel his virgin daughter in to marriage without her consent and even when she has not attained puberty[^]". One such virgin daughter was Hauwa Abubakar whose gruesome murder made headlines in 1987. At the age of nine, her father married her off to one Malam Shehu Garba Kiruwa, a 40 year-old cattle dealer to whom he owed money. For two years she refused to go and live with the man, but she was forcefully taken to the house when she began to menstruate at the age of twelve. Still not content to accept her lot, she twice ran away and was twice forcefully returned. On the third occasion, Mallam Garba pinned her down and chopped off her legs with a cutlass resulting to her death. The ensuing public outcry forced the then military administrator of Bauchi state to enact a decree empowering government to prosecute any parent who withdraw their daughter from school in order to marry her off" (NPE and UNICEF, 2Q01.P.2Q1).

Girl Child and Girl-Child Education

The girl child according to some conceptual theories is a female homo-sapient of unmarried age that is defined by psychological characteristics that set her apart from her male counterpart. As a compound word, the term connotes the sex and age bracket of the gender under reference. Therefore, there is a rite of passage that allows a transition through adulthood culminating in old age.

Education is defined by Zanden (1999) as a learning -process that ushers 'a relatively permanent change in behaviour or capacity that results from experience' Education is one aspect of the many-sided process of socialization in society".

Bullock and Stally brass (1977) are of the opinion that education is all about (1) ...a passing of a cultural heritage (ii) initiation of the young into worthwhile thinking and doing (in) fostering of the individual's growth. Onyekwelu, (2005) sees education as "a tool that teaches someone how to think, what is good, and what is bad, how to solve problems, to know what is fair and unfair rational and irrational". He maintained that education imbues an individual with the confidence to adapt anywhere: it builds self-esteem and self-respect, it brings out the best in you and enables you to assert yourself positively and most importantly, education helps one to identify his or her strengths and weaknesses. In fact education, encapsulate all these definitions and benefits because the end product is the emergence of the mentally librated individual that is free to make decisions for his/her shapes of life, be self-reliant and contribute to National and community development. The Nigeria's National Educational policy (2004) seeks to, among other things create and promote self realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress'.

Early Marriage and Girl-Child Education in Northern Nigeria

The prevailing research works conducted on this problem and mostly emanating from the north reveal that early marriage impedes young girls' education. In the north, parents deliberately keep their daughters out of school because investing in their education is considered a liability to the parent (UNICEF, 2005). Education for all has stated that, the custom of early marriage is acknowledged as one of the reason for girls' exclusion from school. A report published by the international centre for research on women confirmed that early marriage prevent girls from completing their education because after marriage, young girls access to formal and even informal education is severely limited because of domestic burdens, child bearing and social norms that view marriage and education as incompatible". For the last two years, UNICEF has also been working with communities to inform residents of the risks, help them abandon the practice and setup committee that will intervene in case of early marriages.

Conclusion

'Out of school' and in marriage, girls are denied the ability to learn skills that could help them earn an income and take them and their children out of poverty. Married girls who would like to continue schooling may be both practically and legally excluded from doing so.

Child marriage is a major barrier to progress on girls' education. Over sixty percent of child-wives in northern Nigeria have had no formal education. Many girls are not in education because schools are inaccessible or expensive, because of the traditional role girls are expected to play in the household, or simply because parents do not see the value of education for their daughters. Child marriage and lack of education are pinned down to girls' low status.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby given:

- Both government and other institutions should apply more grease to their elbows in their campaign to create awareness of the extent early marriage and human rights abuse constitute.
- State governments, especially in the north should be encouraged to adopt the federal law that established the age of 18 as the legal age of marriage for girls.
- Communities should be engaged in public campaigns against teenage marriage so as to allow the upgrading of the standard of girl-child education in Northern Nigeria.
- Parents should be educated on the risk involved in getting their daughters married at their teenage age and the good nature of investing in the education of the girl-child.
- Girls should be educated at primary school on their right to choose who to marry and when to marry, so as to avoid them getting subjected to their parent's choice at their teenage age when it comes to marriage.

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