

Girl-Child Marriage in the Nigerian Society, Causes, Impacts and Mitigating Strategies

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Abstract Today's society is plagued with a number of challenging issues, one of such issues is early child marriage. Child marriage represents a fundamental breach of human rights. However, a number of societies accept and practice this. This study is therefore informed by this practice seeks to analyse the cause, impact on the Nigerian society as well as determine if available solutions are acceptable employing opinion survey through a structured questionnaire that was rated on a 4 point likert scale and guided by three research questions and four null hypotheses. The findings from the study indicate that continuous practice of early girl-child marriage is caused by a number of factors which include poverty, ignorance from parents, traditional practice, peer pressure, family alliances to mention a few. While social insecurity, strain on the health sector, high level of illiteracy, increased mortality rates as well as high level of divorce rates have been established as some of the impacts of early girl child marriages on the society. The study established that some of the mitigation strategies include empowering the girl child, adopting policies that correct gender equality as well as generating awareness campaigns on impacts of early girl-child marriage. Education empowers and improves the lifestyle and decision making of participants and was therefore recommended by the research to be afforded to both genders.

Keywords: *girl child, marriage, education*

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1. Introduction

Nigeria a country blessed with rich human and natural resources is the most populated country in the sub-Saharan region with an estimated population of about 162.5 million. Of this, about 49% of the population are females, accounting for roughly 80.2 million of the entire population. This population therefore signifies the economic and societal importance of the female to the country. The African society however places expectation on females to marry and become submissive to their husbands and in some cases drop the personal interest and ambitions.

Nevertheless, females across the country have continued to record strides in various sectors of the country. These are reflected by this administrations political appointment of females as Minister of Finance (Kemi Adeosun), D.G of NPA (Hadiza Usman) and the D.G of NAFDAC (Mojisola Adegboye) to mention a few within the political scenery. In the area of the private sector, Emzor Pharmaceuticals (Dr Stella Okoli), Ebonylife TV (Mo Abudu), Newton & David Events Limited (Uche Majekodunmi), Linda Ikeji, Folorunsho Alakija to mention a few.

Females are regarded as the currency in which political and economic alliances are built. They carry out 50-60

percent of the activities involved in food processing, agricultural husbandry activities in the country [1]. Women are at the center of many communities and irrespective of whether they are employed or not, they are very influential to their children [2] As such, their population plays a key role in the social and national advancement.

This section of the population has however faced societal prejudices from discrimination because of their gender as well as stigmatization as a result of failure to meet societal standards and customs. One of these prejudices is the expectation within the society that females must become married in order to gain audience in their society. It is estimated that more than 20-50 % of females in developing nations particularly in the sub-Saharan region of Africa go into marriage before the age of 18. As such this highlights the phenomenon today known as "Girl child marriage".

Child marriage is a global issue that is extremely prevalent in developing nations. According to a report by WHO in 2018, 16 million girls between the ages of 15-19 annually this figure indicates how prevalent the issue of child marriage is across the globe. In addition, 2.5 million girls under the age of 16 give birth annually in developing areas [3].

Marriage according to [4] is an institution that is divinely ordained and has been generally accepted by

everyone regardless of race, colour or belief. It can be said to be a communal and legal coming together between men and women [5]. Although, few cultures have permitted the union between same sex [6]. [7] postulate that marriage is a covenant relationship that exist between a man and woman. It is an intimate and permanent bond between a man and his wife as long as they are both alive. It is the state of being united with a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife for the purpose of companionship, procreation and maintaining a family [8,9].

It must highlight that although most marriages today are structured on monogamy where one man marries one woman. In certain societies where traditional, Jewish, Islamic religion and customs are practiced, men are allowed to take as many as four wives. It is an institution where the two individuals have “chosen” to bound themselves by marriage are expected to leave together until death. Hence, the idea of child marriages sees the girl child married off to their husbands by their parents without her choice. Invariably, it can in some cases be referred to as “forced marriage”. This therefore makes these girls become sexually active as early as 10 years and in the case of Nigeria is commonly found in North-West and North-East of Nigeria [10].

Child marriage otherwise referred to as early marriage is an ancient tradition and can therefore be defined as any marriage that occurs when the girl is not physically, mentally or physiologically ready to bear the pressures of marriage and child bearing [7]. Scholars have emphasized that the human rights of the girl-child is been violated through early marriage as globally, international bodies recognize 18 years as the legal age of marriage [4,11,12]. In furtherance to this, [13] highlights that child marriages are most times carried out without the valid consent of one or two of the parties.

Proponents argue that this practice can be attributed to religious beliefs, financial capabilities and societal conflicts to mention but a few [14,15,16]. Another school of thought argue that under the certain traditional and Islamic laws, a woman becomes of age once she undergoes the process of marriage thereby making it challenging for some nations where this traditions are practiced to accept these classifications [17]. It however, be agreed that the impact of marriage on child brides are harmful and violate other universally accepted regulations and poses developmental challenges for countries [18]. According to Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) “any betrothal or marriage of a child should not have any legal status”. Scholars have opined that most early child marriages are most times consently arranged by parents [2]. [19] opines that the effect of this imposition has long lasting effects on the child. As young girls are forced to grow up and thereby robbing of the youth.

All the across the world, literature has identified numerous interrelated factors that influence the decision for the practice of child-marriage. These include war, religious belief, family pressure, poverty to mention but a few [2,12,20]. According to [5] in Africa, it is particularly common in Africa spreading across Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya, Mali, Chad and Niger to mention but a few. While in the Middle East it is common in Philippines, Iraq etc.

whereas in South-East Asia it spreads across India, Nepal, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Pakistan to mention but a few.

In the case of Nigeria, early marriage is predominant in the Northern part of Nigeria where North-west and North-East geopolitical zones account for over 45 % of child marriages as well as the highest levels of illiteracy amongst females in the nation [4]. The cases continue to occur in spite of the Nigerian constitution frowning at early marriages, the recent cases of Alhaji Ahmed Bakura, former governor of Zamfara and Ese Oruru in Bayelsa state are clear examples that that these practices continue to be practiced.

1.1. Causes of Early Girl-Child Marriage

(a) Financial uncertainty

Financial uncertainty is a critical contributing factor to early girl-child marriage. In the sense that, where the parents of the child are faced with acute uncertainty of finances, their young girls may be seen as expensive and a burden. This can lead to the parents marrying her off to an older man at a very young age. In traditional African societies, the bride’s family may receive cattle from the family of the groom [21]. Furthermore poor families tend to marry off their girls at the same time with a view to reducing the expenses of marriage ceremonies.

(b) Cultural Expectation

As a result of cultural expectation, where young girls are lured into early marriages in order to fit into the expectations of their community. [22] opines that societal expectation pressure parents to allow their girls under the age of 18 years because of prestige. As failure to conform with these expectations can lead to ridicule and disapproval [23].

(c) Religious Belief

Religious beliefs have played a key role in girl-child marriage, as some religious beliefs do not condemn marriage to under aged girls and this has thereby encouraged the perpetuation of such acts. In addition, as a result of religious expectations, parents force their daughters to marry whomever they get pregnant for.

(d) Family alliances

Marriage is a union between two families and some parents lure their girl-child’s into marriage in order to consolidate family alliances. According to a report by UNIFPA, some marriages in Africa and Asia are seen as a means of strengthening the relationships between families or settling disputes [24]. According to a report by [25] in some cases the children are betrothed even before birth.

(e) Kidnapping

The rising case of insecurity in Africa, particularly Nigeria has seen the rise of kidnapping and other criminal vices. This has seen young girls kidnapped on their way to school or at school premises and thereafter forced into marriage by their captives. The case of abduction and eventual forceful marriage and impregnation of some of the Chibok girls in the northern part of Nigeria is a typical example of this [26].

(f) Traditional practice

A number of traditional practices contribute to early girl-child marriage for instance, practices such as female genital circumcision (FGC) where part of all of the female genital is removed for cultural reasons [27]. It is believed that the process improves the health of the girl child, hygiene, prospects of marriage and fertility [4]. It is estimated that about 140 million women have gone through the process of FGC [27].

(g) Ignorance

One of the significant causes of early girl-child marriage is ignorance on the part of the parents. Ignorance in the sense that some parents have the opinion that their daughters are safer when they are married off early so as to prevent sexual attacks and violence [28].

(h) Community pressure

The pressure girls face as a result of their status in the society contributes in early marriage. A study carried out by UN in 2004, established that women are regarded as inferior in African and Asian societies. [29] posits that girls are seen as burdens because of the fact that they will eventually get married into another family as such they prefer to educate their boys and marry off their girl child at an early age.

(i) Control of unintended pregnancy

Most societies in Africa and Asia frown upon pregnancy prior to marriage. As such, most families seek to marry off their girl child before they get pregnant outside marriage. A report by UNICEF established that unmarried girls are seen as liability to the honor of the family and in order to guarantee chastity and virginity of the bride they are married off early to avoid dishonoring the family [12,22].

(j) Limited educational attainment of parents

Africa is continent that is still developing and as such most countries have a significant population that lack educational qualification and form of training. This therefore exposes them to a lot societal superstitions and misinterpretations of marriage. As a result, this makes them gullible to any superstition or misconceptions that have been passed down from generation to generation regarding early-child marriage. According to [30] the education of parents greatly affects the timing and type of union.

(k) Limited or no access to health information services

This is a serious contributory factor to the continuous practice of early girl-child marriage. This is because parents who engage in this practice are not fully abreast with the consequences of early girl-child marriage on their daughter. These include confinement to household roles, sexual abuse, discontinuation of education, exposure to maternal death, Vesico-Virginal Fistulae (VVF) and sexually transmitted diseases [22,31]. According a report by WHO in 2018, adolescent mothers aged between 10 to 19 have a higher likelihood of experiencing eclampsia,

systematic infections as well as puerperal endometritis when compared to older mothers [3].

2. Statement of the Problem

Child marriage in Nigeria is an issue that continues to draw debates among various school of thoughts. However, the impact of child marriage can have devastating impacts of the child being married off and the society at large. The child is denied the opportunities of attaining her educational and employment prospects, is exposed to VVF, risk death through child birth as well as expose them to sexually transmitted diseases to mention a few. The society on the other hand, is faced with population pressure as a result of increased cost of health care, spread of HIV/AIDS, increased mortality and morbidity rates as well as undermining efforts by governmental and non-governmental agencies at fighting poverty etc.

3. Study Objectives

For the purpose of this study, the following objectives were addressed:

1. To identify the factors leading to early girl-child marriages in the Nigerian society.
2. To determine the impact of girl-child marriages on the Nigerian society.
3. To make recommendations aimed at mitigating the impact of early-girl child marriage in the region.

4. Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:

1. What are the causes of early girl-child marriages in the Nigerian?
2. What are the impacts of early girl-child marriage on the Nigerian society?
3. What strategies should be employed to mitigate the impact of girl-child marriages in Nigeria?

5. Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this study were tested at .05 level of significance.

1. There is no statistically significant mean opinion difference between the NGO officers, health workers and young brides causes of early girl child marriages in the Nigerian society.
2. There is no statistically significant mean different in the opinions of female and male respondents to the causes of early girl child marriage in the Nigerian society.
3. There is no significant statistical mean opinion difference between NGO officers, health workers and young brides impacts of early girl child marriages in the Nigerian society.
4. There is no significant statistical mean difference in the opinions of female and male respondents on the impact of early marriage in the Nigerian society.

6. Methodology

The research opinion survey designed and sought the opinions of varying categories of respondents across the south-south region on the issue being researched.

(I) Scope of the study

The study was conducted in the south-south region of Nigeria which has six states namely Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Benin and Cross River states. Bayelsa state is purposely selected for this research because of its reputation amongst the south-south as one of the most educationally backward states in the south-south as well as the rising cases of child marriage in the state despite international condemnation. Bayelsa State carved out of old-Rivers state in October 1996 has a population of approximately 2 million. The predominant religions practiced are Traditional and Christianity. Located within the Edumanom forest reserve, the name "BAYELSA" is an acronym of three Local Government areas that once were in old-Rivers state the state, namely Brass, Yenagoa and Sagbama. Today the state has 32 local governments and has deposits of crude oil and natural gas. However, majority of the population are underprivileged, uneducated and over the years have been neglected by the central government as most communities are completely surrounded by water thus making it inaccessible by road. The study focused on 6 towns within the state namely: Yenagoa, Nembe, Amassoma, Kaiama, Ogbia, Ekeremor.

(II) Population for the study

The population for the research comprised of married young girls, health workers (male & female), NGO officers (male & female). The exact size of population was not determined thus, the convenience sampling technique was adopted in constituting the study sample.

(III) Sample of the study

As a result of the infinity of the population, the sample of the study was chosen by convenience however, conscious efforts was focused on ensuring diversity and extensive coverage of the area to be studied. For the purpose of the study therefore, a sample size of 100 respondents was drawn up that comprised 10 girls that were married off early, 20 NGO officers (Female & Male), 20 health workers (Female & Male).

(IV) Instrumentation

The main instrument for this study is fashioned along the rating scale model of 4 points and validated using parameter of face and content for collation of data. Validity is the procedure of discovering the degree to which the researcher tests what it purports to measure [32]. Thus, in order to ensure validity, the instrument with a coefficient of 0.87 on the Cronbach Alpha scale was adopted.

(V) Data Analysis

The data recorded and collated for the research was analysed using the descriptive statistics of frequency, mean and standard deviation whereas the null hypotheses was subjected to the t-test.

7. Results and Analysis

Upon analysis of the data the following results were obtained as shown below:

Table 1. the percentage composition of categories of respondents

Category of respondents	Male %	Female%	Total %
Young Bride	25	5	30
NGO officers	20	20	40
Health Workers	10	20	30
TOTAL	55	45	100

Research Question 1: What are the causes of girl-child marriages in the Nigerian?

Table 2. Mean perception of respondents on the cause of girl-child marriage in Nigeria (N= 100)

S/N	ITEM/DESCRIPTION	X	SD	REMARK
1	Religious belief	2.87	0.61	Accept
2	Cultural Expectation	2.89	0.56	Accept
3	Kidnapping	2.56	0.68	Accept
4	Peer group pressure	3.00	0.76	Accept
5	Intra-ethnic Conflict	2.59	0.79	Accept
6	Family Alliances	3.15	0.76	Accept
7	Business Strategy	3.23	0.66	Accept
8	Community pressure	3.05	0.51	Accept
9	Protection against loss of virginity	2.69	0.45	Accept
10	Ignorance of parents	3.02	0.67	Accept
11	Traditional practice	2.87	0.67	Accept
12	Low status of girls in the society	3.14	0.59	Accept
13	Control unintended pregnancy	3.50	0.41	Accept
14	Limited educational attainment of parents	2.90	0.34	Accept
15	Limited or no access to Health information services	3.33	0.55	Accept
16	Financial uncertainty of parents	2.92	0.68	Accept

The table above (Table 2) indicates that all the variables causes of early girl-child marriage were accepted by the participants of the survey.

Research Question 2: What are the impacts of girl-child marriage on the Nigerian girl and the society?

Table 3. Mean perception of respondents on the possible impact of girl child marriage on the Nigerian society

S/N	ITEM/DESCRIPTION	X	SD	REMARK
1	Social insecurity	2.56	0.57	Accept
2	Increased levels of illiteracy	3.62	0.23	Accept
3	High divorce rates	3.05	0.51	Accept
4	Increased unemployment levels	2.84	0.72	Accept
5	Increased Sexual transmitted diseases	2.66	0.46	Accept
6	Increased infant mortality rates	3.00	0.76	Accept
7	Increased maternal mortality rates	2.51	0.54	Accept
8	Increased cases of VVF/RRF	3.05	0.55	Accept
9	Pressure on the Health facilities	3.05	0.55	Accept
10	Increased cases of domestic violence	2.65	0.49	Accept
11	Increased cases of sexual abuse	3.02	0.80	Accept
12	Increased cases of mental disorder	3.04	0.54	Accept
13	Increased poverty levels	3.04	0.54	Accept
14	Increased complications for the pregnant girl	3.03	0.51	Accept

The table above (Table 3) illustrates that the participants accepted all the variables as impacts of early-girl child marriage on the Nigerian society.

Research Question 3: What strategies should be employed to mitigate the impact of girl-child marriages in Nigeria?

Table 4. Strategies employed in mitigating the impact of girl-child marriages in Nigeria?

S/N	ITEM/DESCRIPTION	X	SD	REMARK
1	Promoting education of Girls	3.55	0.56	Accept
2	Providing economic empowerment for young girls and young brides	3.47	0.55	Accept
3	Promote community leader participation in advocacy against early girl child marriage	2.98	0.35	Accept
4	Enactment of regulations that curb early girl-child marriages in Nigeria	3.07	0.54	Accept
5	Adopt policies that correct gender equality	3.57	0.67	Accept
6	Basic infrastructures should be provided by the govt.	3.55	0.57	Accept
7	International agencies, NGOs should all join hands raise awareness against this practice.	3.21	0.77	Accept
8	Gender equality courses should be introduced into the educational curriculum.	2.95	0.53	Accept
9	Communities leaders should be educated on the impact of early-girl child	3.25	0.66	Accept
10	Health facilities should be equipped and staff trained to deal with cases of early-child marriages	3.44	0.51	Accept
11	An accessible reporting mechanism should be put in place to aid the girl brides report cases of abuse	2.82	0.42	Accept
12	Parents should be educated on the dangers of early-child marriages.	3.33	0.62	Accept

The table above (Table 4) illustrates that the participants accepted all the variables as strategies that can be employed in mitigating the impact of early-girl child on the Nigerian society.

Table 5. Result of ANOVA (One-way)

Summary Ho1: “There is no significant mean opinion difference among the NGO officers, health workers and young brides to the causes of early girl child marriages in the Nigerian society”

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F-Crit	F-Ratio	Decision
Between Group	8.32	2	4.26	3.0	0.005*	Accept
Within Group	172263.08	97	874			
Total	172271.6	99	878.69			

*Not Significant p =0.05 df = 2 & 97

The table (Table 5) above indicates that the F-ratio (.005) is less than calculated F-value (3.0) the hypothesis of no significant mean opinion difference is therefore accepted.

Table 6. Result of t-Test applied on Null Hypothesis 2: “There is no significant mean opinion difference between female and male respondent to the cause of early girl-child marriages”

Category of Respondent	N	X	SD	Df	P	t-Crit	t-Cal	Decision
Female	55	3.25	46	98	0.05	1.96	1.04	Accept
Male	45	3.57	49					

*Not Significant P=0.05 df = 98

The critical t-value is more than calculates t at 0.05 alpha level and 98 degrees of freedom the proposed hypothesis of no significant mean opinion difference is accepted.

Table 7. Result of ANOVA (One-way)

Summary Ho3: “There is no significant statistical mean opinion difference between NGO officers, health workers and young brides on the impacts of early girl child marriages in the Nigerian society”.

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F-Crit	F-Ratio	Decision
Between Group	8.36	2	4.29	3.0	0.015*	Accept
Within Group	172266.8	97	884			
Total	172275.16	99	888.29			

*Not Significant P=0.05 df = 2 & 98

The hypothesis of no significant mean opinion difference between NGO officers, health workers and young brides on the impacts of early girl child marriages in the Nigerian society is accepted since the table above indicates that F-ratio (0.015) is less than the calculated F-value (3.0).

Table 8. Findings of t-Test applied on Hypothesis 4: “there is no significant mean opinion difference between female and male respondents on the impact of early marriage in the Nigerian society”

Category of Respondent	N	X	SD	Df	P	t-Crit	t-Cal	Decision
Female	55	2.96	0.71	98	0.05	1.96	1.59	Accept
Male	40	2.89	0.54					

The proposed hypothesis above is accepted since the t-Cal is lower than the t-Crit value at 0.05 alpha level and 98 degrees of freedom.

8. Conclusion

This paper has sort to critically investigate the impact, consequence of girl-child marriage on the Nigerian society. Focus is placed on young girls because of the economical and maternal importance females play in the society. This research has shown that child marriage is still widely practiced across the globe especially in developing nations. And even though it is in violation of a number of regulations surrounding human rights and has been encouraged by a number of factors which encompassed answering research question 1 “What are the causes of early child marriages in Nigeria”? and the following causes were identified and established by the study as causes of early girl-child marriage; Religious belief, cultural expectations, peer pressure, intra-ethnic conflicts, family alliances, business strategy, community pressure, protection against loss of chastity, ignorance from parents, traditional and culture practice, low status of girls in the society, control of unintended pregnancy, limited educational attainment of parents, lack of access to health information services, financial uncertainty of parents. In addition, with the guidance of research question 2 “What are the impacts of girl-child marriage on the Nigerian girl and the society”? The study in consistence with the objectives of the study, collated data from respondents and established that social insecurity, increased levels of illiteracy, high divorce rates, increased unemployment levels, increased sexually transmitted diseases, increased

cases of VVF/RRF, increased levels of infant and maternal mortality rates, increased cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse, increased poverty levels as possible impacts on the society. Furthermore, the study established that

- Providing economic empowerment for young girls and young brides.
- Encouraging the community leaders participation in advocacy against early girl child marriage.
- Enactment of regulations that curb early girl-child marriages in Nigeria, adopting policies that correct gender equality.
- Basic infrastructures should be provided by the government, International agencies.
- NGOs should all join hands raise awareness against this practice, gender equality courses should be introduced into the educational curriculum.
- Health facilities should be equipped and staff trained to deal with cases of early-child marriages.
- Accessible reporting mechanism should be put in place to aid the girl brides report cases of abuse.
- Parents should be educated on the dangers of early-child marriages.

As possible means of mitigating early girl child marriages in Nigeria

9. Recommendation

Education is central to the enhancement and improvement of the welfare of a nation as it reduces the impacts of poverty, improves health and nutrition, reduces inequality and increases the participation of women in the labour market. The research therefore recommends that

- Government should create better programmes and policies that allow and encourage elderly parents to get educated.
- Education should be afforded to both male and female children.
- Regular workshops and seminars organized by stakeholders such as government, health bodies, NGOs and religious bodies should be available for parents, intending parents as well as intending couples to enlighten them on the importance, significance of education as means to ensuring stability in marriages and empowering their love ones to prevent abuse and negligence.
- Counseling offices should be spread across urban and rural areas in the country.

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