

**Teachers Perception On The Effect of Early Marriage
On The Girl-child Access To Education
In Jos South L.G.A Plateau State**

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Abstract

This paper explores the issue of early marriage in Jos South Local Government Area in Plateau State, Nigeria. It sheds light specifically on reasons behind its perpetuation, its harmful consequences, shows how it constitutes a barrier to education and enjoyments of girls' human rights and how it further threatens the development of the Local Government Area. The data collected was obtained through primary and secondary sources. The sources involved the use of questionnaires which were administered directly to respondents, while, the secondary sources were derived from a vigorous review of literature. The findings from review literature on early marriage suggest that early marriage is due to many factors including among others, the search for economic survival, protection of young girls, peer group and family pressure, controlling female behaviour and sexuality, wars on civil conflicts and socio-cultural and religious values. It is a violation of girls' human right as it deprives her from freedom of opportunity for personal development and other rights. It is also a development challenge for population pressure, health care cost and lost opportunities for physical development. It is a barrier to girls' education as young girls drop out of school to get married which imparts negatively on the community as a whole and the wellbeing of future generation.

This practice stands in direct conflict with the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG'S), such as promotion of basic education, fight against poverty, the prevention of HIV/AIDS and the reduction of maternal mortality rate. To deal with the problem a number of strategies have been suggested mainly providing economic opportunities to young girls, promoting education of girls and using mass media to increase awareness of the whole community about the consequences and dangers of early marriage on girls themselves, their families and the society as a whole.

KEYWORDS: *Early Marriage, Education, Girl-child, Nigeria*

Introduction

Early marriage is a major challenge for the attainment of the goals of Education for All in Nigeria. Early marriage refers to any marriage of a child younger than 18 years old, in accordance to the Article 1 of the convention of the Right of a child (UNICEF, 2005). While child marriages affect both sexes, girls are disproportionately affected as they are victims. Their overall development is compromised, leaving them socially isolated with little education, skills and opportunities for employment and self realization. This leaves girl-child brides more vulnerable to poverty. Early marriage is now widely recognized as the violation of children's rights, a direct form of discrimination against the girl-child who as a result of the practice is often deprived of her basic rights to health, education, development and equality. Tradition, religion and poverty continue to fuel the practice of child marriage despite its strong association with adverse reproductive outcomes and the lack of education for girls.

The Education for All movement is a global charge to provide quality basic education for all children, youths and adults. The movement was launched at the World Conference on Education of All in 1990, where representatives of the international community accepted to universalize primary

education and massively reduce illiteracy level by the end of the decade. The global commitment of EFA emerged as a reaction to increasing rate of early marriage, child labour, child trafficking, child exploitation and child related abuses that deprive children, especially girls of basic education and an insured future. The cardinal goals of EFA are (i) to expand early childhood care and education, (ii) provide free and compulsory education for all, (iii) promote learning and life skills for young people and adults, (iv) increase adult literacy by 50% and, (v) achieve gender parity and gender equality by 2015 (UNICEF, 2005).

The educational rights of children as earlier stated reveals the fact that all children must and should have equal access to education but contrary to that and also from the Global Campaign for Education (2005), girl education is on the decline instead of improving. Nigeria's Girls Education Initiative (NGEI) is a partnership between Non-Government Organizations (NGO'S), Federal Ministry of Education (FME), UNICEF and likeminded organizations evolved to be a platform for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG'S) and the goals of Education for all (EFA) and Universal Basic Education (UBE) as this relates to girls' education in Nigeria.

NGEI'S goal is to narrow the gender gap in primary and secondary education and to ensure that by 2015, all children complete primary schooling with boys and girls having equal access to all levels of education, thereby making significant progress in Nigeria's effort towards achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and of all levels of education no later than 2015 source (UNICEF, 2005).

Throughout the world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life. Sadly the practice of early marriage gives no such cause for celebration. All too often, the imposition of a marriage partner upon a child means that a child means that a girl's childhood is cut short and their fundamental rights are compromised (UNICEF, 2001, Lefevre, Quiroga and Murphy, 2004).

Young girls are robbed of their youth and required to take on roles for which they are not psychologically prepared. Many have no choice about the timing of their marriage, while others are too young to make an informed decision. Premature marriage deprives them of opportunity for personal development as well as their rights to full reproductive health and well being, education and participation in civic life.

Education is a process through which individuals are made functional members of the society (Orho, 2005). It is the process through which the young acquires knowledge and realizes her potentials and uses them for self-actualization (Offorma, 2009). Education has been described as the most important aspect of human development a key to successful living especially girl-child education (Michael, 2011). Denying the girl-child access to education implies making her a dysfunctional member of the society. Statistics show that many girls are not enrolled in school. The global figure for out of school children is estimated as 121 million, 65 million are girls, with over 80% of these girls living in the sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria (UNICEF, 2007). Action Aid International (AAIN) cited by KIKI (2010) reported that, not until recently, in a school of 150 students in Northern Nigeria, only two or three are girls.

Early marriage contributes to a series of negative consequences both for young girls and the society in which they live. It is a violation of human rights in general and of girls' rights in particular. For both boys and girls, early marriage is profound physically, intellectually, psychological and emotional impacts, cutting off educational and employment opportunities and chances of personal growth.

The aim of this paper is therefore to examine the incidence of early marriage in girls, its effects on child education and progress towards the attainment of the goals of Education for All in Nigeria. More emphasis will be given to girls as this is an issue that impacts upon girls in far larger numbers with more intensity. It will also identify the interrelated factors almost similar worldwide with small variations between societies that interact to place a girl-child at risk of early marriage. These factors include among others, search for economic survival, protection of young girls, peer group and family pressure, controlling

female behavior and sexuality, wars and civil conflicts, maximization of fertility when infant mortality is very high (The Working Group 2000, UNR. Et 2001, Mathur et al 2003)

Methods Of Data Collection And Analysis

The data collected for this research study was obtained through primary and secondary sources. The primary sources involved the use of questionnaires which were administered directly to respondents. In addition, ten schools, chosen at random were included in this study. The study area was Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State. The target population for this study was basically focused on the girl-child. All four (4) Districts in Jos South Local Government Area namely (Du, Gyel, Vwang, and Kuru) comprised the multi-random sampling procedure.

A total number of one hundred and fifty respondents comprised mostly of adult women, adult men and youth to access the level at which early marriage denies the girl child access to education in Jos South Local Government Area. From the above target population, multistage sampling method was employed in selections of villages and respondents. In stage one, two villages were selected in District 1 and one village each was selected from the remaining three Districts making a total of five villages. In stage two, respondents were chosen from each village to make it a total of one hundred and fifty respondents. A total of one hundred and fifty questionnaires were hand distributed to ensure 100% return rate. Likert-type questionnaires were used with responses optioned as listed.

Strongly Agree	-	(SA)
Agree	-	(A)
Undecided	-	(UN)
Strongly Disagree	-	(SD)
Disagree	-	(D)

Results

This section represents the analysis of the findings based on the questionnaire administered. In the questionnaire there are five questions on the evaluation into the factors that deprives a girl child-child access to education due to early marriage.



Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents
Source: Authors Field Survey, 2012.

From figure 1, 48.6% (n=73) of the respondents were within the ages of 20-35 years, 32% (n=48) are between the ages of 36-45 years, 19.3% are (n=29) are 46 years and above.

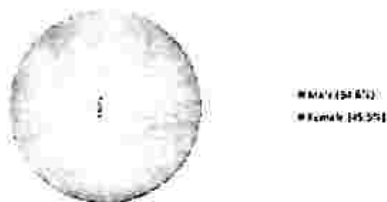


Figure 2 Response to Question 1 – The-Child Has Full Access to Education
Source: Authors Field Survey, 2012.

Thus 54% of the respondents are male while 45.4% are females. This signifies that opinions of both sexes were sought and various age groups were fairly represented in the study.

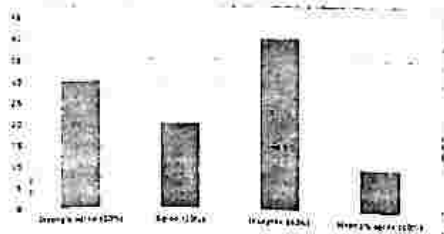


Figure 3. Response to Question 1 – The-Child Has Full Access to Education
Source: Authors Field Survey, 2012.

Figure 3 shows that 40% of respondents disagree that girls have full access to education while 30% strongly agree that the girl has full access to education. About 20% agree that girls have full access to education while the remaining 10% strongly disagree that girls have full access to education. This shows that the respondents that disagree that girls have full access to education are more than those that strongly agree, agree and strongly disagree.

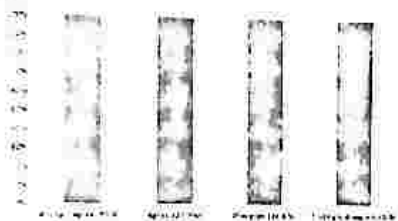


Figure 4 Response to question 2 - Early Marriage Prevents Girls from Remaining or Accessing education.

Source: Authors field Survey, 2012

Figure 4 show that most respondents (79.9%) agree that early marriage prevents girls from accessing, remaining and completing their schooling (56.6% strongly agree, while 23.3% agree)

On the other hand, only 19.9% of the respondents agree that cultural practices like early marriage prevent girls from remaining and completing their education. From the above results, it is therefore observed that inequality manifests itself in various spheres in Nigeria and it affect the girl-child greatly. Inequality exists in social, political, and education sphere and the girl child is being discriminated based on her gender. Inequality is one of the factors that militate against the girl child due to the gender gap favouring boys as against the girl. More boys are sent to schools than girls, this makes girls to be at a disadvantage in their access to education. As a result of inequality, only few girls register for school and yhose who do register attend regularly, often dropping out of school and learning very little. The gender gap favouring boys has remained consistently high, the

proportion of girls to boys in schools ranges from (1) one girl to (2) two boys and even 1 to 3 in some states.

Poverty, poor and uneducated parents lack the information needed to provide optimum care for their children increases the risks of childhood illness and childhood mortality. A girl-child born in poverty is more likely to marry early and have a child while still an adolescent. A malnourished girl becomes malnourished mother, who gives birth to an underweight baby (UNICEF 2001. Pg 33).

Lack of awareness of the importance of girl-child education through public campaigns, rallies and seminars militates against the girl-child access to education. Inadequate school buildings and technical capacity to develop girl-friendly school environment and helping communities to sustain girl education by government has militated seriously against the girl-child education.

Government policies on education that acknowledge the need to equalize education as opportunities between girls and boys lack continuity. There is absence of early childhood care and development of primary education, adult literacy and education of all underserved groups including girls and integral components and this has militated seriously against their abilities to get proper education. There is minimal attempt at promoting the employment of more female teachers, establishing more girls only primary schools and organizing rallies on the negative impact of child marriage especially girl-child marriage and so on.

Discussion

The findings of the study have reaffirmed that early marriage of girls has lowered their educational aspirations. From the data collected and analyzed, it was discovered that over 75% of the respondents are of the opinion that early marriage of girls due to poverty and economic issues, teenage pregnancies, gender biases has by far derailed a girl-child access to education. This goes to show that the efforts of bodies such as UNESCO and ultimately the federal government of Nigeria to

achieve some level of reducing the trend of early marriage in girls is still struggling to achieve such goals. There are still a large number of girls out of schools due to early marriage.

It was found out that in order to help the menace of early marriage, the girl-child needs extra support, encouragement and general literacy awareness as regards physical and health needs, the dangers of early marriage and its disadvantages and the need to be in school for a better and brighter future. This is in agreement with Hyde (1993) which says that the cost of training girls in schools is higher than that of boys

Lastly, women oriented programs have really gone a long way to improve the awareness of the dangers of early marriage by providing awareness, support and encouragements to the girls, therefore more of such women oriented programme should be born so that it can reach out and cater for the needs of girls as regards access to education

Conclusion

Given that the greatest dangers to early marriage is perceived to emanate from the following factors, poverty and economic survival strategies, socio-cultural and religious values. Inadequate infrastructure, gender biases and value of virginity and protection of young girls, efforts must be made by parents, teachers, mentors and school counsellors to teach them about their sexuality and its management right from the age of reason.

Gender sensitization is an imperative challenge that should be pursued as a way to nip-in-the-bud most of the gender-related issues that tends to discourage girls access to education. The idea is that if all aspects of gender discrimination were eliminated, then a solid foundation would have been laid for generalized gender-sensitivity in the school system particularly at the basic education level.

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