

Early Girl-Child Marriage Issues and Families in Ezza North Local Government Area, Ebonyi State

Akubue B.N.

Technology and Vocational Education (Home Economics Unit)
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

Abstract

The study investigated issues relating to early girl-child marriage and families in Ezza North Local Government Area, Ebonyi State. Specifically it identified causes of early girl-child marriage and problems associated with it. Descriptive survey research design was used. The population was made up of 75808 married women. Samples of 280 young married women were used for the study. Questionnaire and focus group discussions (FGD) were used to collect data. Data were analysed using mean. Nine causes were revealed which include illiteracy, poverty, culture and tradition, among others as the causes of early girl-child marriage and ten problems including separation, divorce, sexual transmitted diseases, poverty among others are common among the woman. Recommendations include, that Home economics Association in collaboration with non- governmental organizations should conduct awareness campaign on the implication of early girl-child marriage in the area of study and that federal government of Nigeria should enforce law against early girl-child marriage. Girls education and sex education should be compulsory in the area of study and Nigeria in general.

Keywords: Early, Marriage, Girl, Family, Issues.

Introduction

Marriage is the process in which a male and female who love each other make their relationship publicly official and permanent (George, Girgls and Aderson 2010). It is an institution marked by the union of man and woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other as a couple. It is one of the oldest institutions which regulates the system upon which a couple bear and rear children according to established social norms and custom of a society.

Marriage is distinguished from any form of relationship as it involves togetherness, shearing of life and resources. Marriage ceremony is often marked by legal commitment, customary and/or religious ceremonies, among others (Sussex 2013). It is a bond joining a man and woman often for life.

Marriage practices often vary from one culture to another. Thus there are often different forms of marriage. Puja (2015) classified marriage into monogamy, polygamy and polyandry.

Monogamy and polygamy are forms of marriage practiced in Ezza-North Local Government Area (LGA). Monogamy is the best and wide spread form of marriage. It refers to a marriage of one man with one woman at a time, that is, the marriage involves one sexual partner. Polygamy according Puja (2015) is the form of marriage where there is plurality of partners. It involves a man marrying more than one woman or a woman marrying more than one man at a time. Polygamy has two forms as sororal polygamy and non-sororal polygamy sororal polygamy refers to a marriage between a man and his sister-in-law, that is, a system of marriage in which a man marries two sisters at a time or a man marries his sister in-law after the death of his wife. Non –sororal polygamy is where a man marries many women at a time who are not related to each other.

For both types of marriage, there is a specified age for marriage.

Silver (2014) noted that the minimum age of the girl to be married is 18 years. Involvement of a girl into marriage before the age of eighteen is referred to as early girl-child marriage in Africa tradition (Sovzey and Aburime 2005).Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution (CFRN) (1999) chapter 111stipulated that the official age for marriage in Nigeria is 18 years. Child Right Act (CRA) (2003) also stated that full age to contract marriage is 18 years and above. Thus any marriage under the age of 18 years is against the law of the country. Such marriage can be considered invalid (Braithmah 2014). Olasode, Olaogun, Fatusi and Mosaku

(2008) noted that eighteen (18) years is the legal age for marriage in Nigeria, the law is rarely enforced. Early marriage has been prohibited and criminalized but the law has not been effective in arresting the high incidence of child marriage among Fulani, Hausa and other communities in Nigeria (Braithmah 2014). The practice of early girl-child marriage is still upheld by tradition and social norms in Ezza-North Local Government Area (LGA).

Early girl-child marriage is practice in two ways in Ezza-North Local Government Area. The most common practice of early girl-child marriage in the area of study is that a young girl of less than 15 years old is given out in marriage to an old man of often 50 years and above. In many cases parents often arrange marriage for their children without the consent of the young girl. It constitutes forced marriage most of the time. Parents pressurize girls to marry at early age before the girl become too old to marry in relation to culture and tradition of the area. Kayoed (2015) noted that parents are disposed to marrying off their daughters at tender age to ensure that the girl are virgin as emphasized by the cultural norms of some communities in Nigeria.

Early childhood marriages coerce girls into adulthood before they are physically, socially and emotionally matured. Such early marriage often affects the overall development of girls. They become socially isolated with little or no education, skill and opportunities for employment. They remain poor. Roy (2008) stated that early girl-child marriage denies girls their chances in

society and causes numerous health problems. It is observed that many young women, especially those married by old men in Ezza-North LGA undergo high risk during pregnancy and child delivery, including heavy bleeding, fistula infections, anemia and so on (Ude, 2015). These can increase high maternal mortality rate in the area of study. Issues relating the early childhood marriage influence the children, their husbands and families in various ways. These can lead to various forms of marital problems; such as conflicts, stress, poor communication, separation, divorce among others. Child marriage is recognized as one of the strongest social malaise which must be eradicated to improve on the quality of life of the girls child in the pursuit of sustainable development (Kayode 2015).

Ideally marriage is stable when the couples have considerable emotional support, romantic relationship and communicate well with each other. Most married woman in Ezza North Local Government Area do not share the same building with their husbands. Separate house is built for the wife and her children. This situation impairs effective communication between couples. Their relationship is always coarse and strange. National Council on Family relationship (2014) indicated that compatibility in marriage involves understanding, trust and passionate relationship between the concerned couples. A couple should have confidence in the stability of their relationship to enable them feel strong responsibility for each other, make

happy home and give their children quality training and sound education (Rhoda 2016). Happy marriage is therefore characterised with inseparable love, unity, merged realistic financial lives and common goal plan. It is observed that married women in Ezza North Local Government Area are not involved in any important family discussion and decision

Observation shows that many young married women bleed to death during labour and after child delivery in Ezza-North Local Government Area, Ebonyi state. Some of the young married females are uneducated, poor and unhealthy. They are not adequately nourished, face a lot of social disadvantages and subjected to domestic violence. Ills of early girl-child marriage according to Arinze (2015) can not be justified for any reason. Ajumobi (2014) also opined that out of school during adolescence has serious health and development hazard, on both males and females. Unfortunately early girl-child marriage is still much in vogue in Ezza- North Local Government Area, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate issues relating to early-girl-child marriage in families in Ezza-North Local Government Area, Ebonyi State. Specifically, the study identified;

1. Causes of early girl-child marriage in Ezza-North Local Government Areas
2. Problems associated with early girl-child marriage in families in the area of study.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of early girl-child marriage in Ezza-North Local Government Area?
2. What are problems associated with early girl-child marriage in families in the area of study?

Methodology

Design and Area of Study: Descriptive survey design was used for the study. Area of study was in Ezza-North Local Government Area, Ebonyi State. The local Government is made up of 14 communities with 11 wards and head – quarter at Ebiaji. It has a total population of 145,619 (population census commission 2006). The indigenes are predominantly uneducated farmers.

Population for the Study: The population for the study comprised all the married women from the 14 communities in Ezza North Local Government Area. With a total number of 75808 married women (population census commission 2006), Ebonyi State. The age ranges from 15-65 years who are mainly farmers and petty traders.

Sample and Sampling Techniques: The sample for the study was 280 married women drawn from the population. The sampling size was arrived using multi-stage sampling techniques, Firstly, the local Government was stratified into 11 political wards. Secondly, the researcher selected seven (7) political wards from the 11 wards through simple random sampling method by balloting. Thirdly, forty (40) married women from each of the seven political wards were selected

through purposive sampling technique which is summed up to 280 married women used for the study.

Instrument for Data Collection:

Questionnaire and focus group discussion method were used for data collection. The questionnaire had a 4-point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree with rating of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. It contained twenty items separated into two sections of ten (10) items based on the two specific purposes of the study. The questionnaire was validated by three Home Economics lecturers in the university. The focus group discussion method was also used to illicit some information from the respondents who cannot adequately fill the questionnaire.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques:

Two hundred and eighty copies of the questionnaire were distributed by hand. All the copies were properly completed and returned. Mean was used to analyze the data. Any item with mean value of 2.50 and above was regarded as agreed while those with mean scores below 2.50 was regarded as disagreed.

Finding of the study: the following findings were made:

1. Ten causes of early girl-child marriage out of which nine (9) were identified in Ezza Local Government Area (Table1)
2. ten problems of early girl –child marriage were identified in the area of study (Table2)

Table 1: Mean Responses on Causes of Early Girl-child Marriage in Ezza-North LGA (N = 280).

S/N	Causes of early girl-child marriage	Mean(\bar{x})	Remark
1.	Poverty	3.80	Agreed
2.	Parental ignorance.	3.70	Agreed
3.	Illiteracy of all concerned	3.40	Agreed
4.	Culture and tradition of Ezza-North people	3.80	Agreed
5.	Parents want their daughters to be married by titled men and to settle conflict between families.	2.90	Agreed
6.	Some girls are very eager to marry even at tender age.	1.40	Disagree
7.	Lack of sexual education from parents	3.50	Agreed
8.	Most parents want their daughters to marry wealthy men to ensure their social status	3.60	Agreed
9.	To prevent pre-marital sex by the girls.	3.20	Agreed
10.	Child abuse cause early girl-child marriage	2.90	Agreed

Table 1 shows that item 1-5 and 7-10 had mean score above cut off points of 2.50. This means that the respondents agreed that nine items constituted causes of early girl-child marriage in Ezza North LGA.

Table 2: Mean Responses on the Problems Associated with early Girl-child Marriage (N =280)

S/N	Problem associated with early girl-child marriage	Mean(\bar{x})	Remark
1.	It causes gap in communication between husband and wife.	3.50	Agreed
2.	There is poverty on the side of woman	3.50	Agreed
3.	Children do not receive adequate education and training.	3.40	Agreed
4.	Sexually transmitted diseases may be common in the family.	3.80	Agreed
5.	Women may suffer vesico vagina fistula (VVF)	3.70	Agreed
6.	Prevents education of girl-child	2.95	Agreed
7.	It causes high maternal mortality rate among young women during birth.	3.30	Agreed
8.	It causes separation of the couple	3.60	Agreed
9.	Separation brings disunity between the families of separated husband and wife	3.80	Agreed
10.	Leads to divorce	3.60	Agreed

Table 2 shows that all the ten identified problems associated with early girl-child marriage in the area of study scored mean value above 2.50. This implies that women suffer all identified problems of early girl child marriage in Ezza North Local Government Area.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the study indicated that poverty ignorance illiteracy, poor sexual education, culture and tradition of Ezza people are the cause of early girl-child marriage in Ezza North local

Government Area, Ebonyi State. In spite of growing awareness in the society that early girl child marriage is harmful to girls and their families, parents in Ezza-North still insist upon marrying their daughter in early and mid-teens, to respect their culture. One of the reasons for early girl-child marriage is to respect culture and tradition of the area (Roy 2008). The pursuit to tradition in the face of compelling negative consequence in families of early girl child marriage is common to tradition and culture of many societies (Singh and Samara 1996). Early girl-child marriage prevails due to poor sex education from families of under developing countries. Parents are afraid of unwanted pregnancy from their daughters.

The study also revealed that some parents want their daughters to marry wealthy and titled men, parents give their children to marriage to resolve family dispute and that child abuse causes early-girl child marriage. Some families use marriage to socially affiliate their families to wealthy families. Arinze (2015) noted that many families marry their daughters off at early age essentially for economic survival. Nwimo and Egwu (2015) noted that marriage is one of the means of establishing politics and social bounds in a community. Murray and Lapez (2009) noted that parents give their daughter to marriage to resolve conflicts and strengthen mutual relationship between families and communities. In other words, the value of girls increases with their availability for such unlawful transactions. The

desire to get the girl's dowry is an incentive to arrange a marriage for a young girl without of her consent (Roy 2008).

Child abuse which include failure to provide physical needs such as appropriate clothes, provision of adequate foods, good medical treatment, when sick among others. These ugly conditions lead to girl child marriage.

Some parents do not really understand the negative consequences of early girl-child marriage. The results of the study revealed that early girl-child marriage cause numerous problems in the area of study. It results to gap in communication between the husband and wife, causes separation and divorce, sexual transmitted diseases, women suffer vesico vagina fistula (VVF), disunity between the divorced families among others. The results of the finding confirm the finding of Roy (2008) that early girl-child marriage causes serious disorder in homes such a quarrel and separations. This could be attributed to the fact that, the man has no time to share common view or discuss family issues with the young girl. Arinze (2015) stated that age gap between the early married girls and the husband reinforces the risk of these girls to the subjected to domestic violence having physical, psychological, and fatal outcomes on. United National International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2005) reported that consequences of early girl child marriage are high maternal mortality rate for young women who gave birth

at the age between 15 and 17 years. Dali and Pradham (2009) noted that complications during pregnancy at very young age include obstetric fistula, that is, perforation of the bladder or bowel. Ndyanabo, Mupambireyi and Zaba (2009) opined that early girl-child marriage curtails girls of their personal freedom, opportunity to develop and right of choice.

Conclusion

The study has investigated issues relating to early girl-child marriage in Ezza-North LGA, Ebonyi State with particular references to the causes and problems associated with early girl-child in the area of study. The causes of early girl-child in the area of study include poverty, illiteracy, culture and tradition among others, many problems are associated with early girl-child marriage; such problems are marriage separation and divorce, women suffer various types of sexual transmitted diseases, women remain under developed and have no freedom even at their family level. These inherent causes and problems of early girl-child marriage need to be addressed through individuals, families associations and so on to improve the life of women. There is need to raise awareness of the benefits of educating female child to limit the extent early marriage constitute gross woman rights abuses on the part of girls.

Recommendations

1. Awareness programme should be organized in Ezza-North LGA emphasizing the negative

consequences of early girl-child marriage by Home Economics Teachers Association and Non Governmental Organization (NGOs).

2. The Federal Government of Nigeria should make practicable policies and laws guiding against early girl-child marriage in the area of study and Nigeria in general.
3. State legislatures should be persuaded to domesticate the Child Right Act (2003 (CRA) which outlaws child marriage.
4. Adult school and non-formal education programmes, economic and social programmes should be developed for out-of school married young females.

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