

Issues on Early Marriage among Female Adolescents in Isi-Uzo Local Government Area, Enugu State

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Abstract

This study investigated issues on early marriage among female adolescents in Isi-Uzo Local Government Area (LGA) of Enugu state. Specially, it identified causes and challenges of female adolescent marriage, as well as ways of preventing the practice in the study area. Questionnaire and focus group discussion guide were utilized for data collection. Population for study was 3, 713 adolescents and their mothers. Data were analyzed using means for quantitative data while qualitative data were summarised. Major findings include causes of female adolescent marriage. These include, ignorance, poverty and among others, fourteen (14) challenges identified, including, marital instability, poor health and among others. Ten ways of stopping the practice were identified. These include, provision of free education for youths and orientation program for the youths. Many of the qualitative findings collaborate the quantitative findings. Based on the findings, three recommendations were made for prevention of female adolescent marriage in Isi-uzo LGA of Enugu state.

Key words: Adolescents, Female, Marriage, Causes, Challenges, Prevention.

Introduction

An adolescent is a person between 10-18 years of age. The World Health Organization (WHO 2014) defined an adolescent as a person at a transactional phase of growth and development. It is a period of growth from childhood to adulthood. Neuman (2010) stated that the adolescent goes through physical, mental and developmental challenges. It is a period when children should be given opportunity to discover and develop themselves to the fullest through good quality education and

training, among other desirables provisions; In Nigeria however this is not the case as these children are forced into early marriage.

Early marriage is defined by Berlser (2019) as marriage between two individuals in which one or both partners is below 18 years of age. Owoh (2013) observed that marriage before the age of 18 years is a fundamental violation of human right. This is because many adolescents who married early are likely experience psychological trauma, depression, anxiety and mood

disorder. UNICEF (2004), stated that Nigeria has the third highest prevalence rate of female adolescent marriage in the world (UNFPA 2017). In spite of the fact that Child Right Act of (2003); some cultures in Nigeria still allow early or adolescent marriage Ejindu (2019). The report on female adolescent marriage in Nigeria abound (UNFPA 2017) identified the causes of such early marriage in Nigeria to include gender inequalities, cultural, tradition, insecurity and illiteracy. Furthermore, Agaba (2011) stated that poverty, male dominance, economic burden and ignorance about consequences of early marriage on the lives of the victims contributed to the prevalence of early marriage in Nigeria. Presently, child marriage is in the increase and common in the rural areas such as Isi-Uzo Local Government of Enugu state.

In Isi-Uzo Local Government Area, early marriage has ancient cultural, religious and economic ties. Majority of the natives are Christians but there are still those who practice traditional religion. Dennis (2018), stated that average Isi-Uzo man is proud because of their spiritual belief in Odomagana “the “spirit of pride” . There is a traditional belief among average Isi-Uzo man to preserve his ego and pride in line with cultural beliefs. It is a taboo for example for a young girl to get pregnant before marriage. This explains why majority of the adolescents get betrothed early before 18 years of age. A large number of literature showed that Isi-Uzo people encourages early marriage to prevent their girls from becoming pregnant and thereby bringing shame to the family.

There is the belief that girls who marry after secondary education or 18 years of age becomes promiscuous, so parents often see them as economic burden and usually marries them off to avoid economic liability (Ejindu 2019).

Early marriage has dire consequences for the girl child. This according to Akudolu (2013) decreases the girl’s development by resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation. It interrupts her education, limit her opportunities for career and vocational advancement and places her at an increased risk of domestic violence. World Health Organization (WHO 2014) stated that 29% of the adolescents that marry early experience health challenges which most times result from premature pregnancy. Sometimes it results in life threatening illnesses such as Vesco- Vaginal Fistula (VVF), anemia, High Blood Pressure, premature birth, malnutrition, Sexually Transmitted Disease (STDs) and Postpartum Disease (PPD) Kammina and Kramer (2011) observed that adolescence early marriage is more in societies that have less value for girls and women. Such patriarchal societies insist that women’s place is in the kitchen. Sometimes such cultures force young girls to marry men old enough to be their grandfather.

Female adolescent marriage is a serious hinderance to overall development and welfare of young girls. It therefore evolve ways of preventing it in Isi-uzo LGA. Anthony (2013) opined that introduction of free education in primary and secondary education will ensure that these youths are kept in school without distraction of

marriage. Again establishment of skill acquisition centers, youth empowerment programmes, cultural modifications and enlightenments will reduce the number of female adolescents getting married. Literature reviewed showed gaps on issues of adolescent early marriages in different communities and including Isi-uzo LGA; hence the need for this study.

Objectives of the study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate some selected issues about early marriage of female adolescents in Isi-Uzo L. G. A. Specifically, the study determined:

1. causes of early marriage of a female adolescent in Isi-Uzo L.G.A
2. challenges female adolescents have as a result of early marriage in Isi-Uzo L.G.A
3. ways for preventing early marriage of the female adolescents in Isi-Uzo L.G.A

Research question

The following research questions guided the study

1. What are the causes of early marriage of female adolescents in Isi-Uzo L.G.A?
2. What are the challenges female adolescents have as a result of early marriage?
3. What are the ways for preventing early marriage of the female adolescent.?

Methodology

Research design: Mixed method approach was adopted for the study. Mixed research design is a procedure

for collecting, analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data in order to have a good understanding of the topic under study. This method was deemed most appropriate because of the variety of questions used to source information from different participants.

Area of the study: The study was carried out in Isi-Uzo local government area of Enugu state bordering between Ebonyi and Benue states. Its headquarter is Ikem and it is a constituent of Enugu East senatorial zone. Isi-Uzo local government area (LGA) has an area of 877km and a population of 148,415 (2006 census). LGA has only four towns and nine secondary schools located in the rural area and the people are predominantly farmers. This area has cases of early marriage of adolescent girl child and that is why it is chosen for the study (Source: Isi-Uzo L.G.A 2019).

Population for the Study: This was made up of 3,713 female adolescents in the nine secondary schools in Isi-uzo LGA and their mothers. The female adolescents were in their transitional phase of growth and development between 10 to 17 years of age and in secondary schools.

The mothers were between age ranges of 50-60 years old some of them are illiterate while others have a maximum qualification of West African Examination Council (WAEC). These mothers are low income earners who have had the experiences of bearing the financial burden of performing their roles as homemakers and training their children up. They were chosen as participants for the focus group discussion because of their experience.

Sample for the study: All the nine secondary schools in Isi-Uzo were used for the study. This was because the schools were not many. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 100 female adolescents from each of the nine secondary schools in the LGA. This gave a sample size of 900 adolescent female.

Participants in FGDs were selected purposeively through the assistance of village women leaders. A total of 177 mothers were purposive selected. There were mothers with female adolescents (daughter) were willing to take part in the study.

Instruments for Data Collection: Questionnaire and focus group discussion (FGD) guide were used for data collection. They were developed based on literature reviewed and objectives of the study. Questionnaire was made of two sections, A and B. Section A sought information from the personal data of the respondents while section B sought information from the research questions. Instrument were validated by three experts in Home Economics in the University. Cronbach

Alpha Reliability Coefficient Index was used to determine the reliability of the instrument which was 0.89.

Method of Data Collection: Nine hundred (900) copies of the questionnaire were administered to the adolescents with the help of research assistants. The respondents were guided in filling the questionnaire items correctly before retrieving and returning. There teachers also helped with the distribution and retrieved. This gave a 100 percent return.

Nine FGD sessions of 13 discussants each were organised for the study. Each session had a facilities and a recorded. Tap recorder was also used in each session. The FGD guide was used.

Method of Data Analysis: Mean was used to determine to answer the research questions. Decision was taken based on mean rating of 2.50, The FGD information were summarized.

Findings of the Study

Causes of Early Marriage of Adolescents

Table 1: Mean Responses on Causes of Early Marriage of Adolescent Girl Child

S/N	Causes of early marriage	MeanX	Decision
1	Poverty	3.44	Agree
2	Ignorance on the part of parents	3.20	Agree
3	Lack of protection by parents	3.32	Agree
4	Social and cultural norms of the society	3.60	Agree
5	Lack of information by the adolescents regarding marriage	2.92	Agree
6	Male dominance of the society	2.81	Agree
7	Fear of remaining unmarried	3.54	Agree
8	Desire for money by parents	3.18	Agree
9	Preference for younger bride by men	2.90	Agree
10	Prevention of premarital sex	3.33	Agree
11	To prevent infertility due to age	3.21	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.23	

Table 1 shows that respondents agreed to the item on the causes of early marriage. The mean scores of the respondents were all above the criterion mean of 2.50. Poverty has a mean score of 3.44, ignorance has a mean score of 3.20, lack of protection has a mean score of 3.32, social cultural norms has a mean score of 3.60, lack of information has a mean score of 2.92, sexual transmitted disease has a mean score of 2.81, fear of remaining unmarried has a mean score of 3.54, greed for money by parents has a mean score of 3.18, preference for younger bride mean score of 2.90, prevention of pre-marital sex mean score of 3.33 and infertility due to old age with mean score of 3.21.

- Domestic violence among husband and wife with varying opinion
- Personal belief that older girls does not marry after school
- Poverty
- Ancestral belief and taboos
- Family honour to keep family name against unwanted pregnancy
- Illiteracy/ ignorant about consequence of early marriage
- Religious values that girls must not defile herself
- Fear of rape by men
- Hunger due to poverty
- Fear of immorality
- Fear of defying customary practices
- Fear of rejection by men due to age

The FGD Findings reveal the following:

- Traditional belief/ culture practices

Challenges female adolescents could have as a result of early marriage

Table 2: Mean Responses on the challenges of the Female Adolescent Early Marriage

S/N	Challenges of early marriage	Mean (X)	Decision
1	Poor health challenges	3.11	Agree
2	Broken home/marriage instability	3.42	Agree
3	Complications in pregnancy	2.90	Agree
4	Domestic violence	3.31	Agree
5	Violation of right to education of the adolescent girl	3.33	Agree
6	Violation of right to self defense	3.31	Agree
7	Violation of right to basic amenities	3.12	Agree
8	Risks to infection HIV/AIDS due to ignorant	2.76	Agree
9	Increase to child mortality	3.34	Agree
10	Increase to hunger and poverty due to unemployment	3.36	Agree
11	Lack of self esteem	3.13	Agree
12	Ignorant to self development and protection	3.16	Agree
13	Depression /anxiety due to in capabilities	2.90	Agree
14	Grand Mean	3.17	

Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed to the items on the challenges adolescent girl child have as a result of

early marriage. The mean scores of the responses of the respondents were all above 2.50. Poor health challenges has a

mean score of 3.11, broken home has a mean score of 3.42, complications has a mean score of 2.90, domestic violence has a mean score of 3.31, Violation of right to education has a mean score of 3.33. Violation of right to self defense has a mean score 3.31, Violation of right to basic amenities has a mean score of 3.12, Risks to infection HIV/AIDS has a mean score 2.16, Increase to child mortality has a mean score 3.34, Increase to hunger and poverty has a mean score of 3.36, Lack of self esteem has a mean score of 3.13, and Ignorant to self development has a mean score of 3.16.

The FGD findings reveal the following challenges of female adolescent marriage in Isi-uzo LGA:

- health increased risks
- high maternal and child mortality rate
- domestic violence from mother from mother in-law
- complication during child birth
- STDs
- maximum work load
- poor life style
- sexual abuse from husband
- isolation from family and friends
- pregnancy -related death and birth complications
- obstructed labour and diabetes
- low birth weight

Ways for Preventing Early Marriage of Female Adolescents

Table 4: Mean Response on Strategies (for possible ways) for Preventing Early Marriage of Female Adolescents

S/N	Strategies for preventing early marriage of adolescent girl child include	Mean X	Decision
1	Free Education of the girl child	3.30	Agree
2	Inculcation of moral instruction in the curriculum.	3.20	Agree
3	Value orientation program for youths	2.72	Agree
4	Sensitization of both parents and girls on the consequences of early marriage	3.32	Agree
5	Access to information	3.11	Agree
6	Provision of free health care	3.13	Agree
7	Promotion of gender equality	3.40	Agree
8	Eradicating poverty	3.33	Agree
9	Provision of Skill acquisition centers	3.31	Agree
10	Sensitization programs on physical and mental abuse	3.12	Agree
11	Economic empowerment	2.88	Agree
12	Implementation of law against early marriage	3.53	Agree
13	Enforcement of reproductive right	3.24	Agree
14	Improving maternal health care	3.32	Agree
15	Inculcating sexual and reproductive health training in schools	3.42	Agree
16	Information, education and communication campaign programs	3.37	Agree
17	Mentoring and peer group training	3.31	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.24	

Table 3 shows that all the items are the ways required for curbing early marriage of adolescent girl child as is shown in the mean scores of the responses which were all above 2.50. Free education of the girl child with mean score of 3.30, inculcation of moral instruction in schools with mean score of 3.20, value orientation program with mean score of 2.72, sensitization of both parents and girl child on the consequences of early marriage 3.32, access to information with mean score of 3.11, Provision of free health care with mean score of 3.13, Promotion of gender equality with mean score of 3.40, Eradicating poverty with mean score of 3.33, Provision of Skill acquisition centre and Sensitization programs on physical mental abuse with mean scores of 3.12, Implementation of law against early marriage mean score of 3.53, Enforcement of reproductive right with mean score of 3.24, Improving maternal health care with mean score of 3.32, Inculcating sexual and reproductive health training in schools with mean score of 3.42, Information, education and communication (IEC) campaign programs with mean score of 3.37 and Mentoring and peer group training with mean score of 3.31.

The FGD findings reveal the following possible ways of preventing female adolescent marriage in Isi-uzo LGA:

1. Legislations to increase the minimum age of marriage, changing discrimination against girls and women.
2. Changing discriminatory gender norms and creating alternative

social, economic and civil opportunities for girls.

3. Addressing the root causes of child marriage such as cultural beliefs, poverty.
4. Improving access to quality primary and secondary education.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in table 1 revealed several factors that cause early marriage of female adolescents in Isi-Uzo local government area. The findings are in agreement with the study carried out by Jody (2020), who identified causes of early marriage to include ignorance on the part of parents and adolescent girls, poverty, illiteracy and the socio-economic status of parents. These findings further agreed with the findings of Walker (2015) who opined that girls marry early to remove economic burden and liability from parents. Parents who are poor would rather prefer that their female daughter marry so that the responsibility of training the girl is transferred to the man. Similarly, the bride price received would be used to solve family problem. Most early marriages occur in the poorer areas mainly rural areas that practice gender inequality. The immature individuals who get married are not always stable enough to cope with difficulties that come with early marriage. In agreement with this is Balser (2019) who noted that in most cases early marriages are not good for both sides of the relationship however the negative influence falls on the young girls who are married off at tender ages. From the very early years,

families force their children to do something contradicting their wishes and aim. The young bride is not given a choice and made to get into a relationship without love. Only tradition makes sense while the emotional state of the girl is unstable. This is equally in agreement with Jaya (2019) who stated the obvious by the respondents that socio-economic difficulties led parents suggest that their daughter marry early. The study recognized marriage as an instrument used to regularize religious moral, social and psychological ground. Denis (2018), agreed to it but however stated that early marriage is worse when it involves an adult man and an adolescent girl since the marriage will certainly deprive the girl of her right and subject her to abuse. In a study carried out by Jody (2020), the respondents opined that some girls who were ready to postpone their marriage till after completion of education were propelled to marry due to cultural family structure. These factors according to Ashley (2007) exerted the hidden factors that persuaded the girls to marry early. The family structures include family norms, roles, communication, the balance of power without the family and the integration aspects.

Table 2 revealed that early marriage of the adolescent has some consequences. UNICEF (2014) identifies such consequences as premature death, emotional trauma, retarded growth, prolonged labour, miscarriage, educational set back, and promiscuity. Early marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and

emotional impact. It equally cut off educational opportunities and chances of personal growth. Young girls who are married early begin childbearing soon after marriage leading to increased health risks and complications. This study is in agreement with Tremane (2006), who stated that early marriage of female adolescents could lead to complications during child birth. Despite large global base on consequences of early marriage, Ashley (2007) insist that most girls that get married early lack self empowerment self efficiency and good education that equips the girl with knowledge to have self defense and right. Marriage forces adolescent girls to accept new roles and responsibilities which are sometimes higher than their age could stand. UNIFPA and UNICEF (2017), has a different opinion that girl child early marriage could yield some benefits if the girl is guided into obtaining some skills that will make her to be self reliance.

Table 3 revealed ways of stopping early marriage of adolescents. In stating ways of curbing early marriage of female adolescent, Neuman (2010) suggested the major ways of curbing early marriage is through education and youth empowerment. Empower girls with information, skills, and support network, provision of economic support and incentives are basic. This is in agreement with Richard et al (2018) who reported that society without good educational and skill program for the youth is planning to fail. The fact that adolescents early marriage is rampant in some regions in Nigeria, Jody (2020)

reported that poor educational value is a major cause of early marriage and can only be discouraged through provision of free education that will endure the test of time because when adolescents are not encouraged to have value for education, they misplace their value and priority. .

The FGD findings collaborate the quantitative findings.

Conclusion

Early marriage is used as a surviving mechanism for families in Isi-Uzo L.G.A. This is backed up with harmful and cultural practices which is used as a tool to achieve their aim. However, recognizing the evil effect of early marriage suggestions were made for government to barn the act in every community in Nigeria.

Recommendations:

1. Moral instruction should be taught in schools to impact good values unto the adolescents.
2. Parents should be given adequate information on the consequences of early marriage of adolescent girl child and the need to care for the girl child.
3. Government should provide free education for pupils and students to prevent school dropout as a result of poverty.

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