

## Perceptions of Issues Relating to Early Marriage among Pastoral Women in Saki East Local Government Area, Oyo State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

The main objective of the study was to examine perceptions of issues relating to early marriage among pastoral women in Saki East Local Government Area (LGA) of Oyo State. Specifically, the study determined socioeconomic characteristics of the women, perception on women's early marriage, and effects of early marriage among pastoralist women. Population was made up of pastoralists women in the LGA. Interview schedule was used for data collection. Frequency, percentage, mean score and standard deviation were used to analyze data collected. Findings show that 48.3% of respondents are between 21 and 30 years, while 28.3% are below 20, reflecting the prevalence of early marriage. Educational attainment is low, with 51.7% having no formal education. Large household sizes (45.0% with 1–5 members) and reliance on subsistence farming limit economic stability. Early marriage is driven by the perception to raise many children ( $\bar{X} = 3.30$ ). Perceived effects of early marriage are linked to health risks, including increased exposure to HIV/AIDS ( $\bar{X} = 3.14$ ), Vesicovaginal Fistula ( $\bar{X} = 3.43$ ) and deprivation of child education and wellbeing ( $\bar{X} = 3.01$ ). Recommendations include improving access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for pastoralist women to reduce early marriage and its negative effects.

**Keywords:** Pastoralist, Women, Early, Marriage, Cultural, Rite, Poverty, Violence, Promiscuity.

### Introduction

Marriage is legally defined as a union of two partners in a personal relationship. Early marriage, also known as child marriage, is when one or both spouses are under 18 years old (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2023). This practice is considered a serious human rights violation that affects millions of children worldwide, particularly girls known as girl-child marriage (UNICEF, 2021). Globally, an estimated 650 million girls and women alive today married before their 18th birthday (Efevbera &

Bhabha, 2020). South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa regions accounted for 20 countries with the highest prevalence of girl child marriage. The highest rate of child marriage is in sub-Saharan Africa, with 37% of young women marrying before the age of eighteen (World Vision International, 2020). An estimated 44% of girls in Nigeria are married before their eighteenth birthday, suggesting one of the highest rates of girl-child marriage globally (Save the Children International, 2021; Efevbera & Bhabha, 2020).

Global records of consequences of early marriage are far-reaching and devastating. Early marriage particularly the girl-child marriage has been linked to negative outcomes like reduced formal education, health risks, and perpetuation of gender inequality (Isiugo-Abanihe *et al.*, 2022). Girl-child marriage leads to the exclusion of girls from their families, friends, communities, and significant others, with severe consequences for their physical and psychological well-being (Adeyemi *et al.*, 2023). The socio-cultural dynamics perpetuating early marriage are complex. Early marriage has also been linked to higher incidences of maternal mortality and infant death, as young brides are often unprepared for the health challenges of early pregnancies (Adekoya, A., & Sokunbi, 2021). Early marriage limits women's access to education, perpetuates poverty, and hinders their participation in economic activities, contributing to a cycle of dependency and vulnerability. Studies show that early marriage increases exposure to health risks, domestic violence, and lower socio-economic status (Suleiman & Musa, 2023; Olatunji & Adebisi, 2022). According to Adekanbi & Bello (2020), early marriage significantly curtails educational opportunities and reduces women's participation in income-generating activities. This finding is corroborated by Olatunji & Adebisi (2022), who emphasize that early marriage among pastoralists often leads to economic dependency, reinforcing cycles of poverty. Further research by Fatima & Usman (2021) points out that such marriages often increase young girls' vulnerability to domestic violence and long-term health complications, undermining their socio-economic potential.

Legal changes in Nigeria, such as the endorsement of Section 29(4)(b) of the 1999 Constitution, have drawn attention to child marriage. Under the Child Rights Act 2003, the minimum legal age of marriage is 18 years. However, Multi Indicator Cluster Survey conducted by UNICEF (2018) showed that Nigeria is home to over 23 million child brides indicating 2 in 5 young women were married in before the age of 18. The North West and North Eastern part of Nigeria have the highest prevalence of child brides at 68% and 57% respectively. Early marriage, particularly among pastoralist women that originate from the Northern part of Nigeria, remains a significant socio-economic challenge in Southern parts of Nigeria where many settled for pastoral purposes.

In pastoralist communities, livestock herding is their main means of livelihoods for men while women focus on processing livestock products. Early girl-child marriages is high in their communities due to religious reasons, cultural factors, economic considerations, avoidance of unwanted pregnancy taken as not socially accepted, and the assumption that the girl will give birth to many kids (Lowe *et al.*, 2021; Adeyemi *et al.*, 2023).

Similarly, the pastoralists that settled in Saki East Local Government Area (LGA) hold on to these traditional customs as their girls are often married off at a young age lesser than 18 (Adebayo & Abayomi, 2022). The practice of early marriage among pastoralist women, particularly in Saki East LGA, not only deprives young women of educational opportunities but also perpetuates cycles of poverty, limits their economic potential, and increases health risks associated with early pregnancies. Despite growing awareness of its negative consequences,

early marriage remains prevalent due to deeply rooted cultural norms and economic pressures. If rates of girl child marriage remain unchanged globally, about 12 million girls under age 18 will continue to marry each year (Efevbera & Bhabha, 2020) and also hinders the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of eradicating poverty, hunger, discrimination, and poor health to engender gender equality, inclusivity, and development.

Understanding the effects of early marriage within this specific context is essential for creating targeted interventions that improve the socio-economic status of these women. Recent literature emphasizes the urgent need for relevant empirical data to reform policy and community education program to mitigate the adverse consequences of early marriage and empower young women for a more equitable future in Nigeria (Fatima & Usman, 2021). It is thus necessary to address the gap in understanding the issues regarding the early marriage among the pastoralist women.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study was to investigate perceptions of issues relating to early marriage among pastoral women in Saki East Local Government Area (LGA), Oyo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined:

1. socioeconomic characteristics of pastoralist women in the study area
2. perceptions of pastoralist women on early marriage in the study area.
3. perceived effects of early marriage among pastoralist women.

### **Methodology**

**Design of the Study:** This study adopted a descriptive survey research design.

**Area of the Study:** The research was carried out in Saki East LGA Oyo State Nigeria. The LGA has five major communities. The major language spoken is Yoruba. Farming is the main occupation in the study area. The major occupation practiced by pastoral women is cheese making otherwise called *wara* in Yoruba. The pastoral males look after the cattle for grazing during the day and safe guide the cattle during the night.

**Population for the Study:** The population for the study comprised of all 205 pastoral married women in the five communities in the area of the study.

**Sample for the Study:** Only 120 pastoral women were purposively selected for the study. These were women who indicated that they were involved in early marriage. They also indicated willingness to participate in the study.

**Instrument for Data Collection:** The study used interview schedule to collect data. The interview schedule was developed based on the objectives of the study. it was validated by three experts in family living. The instrument was pilot-tested and reliability was established using Cronbach alpha. A coefficient of 0.72 was obtained. The instrument had a 5-point scale of strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, undecided = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1.

**Data Collection Method:** The instrument was administered to married pastoralist women with the help of research assistants due to their low level of education. One hundred pastoral married women were interviewed using the interview schedule, since almost all of them were illiterate and could neither read nor write. Three trained research assistants who were fluent in Yoruba language were involved in the data collection. All the 120 copies of interview schedule were retrieved.

**Data Analysis Techniques:** Frequency, percentage, mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) and standard deviation (SD) were used to analysed data. The total numerals assigned to 5 scale for issues regarding knowledge and effects of early marriage was 15. Based on the 5-point scale, mean score at 3.0 was considered as cut off point. Thus, variables scoring 3.0 and above mean scores ( $\bar{X} \geq 3.0$ ) were considered as high perceptions and high effects perceived.

## Results

**Socio-economic characteristics of respondents:** The age distribution shows that less than half (48.3%) of the respondents fall between the ages of 21 and 30, while 28.3% are below 20. The educational attainment data indicates that

above half (51.7%) of the respondents had no formal education with only a small percentage (8.3%) achieving tertiary education. The majority of respondents (45.0%) have household sizes between 1 and 5, with a significant proportion having larger families (up to 15 members). Above half (51.7%) of the respondents engage in trading, while 40 percent rely on livestock production. The data reveals that the most (67.3%) of respondents have between 1 and 10 years of farming experience. Self-labor is the dominant source of labor (75.0%), reflecting the reliance on family members for farming activities. The majority of respondents (85.0%) earn between ₦1 and ₦50,000 monthly, highlighting the low-income levels among pastoralist women.

**Table 1: Mean Response and Standard deviation on Perception of Pastoralist Women on Early Marriage in Saki LGA**

S/N	Perception of Pastoralist Women on Early Marriage	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
<b>Early marriage:</b>				
1	is a way of life.	1.70	1.29	NP
2	is preferred so as to get dowry from the grooms parent.	2.68	1.17	NP
3	is a cultural rite that must be performed quickly.	2.01	1.17	NP
4	protects girls from sexual assault.	2.52	1.19	NP
5	is supported because of economic purposes.	2.76	1.16	NP
6	enables parents to marry off their young daughter before the girls become an economic liability.	2.61	1.24	NP
7	enables girls to give birth to many kids.	3.30	1.27	P
8	reduces burden for the care of a daughter.	2.81	1.34	NP

$\bar{X}$  = Mean responses; SD = Standard deviation; NP= Not a perception; P = A perception.

Table 1 shows perception items of pastoral women on early marriage. Early marriage enables girls to raise many kids ( $\bar{X} = 3.30$ ) had the highest mean score as the only

perception of the respondents on regarding early marriage. This reflects the women preference for large family size among pastoral people.

**Table 2: Mean Response and Standard deviation on Perceived Effects of Early Marriage among Pastoralist Women in Saki LGA**

S/N	Perceived Effects of Early Marriage	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	Increased maternal and infant health risk	1.68	0.78	NPE
2.	Greater exposure to human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS).	3.14	0.78	NPE

Table 2 contd.

3.	Greater exposure to domestic and sexual violence.	2.54	0.84	NPE
4.	Deprivation of child education and wellbeing.	3.01	0.84	PE
5.	Poverty.	2.67	0.71	NPE
6.	High maternal mortality rates.	2.20	0.51	NPE
7.	Increase domestic violence against women and girls.	2.54	0.63	NPE
8.	It leads to vesicovaginal fistula (VVF).	3.43	0.76	PE
9.	It leads to divorce.	2.82	0.40	NPE

$\bar{X}$  = Mean responses; SD = Standard deviation; NPE = Not Perceived effect; PE = Perceived effect.

Table 2 shows that the leading perceived effect of early marriage is that early marriage leads to vesicovaginal fistula ( $\bar{X}$  = 3.43). This is an abnormal connection between the bladder (vesico) and the vagina, allowing urine to leak into the vagina mainly caused by childbirth injuries. Another perceived effect of early marriage indicated is deprivation of child education and wellbeing ( $\bar{X}$  = 3.01). This is a denial or limitation of access to educational opportunities, resulting in a lack of knowledge, skills, and social development. Yet another perceived effect is that, early marriage leads to greater exposure to human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) ( $\bar{X}$  = 3.14). The findings imply a growing concern that early marriage among girls may increase the risk vesicovaginal fistula, HIV/AIDS and be deprived of formal education and wellbeing opportunities.

### Discussion

Findings on age of the respondents, reflects the prevalence of early marriage among younger women in pastoral communities, consistent with Adedokun *et al.* (2012), who found that a large percentage of young mothers in northern Nigeria marry early, resulting in limited life opportunities. Also aligns with global trends where early marriage disproportionately affects younger

women, restricting their educational and economic potential (UNICEF, 2020). Regarding the educational attainment data, lack of education among pastoralist women exacerbates their vulnerability, as low educational levels limit their ability to make informed decisions about health, fertility, and economic activities. This is substantiated by Abdulkadir *et al.* (2021) that lack of education perpetuates a cycle of poverty and dependency, especially in northern Nigeria where traditional norms still encourage early marriage and limit girls' access to schooling. Large household sizes found in this study are common in pastoralist communities due to the value placed on having multiple children for labor and economic stability. However, research by Babatunde & Akeem (2022) suggests that larger household sizes often lead to increased economic strain, especially among households with low incomes, as resources such as food, education, and healthcare become stretched. The highlights of dual livelihood strategies of pastoralist women in this study, balancing commerce with traditional roles in livestock management support report by Fadairo *et al.* (2022) who highlight that the economic role of women in pastoralist communities is evolving, with trading and entrepreneurship offering new avenues for income generation, although constraints like early marriage continue to restrict their full

participation in the economy. Limited experience reflects how early marriage and household responsibilities reduce women's ability to accumulate long-term farming knowledge. In contrast, male pastoralists often have extensive experience due to their uninterrupted involvement in livestock and crop farming (Amusan & Olayinka, 2021). This gender gap in agricultural experience further limits women's contributions to household food security and economic well-being. Self-labor is the dominant source of labor among respondents, reflecting the reliance on family members for farming activities. The dominance of self-labor among respondents is consistent with the findings of Dogo *et al.* (2020), who noted that pastoralist households in northern Nigeria tend to use family labor for subsistence farming. This can limit productivity, as the absence of hired labor constrains the scale of farming operations and output, especially among households with limited male labor due to migration or conflicts. The low-income levels among pastoralist women could restrict their ability to access healthcare, education, and better livelihoods. This is supported by Adeola & Samuel (2022), who found that early marriage often exacerbates poverty, as women are unable to contribute meaningfully to household income due to restricted educational and employment opportunities.

The results on the knowledge of pastoralists women on early marriage is in consistent Suleiman & Musa (2023) that early marriage is often linked to the belief that starting a family early ensures more children, which is seen as a source of labor and security in pastoralist settings. Closely followed by economic burden of caring for daughters as another significant driver of early marriage ( $\bar{X} = 2.8$ ). Olatunji

and Adebisi (2022) explain that in rural economies, marrying off young girls is perceived as a means of reducing financial responsibility for parents, especially in resource-constrained households. Furthermore, economic motivations (2.3) are frequently cited in early marriage practices, where families seek financial relief through dowry payments or other forms of economic support. According to Fatima & Usman (2021), this practice is often a survival strategy in impoverished rural communities where early marriage helps alleviate financial pressure.

Findings on the effects of early marriage the finding implies a growing concern that early pregnancies and lack of proper healthcare may increase the risk of reproductive cancers, such as cervical cancer, among young girls. The finding is substantiated by Olayinka & Ahmed (2023) that early marriage exposes women to greater health risks due to inadequate access to maternal care. This was closely followed by greater exposure to HIV/AIDs. Early marriage often leads to an increased risk of HIV/AIDS, particularly in rural areas where access to healthcare and sexual education is limited. Musa & Abiola (2022) found that young brides in pastoralist communities are particularly vulnerable due to limited awareness and the lack of control over their reproductive health. In addition, divorce is another notable consequence of early marriage, especially when young girls are unprepared for the demands of marital life.

### **Conclusion**

The study highlights the significant perception issues regarding early marriage among pastoralist women in Saki East LGA. Based on finding, perception that early marriage enables girls to give birth to many kids was the

main cause of early marriage among pastoralist women that leads to larger family size. Early marriage has caused the victim health risks including greater exposure to HIV/AIDS, the risk of Vesicovaginal Fistula during childbirth, as well as deprivation of child education and wellbeing.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following were suggested

1. Efforts should be made to enhance access to formal education for girls who particularly married as child in pastoral communities.
2. Educational programs focusing on the negative effects of early marriage, particularly health risks, should be implemented and provide alternative livelihood opportunities for pastoralist families, reducing the economic motivation for early marriage.
3. There is need for advocacy re-orientation programme in pastoral communities that emphasis the capability of girls at 18 years and above to still bear many children.

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