

Konkomba Values That Support Girl-Child Betrothal

Dominic Alimbey Dery (Phd)¹, Adam Bawa Yussif (Phd)², Alexander Bedekuru Nmaninyin³

^{1,2}*Department of Languages and Liberal Studies, Tamale Technical University, Ghana*

³*Mccoy College of Education, Ghana*

Abstract: - The phenomenon of betrothal of the Konkomba girl-child and the resultant early marriage is a very serious cultural issue that the people of Saboba have to grapple with. For instance, records from the Saboba District Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) indicate that up to one hundred cases of girl-child betrothal were recorded between the years 2002 and 2005, and of this number, more than seventy percent are cases from Nalogni. These numbers exclude unreported cases. The case study approach was used for investigating the research problem. Purposive sampling was first used to identify the respondents, after which random sampling approach was used to select respondents for interviews to be administered. The sample size included seventy respondents (70), out of a total population of four hundred and thirty people, representing 16.2% of the entire population. Of the seventy (70) respondents, the breakdown was as follows; girls betrothed (15), girls not betrothed (15), mothers of girls betrothed (10), fathers of betrothed (10), mothers of girls not betrothed (6), fathers of girls not betrothed (6) and key persons (8). The study revealed the following; that the adherence to a number of Konkomba values accounted for the betrothal of the Konkomba girl-child. These included the following; maintenance of family ties, lineage, ensuring girls marry men of good character, solidification of marriage alliances, and the desire to choose the right partners for these girls.

Key Words: Values, Girl-Child and Betrothal

I. INTRODUCTION

In June 1999, the Institute of the African Child realizing the vulnerability of the African child especially the girl-child who is exposed to a lot of dangers as a result of many questionable customs decided to hold an inaugural conference of its community members to deliberate on the state of the African child. Among the outcomes of these deliberations and activities, was the realization that the African girl-child was more vulnerable and encountered peculiar challenges in the exercise of her rights. Various constraints ranging from cultural practices in the form of female circumcision, nutrition taboos, early betrothal and marriage, low enrollment in school as a result of her engagement in domestic labour and care, trafficking and sexual exploitation and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, continue to retard the progress of the African-child. The need to make the plight of the African girl-child the focus of researchers became even more necessary than ever (Manoja 1997).

Child marriage though widespread globally, is highest in West Africa. According to Mathur, Greene and Malhotra. (2003), there are more than fifty one million adolescent girls aged 15-19 who are married and bearing the burden of domestic

responsibility and the risks associated with sexual activity, including pregnancy. In West Africa approximately 30% or more of girls aged 15-19 are already married. Gender roles and poverty were some of the reasons for girl-child betrothal.

Betrothal and early marriages have resulted in less education and fewer schooling opportunities for these girl-children. Education is desirable because it leads to HCF thereby making the individual more marketable in terms of seeking job opportunities; being more health conscious and making use of all other opportunities that come along with education. Mensch (2003) states that, the percentage of women married by age 18 decreases with increasing years of schooling (Mensch 2003). In the case of the Konkomba girl-child, their numbers begin to dwindle in school as they move higher up the educational ladder. This is because they are withdrawn at the junior secondary school level to marry to men they have been betrothed to, (G.E.S. 2007). Child betrothal therefore affects the HCF of the Konkomba girl-child since the value that would have been placed on her through education is denied her by the practice of child betrothal. Thus girl-child betrothal and HCF are developmental issues.

Some earlier researchers such as Jejeebhoy (1995); Wolf, Blanc, and Gage (2000) have made claims to the effect that betrothal of the girl-child consistently has led to less education and fewer schooling opportunities than unmarried girls, less mobility than their unmarried counterparts and other young married women, less household and economic power than older unmarried girls, less exposure to modern media than unmarried girls, limited social networks and greater risk of gender based violence than females who marry later.

Also, the 2000 Population and Housing census reveals that there is a decline in girl-child enrollment as compared to that of the boy-child Ghana Statistical Service (2002). This decline, starts from the Junior Secondary (J.S.S.) level and increases up to the Post-Secondary level. Despite several interventions by NGOs, the several negative media publicity regarding girl-child betrothal, the practice is ongoing as indicated from the CHRAJ annual report for the Saboba district for 2005. This research is aimed at ascertaining why this practice is so prevalent in the area.

Thus, even though betrothal impedes the human capital development of the girl-child in the study area, the issue has not been thoroughly investigated. Except for the work of Tait(1961), there is very little to find in the literature on girl-child betrothal among the Konkomba of Nalogni in the Saboba District.

In the light of these discussions, betrothal as a cultural practice has some adverse effects on the HCF of the girl-child thus it becomes a development issue.

II. BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In societies in which premarital sexual relations are condoned or in which consensual union is common, betrothal may be unimportant. In some societies, however, betrothal is actually part of the marriage process, and a change of intention by one of the partners after he or she is betrothed is a serious matter, subject in some instances to a fine, (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica 2003).

Marriage has historically been so frequently a matter of alliance between kinship groups that mate selection has been more often than not removed from the hands of the participants and negotiated by important or assigned representatives of each kinship group. In many, but by no means all, such cases, betrothal has been marked by various forms and degrees of mutual visits and gifts exchanged between two families.

Child betrothal refers to the promise or engagement between a man and a newly born baby girl. In such circumstances, the approach to the parents of the baby is made as soon as the sex of the infant is known (Tait 1961).

According to Erinosh (2000), patriarchy on which Africa's social structure is anchored has become the veritable medium for discriminatory and violent practices against women and girl-children. Among the practices/rites that infringe on the rights and which undermine the social, physical and emotional well-being of women/girl-children and which are firmly embedded in the social structure are female genital mutilation (FGM), widowhood rites, and early marriage (betrothal).

Prevailing gender roles can limit the full impact of educational or employment opportunities for girls. For example, research in Bangladesh shows that parents pull daughters out of school because of expectations that those husbands should be better educated than their wives (Arends-Kuening 2000).

In Nepal, studies show that although young people and their parents aspire to having their daughters experience education, careers, and delayed marriages and child bearing, they find it difficult to go against social custom which stigmatizes girls who break existing norms by engaging in activities that delay marriage and child bearing (Mathur, Malhotra and Mehta 2001). The situation explained here is the same as prevails in Nalogni.

Poverty is another reason that accounts for the practice of girl-child betrothal. In families that are poor, a daughter may be considered an "economic burden" to be "disposed" off through betrothal. Similarly, one cannot overlook the economic gains that will be made through early betrothals of a daughter in a poor family. For example, countries such as India, Ethiopia, and Malaysia, families cite economic reasons

for giving out their girl-children in betrothal. In both Malaysia and India, poverty in general, but especially among those in the agricultural sector is an important determinant of early marriage (Pandey, 1984; Anderson, Hill and Butler 1987), (as cited in, Mathur, Greene and Malhotra 2003).

It is also a belief among the Konkomba that betrothal facilitates the maintenance of family ties. The reason being, that betrothals are normally marked by various forms of mutual visits and gifts are exchanged between the two families. This often leads to maintenance and solidification of family ties. It is also believed that in extreme cases when two potentially hostile groups are concerned, girl-child betrothal has been adopted to ensure continuing social, economic, or political harmony.

The phenomenon of betrothal of girl-children and the resultant early marriages thereof are common among countries and societies that are less developed and poorer and as such have lower levels of motivation for investing in alternative options for young girls. Betrothal as a cultural practice prevails among the Dagaaba, and Lobi in the Upper West Region, and among the Binmobas in the Bunkpurugu/Yunyoo District, and the Bassari's of the Zabzugu/Tatale District of the Northern Region. Internationally, it is also practiced in Mali, Bangladesh, Uganda, Nicaragua, Cameroon and India just to name a few (Froehlich, Jean-Claude, Pierre and Robert 1963).

Girl-child betrothal and consequently early marriages are therefore common in poorer countries and societies than is the case in richer and more developed settings because in the latter settings investments in the lives of girls are common place. A number of studies have shown that aggregate levels of education and literacy, as well as community development, are positively associated with age at marriage, (Prakasam and Upadhyah 1985, Ganiger 1992 and Tripathy, Rao, and Pradhan 1992). It is worth pointing out that girl-child betrothal and child marriage are not the same. Child betrothal is a form of early marriage. There are therefore some cases of girl-children who are married but not betrothed.

Betrothal and HCF are in serious conflict because of the negative effects the former has on the latter. Girl-children are sometimes forcefully withdrawn from school in response to the demands of marriage by their prospective husbands. This normally occurs at a time that some of these girls are in the junior secondary schools. As a result of the demand for early marriages by prospective husbands, the education of these young girls is not only cut short, they are left with very little or no employable skills thereby leaving them with no choice but to become fully dependent on their husbands. They would also have no job options but to engage in farming and housekeeping activities. There is no gainsaying that when these girls marry early, the chances are that their Human Capital Formation (HCF) is cut short. This HCF refers to the investment in the girl-child's education (Schultz 1963).

Furthermore, considering the fact that these girl-children are betrothed away in marriages, at very tender ages, the lack of

necessary skills, experience and knowledge to fend for themselves could end them up with less household and economic power than their unmarried counterparts who marry later.

Thus the issue of betrothal and HCF are much interconnected since the practice of the former goes to negatively affect the latter. It is widely believed that mothers who as a result of betrothal and early marriages had little or no education at all are also bound to send their girl-children into such betrothals and early marriages, leading to a cycle of the same events. These above mentioned reasons make the issue of girl-child betrothal a development issue.

A number of stakeholders in the Saboba District for example have come with some interventions aimed at increasing girl-child enrolment in schools and possibly a reduction in the incidence of girl-child betrothal. Since poverty has been mentioned as one of the reasons Konkomba betroth their girl-children, some non-governmental organizations like Action Aid Ghana (AAG), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), World Vision Ghana (WVG) and UNICEF have come out with interventions targeted at the Konkomba girl-child. AAG, identifies poor but brilliant girls and sponsors them to the tertiary level. CRS on its part after a base line survey realized that most children in the rural areas do not eat before coming to school as a result of the fact that their parents cannot afford to feed them. Thus they introduced school feeding for children of these deprived and rural communities. It is worth mentioning that on some occasions food is distributed for children to send to their houses. This practice has worked since parents send children to school so that they can bring food back home. WVG and UNICEF have presented bicycles and other educational materials to girls just to serve as an incentive for them to remain in school. Despite all these interventions the issue of girl-child betrothal still persists among the Konkomba of Nalogni. Parents are still prepared to withdraw their girls from school and give them to their betrothed men to marry.

The practice of girl-child betrothal among the Konkomba of Saboba has attracted negative media publicity for some time now. Records from the Saboba District Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) indicate that up to one hundred cases of girl-child betrothal were recorded between the years 2002 and 2005, and of this number, more than seventy percent are cases from Nalogni. These numbers exclude unreported cases.

Betrothal is explained as the promise between a man and a woman that they will be married. In some societies in which premarital sexual relations are condoned or in which consensual union is common, betrothal may be unimportant. In some societies, however, betrothal is actually part of the marriage process, and any reneging on the initial promise by one of the partners after he or she is betrothed is a serious matter, punishable by penalty (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2003).

Marriage has historically been so frequently a matter of alliance between kinship groups. It has been more often than not removed from the hands of participants and negotiated by important or assigned representatives of each kinship group. In many, but by no means all, such cases, betrothal which has preceded marriages has been marked by various forms and degrees of mutual visits and gifts exchanged between the two families. Sometimes, especially when two potentially hostile groups are concerned, child betrothal may be accepted to ensure continuing social, economic, or political harmony (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2003).

Causes of early marriage/betrothal

As has been mentioned earlier on, gender roles can limit the full impact of educational or employment opportunities for girls. For example, research in Bangladesh shows that parents pull daughters out of school because of expectations that husbands should be better educated than wives (Arends-Kuenning, et al. 2000). The same also applies to the Konkomba girl-child. Several other reasons account for betrothal of the girl-child. These are; social values, marriage alliances, fear of premarital pregnancy and poverty, just to mention a few.

One motivation which in the past led to betrothal, for that matter was the value that was placed on virginity and fears about pre-marital sexual activity. In many cultures around the world, a woman's sexuality is not her own to control, but the property of her father, husband, family or ethnic group.

According to Mathur et al. (2003), because a woman's sexuality is not her own, the decision to marry and to initiate sexual activity is often not a young woman's but that of family members, whose honour and shame are defined by whether or not she is a virgin before she marries. They go on to say that value systems can also influence the practice of betrothal of the girl-child. For instance, once a girl has menstruated, fears of potential pre-marital sexual activity and pregnancy become the major concern among family members who are accountable for 'protecting' her sexuality. Thus, the timing of a girl's menstruation is associated with the first steps towards marriage in many settings.

Research also points to the fact that young married girls understanding of their bodies and sexuality is often severely limited by the importance placed on virginity in their cultures (Dowsett 1998). It is also worth mentioning that negative gossips about girls who have lost their virginity have not helped the incidence of betrothal.

Furthermore, marriage alliances and transactions have also led to betrothal. Chandrasekhar (1996) and Hussain (2001) have stated that pressure to use marriage to reinforce family, caste, and tribal linkages which in turn create political, economic and social alliances – tends to lower the age at marriage in a variety of settings. For example, in Yemen the growth in marriage among selective tribes has contributed to a lower age at marriage for women (Jurdi and Saxena 2003).

There is another argument that in most cultures around the world for instance, economic transaction form an integral part of the marriage process with an underlying assumption that these cost become lower when marriage occurs at an early age. In Bangladesh, for example, dowry increases in tandem with age at marriage, placing pressure on parents to betroth their daughter. This may be especially true if the family or the bride suffers from other disadvantages in the marriage market (such as the lower social status of her family or darker skin tone (Huq and Amin 2001).

Like dowry, bride wealth can foster betrothal because it is when a girl is young that her productive labour and reproductive capacities are seen as “best buys” in exchange for valued cattle or other goods (Nasimiyu, 1997). It is also suggested that in some cultures, dowry is an indication of a wife’s obligation to bear children and to fulfill other duties. This practice according to (Bawah, 1999) reinforces their subordinate position in relation to husbands. In ethnic groupings where men are expected to pay very high bride prices, the tendency is for such men to think that they have bought these women hence they subject them to subordinate positions and other forms of inhuman treatment. Examples are among the Dagaaba of the Upper West Region where men pay several cattle and money as bride prices of their wives. Today, most Dagaaba chiefs are calling for a review of these bride prices.

Last but not the least is the role of poverty in the betrothal of the girl child. Poverty is defined in several ways, the social definition and the dollar a day definition (Moore 2007). Some people define poverty as a lack of essential items such as food, clothing, water, and shelter-needed for proper living. At the United Nations’ (UN) World Summit on Social Development, the ‘Copenhagen Declaration’ described poverty as “--- a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including, food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information” (Saddiqur 2003).

When people are unable to eat, go to school, or have access to health care, then they can be considered to be in poverty, regardless of their income.

The most commonly used definition of global poverty is the absolute poverty line set by the World Bank. Poverty is set at an income of \$2 a day or less (World Bank 1995). In families that are poor, the upbringing of a daughter may be considered as an “economic burden” hence the desire to “dispose of” her through betrothal. Similarly, one cannot also overlook the economic gains that will be made through early betrothal of a daughter in a poor family. For example, in countries such as India, Ethiopia and Malaysia, families cite economic reasons for giving out girl-children for betrothal. In both Malaysia and Indian, poverty in general, but especially among those in the agricultural sector is an important determinant of betrothal (Pandey, 1984; Anderson, Hill and Butler 1987).

The phenomenon of betrothal of the girl-child is common among countries and societies that are less developed and poorer and as such have a lower level of motivation for investing in alternative options for young girls. Betrothal is therefore more common in poorer countries and societies than it is in the richer and more developed settings because in the latter settings investments in the lives of girls are common place (Prakasam, and Upadhyah, 1985; Ganiger, 1992; Tripathy, Rao, and Pradhan 1992).

Studies by Prakasam and Upadhyah (1985) show that aggregate levels of education and literacy, as well as community development are positively associated with age at marriage. The research by Prakasam and Upadhyah (1985) suggests that this is because of greater social acceptability of unmarried girls and young women, as well as young girls’ own aspirations for other experiences and ambitions in life before entering marriage.

Effects of the betrothal on the girl-child

This section looks at the effects of girl-child betrothal. The outcome of girl-child betrothal are many, however notable among some of these outcomes are; marriage and educational/schooling opportunities, married girls and mobility and marriage, age birth and health of mother.

Marriage and education/schooling opportunities

Education is a right as enshrined in the Children’s Act (1998), Act 560. Thus, the Ghanaian child should not be denied the right to education. As a right Education is desirable because it makes a person more marketable in terms of seeking job opportunities; being more health conscious and making use of all other opportunities that come along with education. Education expands knowledge and provides tools to function in a modern world. As an independent variable, it is consistently and positively related to women’s reproductive health, sexual negotiating ability, and infant mortality and autonomy outcomes Jejeebhoy 1995; Wolf, Blanc, and Gage (2000).

The percentage of women married by age 18 decreases with increasing years of schooling (Mensch 2003). For instance, Mensch (2003) finds that among women aged 20-24 in South and Southeast Asia, the proportion married by age 18 is 17 percent among those with eight or more years of schooling and 56 percent among those with 0-3 years of schooling. Similarly, in West and Central Africa the proportion is 14 percent among women with eight or more years of schooling and 70 percent among those with 0-3 years of schooling. In South America the corresponding figures are 10 percent and 41 percent (Mensch 2003).

These differences exist in Ghana as well. In the Northern Region, the following statistics may help situate the enormity of the effect of early betrothal on the girl-child. At the basic or primary level, the enrollment of girls is higher than that of boys. This trend begins to narrow down until at the secondary level when fewer girls enroll as against more boys. The

following data gives a better picture of the boy/girl enrollment from the primary school to the secondary school.

Of the population that ever attended school, there are big differences between men and women. According to the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 4) it is stated that in the year 2000 44.1% of women as against 21.1% of men have no formal education. It is therefore not surprising that more men are employed in the formal sector where formal education is one of the main requirements.

Additionally, the GLSS 4, further states that factors such as poverty, early marriage and teenage pregnancy prevent females from continuing their education to the tertiary level. Because majority of women do not have higher education or marketable skills, they are unable to obtain good jobs in the formal sector.

Therefore we find the situation where majority of women in employment are in the informal sector, or even when employed in the formal sector, they are in lowly paid jobs the, GLSS 4. They do not earn enough in these jobs to allow them to be economically independent and therefore they find themselves most of the time in a situation of economic dependency on the man. This dependency reinforces their low status in the society and therefore makes them susceptible to control by the men, violence and other forms of maltreatment and discrimination.

III. METHODOLOGY

The case study approach was used for investigating the research problem. A case study is defined as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 1994). The study design was particularly selected because it offers a greater opportunity to explain the links between betrothal and human capital formation of the Konkomba girl-child since she is the recipient of this cultural practice. This case study approach therefore gave the Konkomba girl-children betrothed, the opportunity to relate their real-life experiences. These experiences could be compared with others elsewhere that have been investigated and documented. This is consistent with Yin's (1994) assertion that case studies enable the researcher to deal with a full variety of evidence-documents, artifacts, interviews and observations. The target population of this study comprised some girl-children who had been betrothed, parents of these betrothed girl-children, key persons (chiefs and opinion leaders), and a control group made up of unmarried girl-children who had not been betrothed and their parents. Purposive sampling was first used to identify the respondents, after which random sampling approach was used to select respondents for interviews to be administered.

The sample size included seventy respondents (70), out of a total population of four hundred and thirty people, representing 16.2% of the entire population. Of the seventy (70) respondents, the breakdown was as follows; girls

betrothed (15), girls not betrothed (15), mothers of girls betrothed (10), fathers of betrothed (10), mothers of girls not betrothed (6), fathers of girls not betrothed (6) and key persons (8). The issue of betrothal it turned out was so pronounced that it was sometimes difficult to get an equal number people who were not betrothed and those betrothed, thus only six (6) of mothers not betrothed and the same six (6) of fathers not betrothed could be interviewed for the purpose of this study. This difficulty in itself became a limitation to the study since it was difficult to get the same numbers as mothers and fathers of betrothed girls for effective comparison.

The study area Nalogni was purposely chosen due to the high incidence of girl-child betrothal there. These various categories of people were selected in order to capture the views of all those related to the customary practice of girl-child betrothal.

The inclusion of parents whose girl-children had not been betrothed was used to enable a comparison to be made. In all the categories, a multi-stage sampling method was used. A local informant helped in the identification of parents of girl-children betrothed, girls betrothed, parents of girl-children not betrothed, girls not betrothed and key persons. The houses of these people were coded and randomly selected for interviews.

Different categories of the respondents were interviewed using three different sets of open ended interview schedules, one for girls' betrothed and girls not betrothed, key persons and their parents, respectively. The schedule for all three groups solicited information on their backgrounds, Konkomba values that support girl-child betrothal, description of HCF facilities available in Nalogni, accessibility of girl-children to these HCF facilities available and an examination of the extent to which these Konkomba values affect the HCF of the girl-child.

The open ended nature of questions asked allowed for respondents to talk freely, thus, much information was made available. The study basically used interviews on three areas. First was that which focused on the social actors of the betrothal system (girls betrothed/girl not betrothed), next was key persons (custodians of traditional value systems) and finally the control group (parents/girl-children not betrothed).

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IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Values that support girl-child betrothal

The reason, for which members of a community behave in a certain way, goes to emphasize the values the group places on that practice. This underscores their value systems. Communal values are those values that express appreciation for the worth and importance the community attaches to various issues and activities. Those values underpin and guide the type of social relations, attitudes and behaviour that ought to exist between individuals who live together in a community, showing a social life and having a common sense of common good. Examples of such communal values are sharing, mutual aid, caring for others, interdependence, solidarity, reciprocal obligation and social harmony, Gyekye (2002).

For instance a value such as social harmony could influence the Konkomba to the extent that to preserve social harmony

between a suitor’s family and parents of the girl-child, the latter would not hesitate to betroth their daughters to the suitor. Thus, this value affects the HCF of the Konkomba girl-child. Likewise values such as mutual aid, sharing, caring for others, interdependence and reciprocal obligation would compel a parent of a girl-child to betroth her daughter when approached by a suitor than keep the girl-child in school. These values in as far as they deprive the girl-child of her right to education are a hindrance to her HCF.

The majority of the respondents were of the opinion that maintenance of family ties was the value that accounted for girl-child betrothal. For instance, among mothers of girls betrothed, out of a total number of ten, about 80 percent representing eight mothers thought the maintenance of family ties accounted for the practice, whilst out of a total of ten fathers of girls betrothed, 60 percent representing six were of the view that family ties was the reason behind girl-child betrothal.

On the part of mothers of girls not betrothed, the pattern was no different. About 75 percent representing three of the four mothers attributed the cause to the maintenance of family ties, whilst 83 percent representing five out of six fathers of the same category of girls put the blame on family ties.

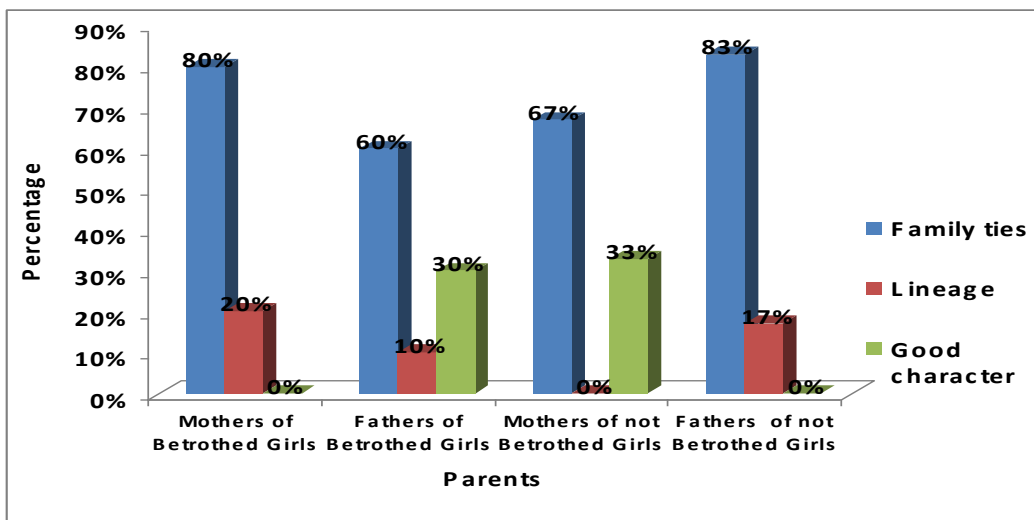


Figure 1: Parents opinions of values that support child betrothal

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

About 80 percent of mothers of girls betrothed said maintenance of family ties were the cause of girl-child betrothal, whilst 60 percent of fathers of girls betrothed attributed the cause to be the desire to maintenance of family ties. On the part of the mothers of girls not betrothed, none believed it was to maintain the lineage whilst four representing 67 percent thought betrothal was practiced to maintain family ties and the remaining two mothers, representing 33 percent thought betrothal was practiced

because of the desire to maintain good character. Regarding the fathers of girls not betrothed, 17 percent representing one of the fathers thought it was to maintain the family lineage, with the remaining five, representing 83 percent thought the practice of betrothal was to maintain family ties (Figure 1).

The issue of good character as mentioned by some of these respondents, when probed further was that because parents did not trust the good judgment of daughters to make the

choice of husbands who would meet their expectations, they made sure they influenced these choices by betrothing girls to people they thought met their standards. This attitude fell in line with, Gyekye (2002) explanation of values in terms of ensuring social harmony. To conclude, from the information on (Figure 1), the main value that was believed to support girl-child betrothal was the maintenance of family ties.

Table 1: Key persons opinions of values that support child betrothal

Values	Frequency	Percent
Family ties	6	75
Good character	1	12.5
Lineage	1	12.5
Total	8	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

The opinion of key persons in Nalogni was not very different from that of the parents gathered (Table 1). About 75 percent or six out of eight key persons were of the opinion that the maintenance of family ties was the cause of child betrothal, whilst 13 percent representing one said it was the maintenance of lineage that caused betrothal of the girl-child, and the remaining one representing 13 percent put it on the desire of parents to ensure their girls marry men of good character.

In conclusion, betrothal of the Konkomba girl-child can be said to be because of the desire to maintain family ties between the families of the man and girl. Different shades of

opinions can be gathered from the responses above. Whereas majority of the respondents made up of; girls betrothed, their parents, girls not betrothed and their parents thought the maintenance of family ties accounted for the practice of girl-child betrothal among the Konkomba, in the case of key persons, there was a split decision between good character and lineage. Thus, it can be said that one of the underlying reasons for girl-child betrothal among the Konkomba of Nalogni is because of the belief that the practice maintains family ties. Thus, respondents felt that the maintenance of family ties and good character were contributory factors to girl-child betrothal.

These values that have accounted for the high incidence of child-betrothal among the Konkomba of Nalogni have affected the HCF of the girl-child. This is because any time a girl is withdrawn from school to marry; her HCF has been cut short.

Qualities of an ideal Konkomba woman

An ideal Konkomba woman would be one imbued with certain qualities that make her outstanding among her colleagues. The ideal woman would possess those values that are sought after and much cherished in Nalogni. One important point is to what extent the qualities that the people of Nalogni cherish as qualities an ideal woman would encourage parents to invest in the HCF of their girl-children as against giving them out into marriages.

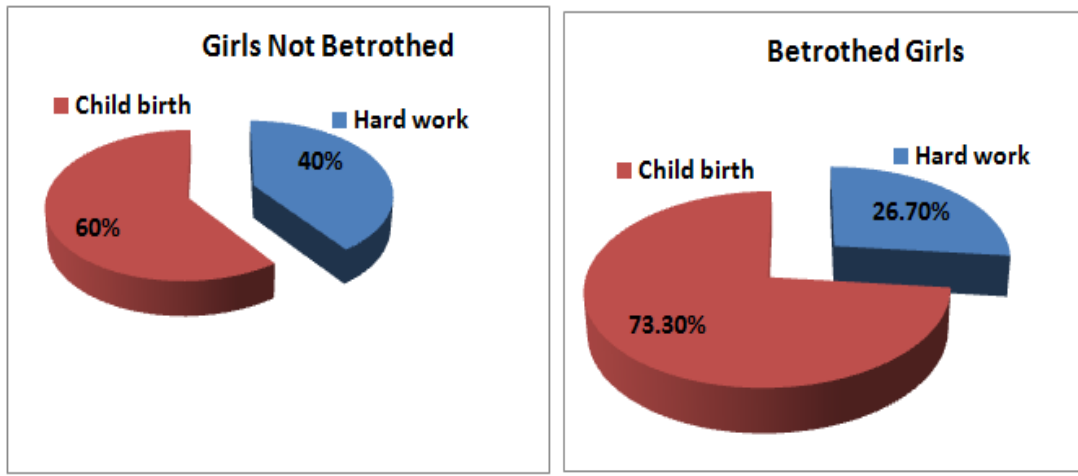


Figure 2: Girls perception of the qualities of ideal Konkomba woman

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

About 27 percent or four out of the fifteen girls betrothed were of the opinion that hard work was the quality of the ideal Konkomba woman, whilst 73 percent representing the remaining eleven said a woman ability to bear children was the quality of the ideal Konkomba woman (Figure 2). In the case of girls not betrothed, whereas 40 percent or six out of fifteen thought hard work was the quality of the ideal Konkomba woman, the remaining 60 percent representing

nine said child birth was the quality of the ideal Konkomba woman. In conclusion, both categories of girls accepted that a Konkomba woman's ability to bear children made her the ideal woman (Figure 2).

Thus, of the thirty respondents, 33 percent or ten respondents were of the opinion that hard work was the most cherished quality in an ideal Konkomba woman whilst 67 percent

representing twenty respondents said it was the ability to give birth that was the most cherished quality. It can be said that childbirth and hard work are the qualities of an ideal Konkomba woman.

In the light of the foregoing information, it is worth stating that the values of hard work and child birth mentioned as the

accepted qualities of an ideal Konkomba woman are unfortunately values that do not encourage parents to invest in the HCF of the girl-child thus accounting for their poor enrolment in school.

Table 2: Parents' perception of the ideal Konkomba woman

Perception	Parents of girls betrothed				Parents of girls not betrothed			
	Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers	
Qualities	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Hard work	7	70	4	40	3	50	2	33
Child birth	3	30	6	60	3	50	4	67
Total	10	100	10	100	6	100	6	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

Seventy percent or seven out of the ten mothers of betrothed girls (Table 2) said hard work was the quality of the ideal Konkomba woman, whilst the remaining 30 percent representing three said it the quality of being able to give birth was the quality of an ideal Konkomba woman. On the part of the fathers of these betrothed girls, whereas 40 percent or four out of the ten thought hard work was the quality of the ideal woman, the remaining 60 percent representing six said a woman's ability to bear children was the quality that made her

an ideal woman. In the case of girls not betrothed, about 50 percent or three out of six mothers said the quality of hard work was the quality of an ideal Konkomba woman, whilst the remaining 50 percent or three said the child birth was the quality of the ideal Konkomba woman. In the case of the fathers, 33 percent or two out of the six felt it was hard work that made a woman the ideal woman, whilst the rest 67 percent or the four chose child birth.

Table 3: Key persons' perceptions on the qualities of the ideal Konkomba woman

Qualities	Females	Percent	Males	Percent
Hard work	2	50	1	25
Child birth	2	50	3	75
Total	4	100	4	100

Source: Field Work, 2018

Table 3, above shows that, about 50 percent or two out of four female key persons were of the opinion that hard work was the quality of the ideal Konkomba woman; whilst the rest of the 50 percent representing three said it was child bearing. On the part of the male key persons, 25 percent or one said it was hard work, and the remaining 75 percent or three felt that a woman's ability to bear children was the quality of the ideal Konkomba woman.

In the light of the above statistics, it can be concluded that Konkomba men in Nalogni are generally fixated on the issue of child birth in marriages as can be seen from (Table 3) above. The outcome is not a surprise because in Ghana, among the Konkomba, children seem to be the *raison d'être* of most marriages. There is so much value placed on child birth to the extent that a marriage that fails to produce children becomes a shaky one. Children are considered a sign of wealth, status, normality, femininity, masculinity and good health (Ankomah 2005).

V. CONCLUSION

The practice of early marriage goes beyond the decision of the girl-child this is because in most cases she is not consulted before being sent into such lifelong relationships. The consequences of these early marriages reach beyond the lives of these young married girls to the next generations because the likelihood of a teenage mother giving birth to infants with poor health is very high. The study revealed the following; that the adherence to a number of Konkomba values accounted for the betrothal of the Konkomba girl-child. These included the following; maintenance of family ties, lineage, ensuring girls marry men of good character, solidification of marriage alliances, and the desire to choose the right partners for these girls.

Even though the in some cultures, the practice of early marriage is strongly entrenched, conscious socio-economic investment, active policy and pragmatic efforts can bring about changes in social norms and institution that would invariably lead to delay in marriages among girls. For example, improvements in social welfare, employment and

educational levels have been associated with later age in marriage at marriage for women in countries such as the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand, Mathur et al. (2003).

In some parts of Northern Ghana, among the Konkomba for instance, a combination of tradition, poverty, and lack of opportunities put a large number of young people at risk of early marriage. Increased policy and programme attention is therefore needed in these areas. Fortunately many of the NGOs and Development Agencies earlier mentioned, that are working in the deprived areas of the Northern Sector are recognizing the need (often as part of the overall efforts to improve development outcomes) to address the problem of early marriage through a range of policy and pragmatic solutions. These efforts are targeted both at delaying marriage and equipping those who are married young with information, resources, skills, and services they need to deal with their situations. Continued efforts should be made to understand the needs of these young girls and their families, as well as the types of innovative, targeted strategies that can effectively reduce or stop the practice of early marriage.

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