Child Marriage Practice in Ebonyi State: The Sustainability of Socio Economic and Cultural Factors.

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to child marriage in selected Local Government Areas of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Despite efforts to combat child marriage, it persists, particularly in underdeveloped regions like Nigeria, especially in the Moslem North and Ebonyi State in the East. The investigation focused on individuals aged 18 and older in Ebonyi State, which had a population of 2,176,947 according to the 2006 census. To project the adult population for 2019, the 2006 population was estimated at 3,278,566 using an annual growth rate of 3.2%. The sample size for the study was 624, calculated using Taro Yamane's formula. A multi-stage sampling approach was employed, involving the three senatorial zones of Ebonyi: Ebonyi North, Central, and South. Cluster sampling categorized each zone with the Local Government Areas (LGAs), and simple random sampling selected Ebonyi, Ikwo, and Onicha LGAs. From each LGA, three communities were chosen using a simple balloting system, resulting in a total of nine communities selected across the three LGAs. The research assessed the reliability of its instrument using Cronbach Alpha and analyzed quantitative data using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Qualitative data from in-depth interviews were analyzed with Nvivo. Findings indicate older individuals in Ebonyi State tend to support child marriage more than younger individuals, influenced by cultural values and male dominance. Income was identified as a significant factor in the prevalence of child marriage, which adversely affects girls' futures. The study advocates for heightened awareness of the risks associated with child marriage, particularly in rural areas, and calls for culturally suitable programs to promote behavioral change regarding family size and marriage practices.

Keywords: Child Marriage, Socio-cultural, Parental upbringing, Practice, Local Government Areas, Ebonyi State.

INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is a formal marriage or informal union entered into by an individual before reaching the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2005). The UN defines child marriage as modern slavery and it is prohibited by Nigeria's Child Rights Act (2003) but this is negated by Sharia Law that is in force in much of the Northern States of Nigeria (UN, 2014). According to United Nations International Children Education Fund (UNICEF, 2005), Africa has the highest incidence of child marriage which has sometimes been referred to as 'early marriage' or 'child brides', however, early marriage does not imply that children are involved, and the term is vague because an early marriage for one society may be considered late marriage by another society. If a girl marries at the age of 19 to about 24 years, it can be seen as early marriage and yet not child marriage. Similarly, the term 'child bride' glorifies the tradition by portraying an image of joy and celebration. Most of the child marriages are arranged by parents but the most vulnerable children are the orphans, since they are left at the mercies of their guardians who give them out. Girls of poor economic background, uneducated, living in the rural and urban areas is also prone to child marriage. It is no longer a matter of argument that females constitute more than fifty percent (50%) of the world's active population (UNICEF, 2005). Although they make immense contribution to national

development, they still face a number of difficulties that limit their potentials in promoting personal and collective development.

Child marriage seems to be more prevalent in some parts of Nigeria than the others. For instance, the cores Muslim North uphold the 'doctrine' of child marriage. This tends to create a clash of laws and principles, based on different religious grounds in Nigeria. The Southern part of Nigeria is mainly Christian, while the Northern part is principally Muslims. In Northern Nigeria, parents believe strongly that the quality of education is so poor that schooling cannot be considered a viable alternative to marriage for their daughters (UNPF, 2013). The prevalence of child marriage varies widely from one region to another, with figures as high as 76% in the North West region and as low as 10% in the South East (UNPF, 2013).

It is expedient to state that culture is what describes each ethnic group in Nigeria. Anikpo and Tantua (2015) defined culture as the people's way of life. It includes the people's belief, their mode of worship, their arts and craft, language, religion, technology, dressing, way of thinking, dancing, greeting and eating habits, as well as the political and economic systems they operate. It is a social heritage of a particular group of people and not a personal property. Anikpo and Tantua (2015) further state two components of culture: material/ tangible and non-material/ intangible culture. Material culture refers to the physical objects made by the society to meet and satisfy the needs of the people. It includes things that we can see and touch. Non-material culture, on the other hand, describes abstract things found in a people's ways of life. These things include language, religious beliefs, values, norms, customs and rules. A group can best be understood and described, based on its cultural practices. People's culture best explains why and how they do what they do and behave the way they behave.

Evidence has consistently shown that there are multiple socio economic and cultural factors that affect child marriage in Nigeria. These include, 'male-issue syndrome', low status of women, cultural beliefs and practices and unwanted pregnancy. These have combined to increase the chances of young girls getting married below 18 years of age (UNICEF, 2003). It should also be mentioned that certain attitudes or expectations from parents have also contributed to a great extent to child marriage. The inability of the parents to provide adequately for the children can lead to child marriage. Such parents often push away their children from the house and sometimes they are seen as maids to relations and strangers as well. Some of them ends up in getting married at a tender age, even to people that are good enough to be their fathers. The focus of this study was therefore, on the socio economic and cultural factors affecting child marriage in selected LGAs in Ebonyi state, Nigeria.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Erulkar and Muthengi (2014) studied Berhane Hewan; a programme to delay child marriage in rural Ethiopia. The aim of the programme was to reduce the prevalence of child marriage in rural Ethiopia, through a combination of group formation, support for girls to remain in school and community awareness. Erulkar and Muthengi (2014) carried out a quasi-experimental research design, with baseline and endline surveys to measure changes in social and educational participation, marriage age and reproductive health knowledge and contraceptive use. Chi-square tests, proportional hazards models and logistic regressions were conducted to assess challenges associated with the project. The result showed that intervention was associated with considerable improvements in girls' school enrollment, age at marriage, reproductive health knowledge and contraceptive use, particularly among girls aged 10-14. Those exposed to the program were more likely than those in the control area to be in school at the endline survey (odds ratio, (3.0) and were less likely to have ever been married (0.1). However, among girls aged 15-19, those in the intervention area had an elevated likelihood of having married by the endline (2.4). Sexually experienced girls exposed to the intervention had elevated odds at end line of 2.9. In conclusion, Berhane Hewan program, was one of the first rigorously evaluated interventions to delay marriage in Sub- Saharan Africa. It suggests that well designed and effective implemented programs can delay early marriages until late adolescence. This current study is consistent with National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2005) which stated that child marriage is associated with lower levels of schooling for girls in every region of the world and is a barrier to international development goals. This is further validated by Saranga and Kurz (2006) which emphasized that education a girl receives is the strongest predictor of the age she will marry across many countries and regions. Bennell, (2002) reported that in Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of girls out of school each year has risen from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002. Of the 25 selected countries studied, fifteen (15) were in sub-Saharan Africa. According to NDHS (2018) the patterns by

background characteristics of women who married early in Nigeria revealed that rural women age 25-49 marry at younger ages than their urban counterparts (17.2 years versus 21.6 years) while women with no education marry 6 years earlier than women with a secondary education (15.9 years versus 21.9 years). Generally, girls living in rural areas marry earlier than girls in urban areas. In rural areas of Nigeria, 21 percent of young women, who are now 20 to 24, were married by age 15, as compared to 8 percent in urban areas (Rashad, Osman, & Roudi-Fahimi, 2005). In India, percentage of women aged 20 to 49 years who were married or in union before age 18, by place of residence (Sekine, & Hodgkin, 2017).

Child marriage, which is marriage before the age of 18, increases the chances of Vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF), because the pelvic of such girl who married early is too narrow to allow a baby to pass through it (Bunting, 2005). The common causes of VVF are obstructed labour, early marriage, rape, poverty and women's limited control over the use of family resources Adedokun, Adeyemi, & Dauda, 2016). Nour (2009) mentioned depression, sexually transmitted infection, cervical cancer and infant and maternal mortality as the consequences of child marriage.

In a study conducted by Karlyn and Erulker (2007), on child marriage in Northern Nigeria, it was revealed that child marriage contributes to HIV exposure and negative Rhesus factor outcomes for adolescent girls in Northern Nigeria. Presenting the attitudinal and structural antecedents to early marriage among adolescent girls in the Northern Nigeria, 3915 young people aged 10 to 24 years were interviewed in 2006. Perceived external autonomy among young people was significantly lower for girls (13.8%) than boys (38.9%) (p<0.00) increasing slightly with age. Logistic regression confirms that age and sex are significantly associated with autonomy, controlling for socio-demographic factors. Regression on gender attitudes toward girls played no significant role in perceived autonomy of girls or boys. Factors contributing to early marriage in girls include sex, age, and literacy (p<0.05). Low autonomy nearly doubles the likelihood of early marriage (OR=0.04) (p<0.001). Karlyn and Erulker (2007), which the underlying social and structural factors associated with early marriage in northern Nigeria are largely immutable. However attitudes towards girls' autonomy are sensitive to change by program intervention.

METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study was mixed cross-sectional descriptive survey research design, which investigates and describes events as they are at a particular point in time. This design suits this study as it would help to identify the existing socio-economic and cultural factors that affect child marriage in Ebonyi state. Ebonyi State is one of the six states created in 1996 by the former Nigerian ruler, General Sani Abacha. Ebonyi was carved out of the old Abakaliki division of Enugu State and the old Afikpo division of Abia State. The State shares borders with Benue State to the North, Enugu State to the west, Imo and Abia States to the south, and Cross River State to the East. The population for this study were males and females within the age of 18 years and above in Ebonyi State. Ebonyi State had a population of 2,176,947 at the 2006 census (NPC, 2009). However, to get the adult population projection of the adult population for 2019, the 2006 population was projected, using the annual population growth rate of 3.2% in arriving at 3,278,566 which made up the population of this study. The sample size used for this study was 624 determined using Taro Yamane statistical formula. The study adopted multi-stage approach for the study. Ebonyi has three senatorial zones; they are Ebonyi North, Ebonyi Central and Ebonyi South Senatorial zones. The cluster sampling technique was used to categorize each senatorial zone with the LGAs. Using simple random sampling was used in selecting each of the senatorial zone and Local Government Areas (LGA). They include Ebonyi LGA, Ikwo LGA and Onicha LGA. Going further, from each of the selected LGAs using the simple balloting system, three (3) communities were selected. A total of 9 communities were selected from each of the three LGAs. In carrying the reliability of the research instrument, the Cronbach Alpha was used. Quantitative data from the questionnaires was subsequently coded, processed and analyzed, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency tables were employed in the analysis of data. Chi-square statistics was utilized in testing the study hypotheses. The Nvivo software was used to analyze the qualitative data from the in-depth interviews (IDI).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section shows the presentation and analysis of the data as stated in the study methodology. In this study, six hundred and twenty four (624) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to adult population in Ebonyi state. Out of the total number of questionnaires distributed, only five hundred and eighty three (583) copies (representing 97.1% of the distributed questionnaire copies) were properly filled and returned. Hence, the quantitative data analysis in this study is based on 583 valid copies of the questionnaire. The qualitative data obtained through twelve (12) IDI responses of the traditional leaders, youth leaders, women leaders and clergy men were analyzed thematically to complement the quantitative data.

Table 1: Analysis on Place of residence of the respondents

Place of residence	Frequency	Percentage
Urban	71	12.2
Semi-Urban	201	34.5
Rural	311	53.3
Total	**583**	**100%**

The Table shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The data realized from the respondents' residential places shows that the majority of the respondents (53.3%) are from the rural area, (34.5%) are from the semi-urban area while, 12.2% were drawn from the urban area.

Table 2: Analysis on Sex of the respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	111	19.1
Female	472	80.9
Total	**583**	**100%**

The Table also showed sex variation of respondents, (80.9%) females and (19.1%) male simply disclosed the keen interest of and the eagerness of women to air their views on the subject matter as it concerns them most.

Table 3: Analysis on Age of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 27 years	99	16.9
28 – 37 years	83	14.2
38 – 47 years	100	17.2
48 – 57 years	98	16.8
58 – 67 years	114	19.6
68 and above	89	15.3
Total	**583**	**100%**

Age groups were categorically specified in the study where 16.9% of the respondents fell within age of 18 to 27 years; 14.2% within the age of 28 to 37 years; 17.2% are within the age of 38 to 47 years; (16.8%) within age 48 to 57; (19.6%) also fell within the age of 58 to 57years, while (15.3) within 68 years and above.

Table 4: Analysis on Marital Status of the respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	91	15.6
Married	316	54.2
Divorced/Separated	81	13.9
Widowed	95	16.3
Total	**583**	**100%**

Subsequent to the ongoing, was the distribution of respondents' by their marital status. (15.6%) are seen to be single; 54.2% are married; 13.9% are divorced with some living all alone, some others living together with their children, while 16.3% have lost their husbands and are now widows. Most of the females in this study are married, while the divorced are the least in number.

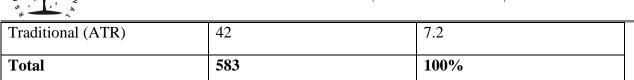**Table 5: Analysis on Educational Qualification of the respondents**

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
No formal education	98	16.8
Primary education	181	31.0
Secondary Education	135	23.2
NCE, Diploma	82	14.1
HND/BSc/B.A/B.Ed	80	13.7
MBA, M.A., MSc,	5	0.9
PhD	2	0.3
Total	**583**	**100%**

Furthermore, the participants, who did not attain formal education are (16.8%) in number; (31.0%) possess primary education; (23.2%) attained up to secondary school education, (14.1%) had their NCE, Diploma; (13.7%) attended tertiary institution up to HND/BSC while those who earned their Ph.D. were only (0.3%). This shows that a good number of women involved in this study have no formal education. Meanwhile, a larger percentage (%) had their primary cum secondary school education, and then the number that attended tertiary institution is insignificant compared to the other categories.

Table 6: Analysis on Religious Affiliation of the respondents

Religious Affiliation	Frequency	Percentage
Christianity	535	91.8
Islam	6	1.0

Traditional (ATR)	42	7.2
Total	**583**	**100%**

The religious affiliation of the respondents show that the majority are mostly Christians (91.8%); (7.2%) are traditional worshippers, while (1.0%) are Moslems.

Table 7: Analysis on Level of monthly Income of the respondents

Level of monthly Income	Frequency	Percentage
Less than N20,000	434	74.4
N21,000 to N49,000	95	16,3
N50,000 to N99,000	51	8.8
N100,000 to N199,000	3	0.5
N200,000 and above	Nil	Nil
Total	**583**	**100%**

As for monthly income level, a greater percentage of the respondents (74.4%) earn less than N20, 000 naira per month, showing how indigents the majority of the respondents' are. A little above that are (16.3%) respondents, whose income fell within N21,000 to N49,000; this is followed by (8.8%) who earns between N50,000 to N99,000; also (0.5%) whose theirs' fell within N100,000 to N199,000 and finally at zero percentage (%) none agreed to be earning anything beyond N200,000 and above.

Table 8: Analysis on Occupation of the respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Farming	205	35.2
Civil Servant	99	16.9
Public Servant	89	15.3
Business/Trading	122	20.9
Unemployed	68	11.7
Total	**583**	**100%**

In considering the occupational status of the respondents it was deduced as stated above that the greater proportion of those who participated in the study (35.2%) are farmers; (16.9%) are Civil Servants; (15.3%) are Public servants; in the same vein (20.9%) are basically into one business/trading or the other, while, quiet a reasonable number (11.7%) complained that they had nothing doing at the time this study was being conducted.

Table 9: Analysis on how long the respondents have lived in the Area of Study

How long have you lived in this place	Frequency	Percentage
1-9 years	28	4.8
10-19 years	31	5.3

20-29 years	94	16.1
30-39 years	102	17.5
40- 49 years	116	19.9
50- 59 years	125	21.5
60 years and above	87	14.9
Total	**583**	**100%**

However, to ascertain how long each respondent had lived in the study locale, seven (7) years age groups were categorically established to guide this finding. It shows that (4.8%) have lived up to 1 to 9 years in the area; (5.3%) lived up to 10 to19 years; (16.1%) lived up to 20 to 29 years; (17.5%) lived up to 30 to 39 years; (19.9%) lived up to 40-49 years; (21.5%) agreed to have lived up to 50 to 59 years while, (14.9%) disclosed that they have lived there for about 60 years and above.

Table 10: Chi-square test of the relationship between place of residence and encouraging child Marriage

Place of Residence	Encouraging child marriage							Total
	when she starts mensuration	when it can help to protect family honour/reputation	when it can help to resolve financial problem	when it can help to prevent sexual abuse/ harassment	when parents approve the marriage	when she gets unwanted pregnancy	when she is of age and willing to get married	
Urban	19 (3.2%)	14 (2.4%)	13 (2.2%)	11 (1.8%)	18 (3.0%)	25 (4.2%)	44 (7.5%)	144 (24.6%)
Semi-Urban	32 (5.4%)	21 (3.6%)	25 (4.2%)	28 (4.8%)	27 (4.6%)	31 (5.3%)	22 (3.7%)	186 (31.9%)
Rural	57 (9.7%)	33 (5.6%)	38 (6.5%)	21 (3.6%)	28 (4.8%)	62 (10.6%)	14 (2.4%)	253 (43.3%)
Total	**108 (18.5%)**	**68 (11.6%)**	**76 (13.0%)**	**60 (10.2%)**	**73 (12.5%)**	**118 (20.2%)**	**80 (13.7%)**	**583 (100%)**

Researcher's Fieldwork 2019 $X^2(df = 10, N=583), = 18.320, p=.001$

The chi-square test was run at 0.05 level of significance to cross tabulate if place of residence is likely to encourage child marriage in Ebonyi State; the chi-square test in Table 10 revealed a statistically significant (P-value = .001) relationship between place of residence and encouraging child marriage. This result is expected because rural dwellers are likely to be susceptible to child marriage due to the prevailing cultural realities in the rural areas that encourage such practice.

Table 11: Chi-square test of the relationship between place of education and encouraging child marriage

Level of Education	Encouraging child marriage							Total
	when she starts mensuration	when it can help to protect family honour/repu tation	when it can help to resolve financial problem	when it can help to prevent sexual abuse/ harassment	when parents approve the marriage	when she gets unwanted pregnancy	when she is of age and willing to get married	
No formal education	44 (7.5%)	29 (4.9%)	18 (3.0%)	24 (4.1%)	21(3.6%)	41 (7.0%)	10 (1.7%)	187 (32.0%)
Primary education	24 (4.1%)	22 (3.7%)	12 (2.0%)	18 (3.0%)	17 (2.9%)	21 (3.6%)	9 (1.5%)	123 (21.0%)
Secondary Education	15 (2.5%)	9 (1.5%)	18 (3.0%)	16 (2.7%)	19 (3.2%)	20 (3.4%)	12 (2.0%)	109 (18.6%)
NCE, Diploma	14 (2.4%)	7 (1.2%)	16 (2.7%)	12 (2.0%)	10 (1.7%)	14 (2.4%)	9 (1.5%)	82 (14.0%)
HND/BSc/B.A/B.Ed	11 (1.8%)	12 (2.0%)	4 (0.6%)	7 (1.2%)	8 (1.3%)	13 (2.2%)	20 (3.4%)	75 (12.8%)
MBA, M.A., MSc,	1 (0.1%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.1%)	2 (0.3%)	5 (0.8%)
PhD	0 (%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.1%)	2 (0.3%)
Total	**109 (18.6%)**	**79 (13.5%)**	**70 (12.0%)**	**77 (13.2%)**	**75 (12.8%)**	**110 (18.8%)**	**63 (10.8%)**	**583 (100%)**

Researcher's Fieldwork 2019 $X^2(df = 13, N=583), = 11.274, p=.001$

The chi-square test was run at 0.05 level of significance to test if there was a positive significant relationship between level of education and encouraging child marriage; the result of the statistical test showed significant evidence to accept the stated alternate hypothesis, $X^2(df = 13, N=583), = 11.274, p=.001$. This finding implies that level of education of people determine their behavior. People of low educational qualification are more likely to encourage child marriage due to their narrow mindedness/ignorance than their counterpart of higher educational qualification.

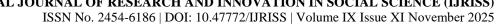## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

The study revealed that rural dwellers are likely to be susceptible to child marriage due to the prevailing cultural realities in the rural areas that encourage such practice. The study also revealed that people of low educational qualification are more likely to encourage child marriage due to their narrow mindedness/ignorance than their counterpart of higher educational qualification. A common belief is that child marriage is a coping strategy for poverty, accords girls and parent's status and honour. However, evidence also shows that child marriage is a catalyst for poverty which undermines status and honour in societies. The study recommended the need to prioritize girl child education up to tertiary level in Ebonyi state. It also recommended that gender based interventions should be done to institutionalize gender balance and sensitivity in all sphere of social, economic and cultural institutions and engagement in the Ebonyi state.

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