
Research Article

Reforming the Girl-Child Education Vis a Vis Early Marriage in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Education is very important in the socio-economic political development and progress of individuals in any society so girl child education becomes imperative. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Six research questions guided the study. A questionnaire was used for data collection. Through purposive sampling technique 170 subject between the age of 17 and 30 years, form the sample size. The data were analyzed using frequency count, percentages and mean score. The study revealed among others that the respondents (girls) got married within the age of schooling which is between 12 and 19 years and that the predominant age of marriage is between 17 and 19 years. Some dropped out of school because of early marriage. The results also revealed that the major causes of early marriage are poverty, ignorance and illiteracy. The study recommended among others that educational reforms should focus on ensuring that free and compulsory education should be for children up to the age of 18 years, technical and vocational education should be established as a matter of urgency to create move avenues for our girls to develop their talents.

Keywords- Early Marriage, Education, Reforming, Girl child, Local government

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a vital tool for empowerment that allows meaningful contributions to society. According to [1], girls' education does not only bring the immediate benefit of empowering girls, but is seen as the best investment in a country's development. Education helps girls to develop essential life skills including self confidence, the ability to participate effectively in the society and protect themselves from HIV/AIDs and other sexual exploitations. [1] further asserts that girl child education also helps in cutting children and maternal mortality rates, contributing to national wealth and controlling disease and health status. Children of educated women are likely to go to school. Consequently, this has exponential positive effects on education and education for generations to come. One very important aim of every family is to raise healthy and productive individuals who will contribute meaningfully to society. This can be achieved through the education of the girl-child who is the mother of tomorrow.

The Federal Government through the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme is making efforts at accelerating girl-child education. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, which was launched on 30th September, 1999, is one of the major reforms in Nigeria educational system. The main objective of the programme is to democratize education by ensuring that all citizens have equal access or opportunity [2]. Through UBE programme the government intention is to make primary education free and compulsory for all children up to fifth standard and for girls up to the college level. The programme if well implemented will take care of educationally marginalized groups such as girls and the rural poor. According to [3] two thirds of the world's illiterates are female, 600 million women cannot read or write and 90 million girls are not in school.

In developing countries like Nigeria, there are so many reasons why girls lag behind in education; they include cultural belief system, poverty and early marriage.

Any social scientist will be alarmed by the number of young women who sit under the scorching sun selling very little things like groundnut, sachets water and fruit. These girls are found around officer, school hospitals, motor parks, markets and other public places or areas. Some of them are seen hawking various things from one place to another and most of the time the young woman is either pregnant or carrying her baby behind her back.

The quantities of items they are selling indicate that they are living below the poverty level, because not much money will be realized from the sales.

One relevant question is: what factors are responsible for this waste of such potential human resources? Various reasons are abound for this ugly situation; these include lack of education, ignorance and poor-socio-economic background which pushed them to early marriage. The universal declaration of Human Rights in Article 25 refers to right to adequate living standard. These rights are meant to ensure that all human beings have existence worthy of human dignity. This means that the rights of these categories of women described above are being violated by the government who should provide them the opportunity for education and thereby increase their chances and empower them to be self reliant. Some of them could have been forced into early marriage because of the circumstances beyond their control.

1.1 Concept of Marriage

Marriage is the state of being united to a person of opposite sex as husband and wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law. Marriage is also called matrimony, wedlock, is a socially or ritually recognized union or legal contract between spouses that establishes rights, and obligations between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws.

Marriage is legally sanctioned contract between a man and a woman. Entering into a marriage contract changes the legal status of parties giving husband and wife new rights and obligation. Public policy is strongly in favour of marriage based on the belief that it preserves the family unit.

Traditionally, marriage has been viewed as vital to the preservation of morals and civilization [4]. The traditional principle upon which the institution of marriage is founded is that a husband has the obligation to support the wife and the wife has the duty to serve. In the past, this has meant that the husband has the duty to provide a safe house, to pay for necessities such as food and clothing, and to live in the house. [5]. He further stated that a wife's obligation has traditionally entailed maintaining a home, living in the home, having sexual relationship with her husband, and rearing the couple's children. Sequel to this, changes in society have modified these marital roles to a considerable degree as married women have joined the workforce in large numbers, and more married men have become more involved in child rearing.

The change is due to awareness of human rights and family law, which focused in marriage as partnership and established equal rights among the couples. [6]. Early marriage refers to any marriage of a child younger than 18 years old, in accordance of the convention on the right of the child who early marriage can happen to both sexes, it disproportionately affects girls. Early or child marriage is a formal or informal marriage entered into by an individual before reaching the age of 18 years. And this is a violation of human rights, compromising the development of girls and often resulting in early marriage, so the ill is that girls who are victim are denied their rights to education, health etc. The issue is that even though marriage should be based on the mutual consent of both parents, it should be after the man has reached the age of 20 years and the girls 18 years of age. Therefore, marriage is said to be early if it involves either of the couples below the age of 18 years. The ripe age for girls to marry is 21 years. It should not be a situation whereby parents give their consent on behalf of their daughter or marry for their under-aged sons. World over, marriage is regarded as the most intimate and private of all relationships but it is still guided and controlled by culture and tradition of the people. What it means is that, a wide range of Kinship groups are involved.

In developed countries for example, Britain in the early 70s teenage marriage was known and in the year 1971 9% of girls aged 16 to 19 years got married compared with less than one parents who got married at the same age range in 1992 (United Nations 2005). [7] observed that in the middle East, North Africa and some parts of Asia, married shortly after puberty. In 2008 a survey was carried out in some part of Nigeria [8] the findings showed that nearly 14% of the girls marry between the

age of 10 and 14 years. In another survey it was found out that the average age of marriage in Yobe State of Nigeria is 11 years, which is against the national average age of 18 years. In some cases the girl may be a second or fourth wife. It has been pointed out by a committee of Human Rights that polygamy violates the dignity of women and should be abolished wherever it continues to exist [3].

It has been observed that in rural areas, from low socio-economic background tend to marry younger than those in urban areas. Another issue is that a good number of women are opting to delay marriage or decide not to marry at all. Despite the increase in the number of women, marriage is still taken for granted by most young women as normal and inevitable part of their lives. Sequel to this, the implications and disadvantages of early-marriage on the girl-child are tremendous. It often generates depression and mental stress in the child 's life" [9]. He further pointed out that the great disparity in ages between husband and wife causes a generation gaps, as a result, of this "child wife" often fails to respond to husband's demands and expectations. Consequently, a lot of ailment could be developed by the "child wife". On the other hand, girls of school age who marry early are denied their right to education, which is required for self development and fulfillment so as to fit into the new millennium. Early marriage creates a vicious circle for the girl-child.

In the first place she is denied the fun and comfort of childhood and adolescence. Most of the times the girls are not prepared to play the role of a mother which circumstances have forced on them. There is need therefore to study the present trend with reference to early-marriage, and its implication on the girl-child education.

The problem of this study therefore is to, investigate the extent to which early-marriage undermines the life chances of the girl-child. The findings of the study will portray the importance of proper educational reforms by the government, which will empower the girl-child and enable her escape from the social rot into which she is born.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is:

1. To find out the predominant age of marriage in Uzo-Uwani of Enugu State Nigeria.
2. The views of the indigenes on early marriage,
3. The cause of early marriage,
4. The effect of early marriage on the girl-child education. It also looked at
5. The level of education of the respondents
6. Reasons for not furthering their education.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the predominant age of marriage in Uzo-Uwani LGA of Enugu State, Nigeria?
2. What are the views of indigenes on early –marriage?
3. What are the causes of early –marriage?
4. What effect has early – marriage on the girl- child education?
5. What is the level of education of the respondents?
6. What are the reasons for not furthering their education?

II. METHODOLOGY

The design of the study is a description survey carried out in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State Nigeria. The choice of the area of study is based on the fact that the Uzo-Uwani community is regarded as educationally disadvantaged and that the girl-child is likely to bear the brunt. The population for the study is made up of all married young women who work in the informal sector of the economy. Purposive sampling techniques were used to draw 170 subjects aged between 17 and 30 years of age who are victims of early marriage. Out of which 100 formed the sample. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire that consists of 33 items related to the objectives of the study. The instrument was face-

validated by 3 experts in the faculty of education Enugu State University of Science and Technology. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted in known local government Area of Ebonyi State, Nigeria which gave reliability coefficient of 0.76. Data was analyzed using frequency count, percentages and mean. A mean of 2.5 on a 4 point likert scale was set as an acceptance level.

III. RESULT

The research question I sought to find out the predominant age of marriage in Uzo- Uwani Local Government Area. TABLE 1 presents the funding based on responses.

Table 1: Marital Age of the Respondents [N = 170]

S/N	Item	Frequency	Parents
1	Between 12 and 16 year	57	33.5
2	Between 17 and 19 years	86	50.6
3	Between 20 and	16	9.4
4	26 years and above	11	6.5
	Total	170	100

The data presented in the TABLE 1 showed that 50.6 percent of the respondents got married between 17 and 19 years of age and 33.5 percent between 12 and 16 years old, which are with the range of early marriage.

Table 2: Mean Score on the Respondents View of Early Marriage [N = 170]

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Early marriage is common in Uzo-Uwani in the olden days	2.99	0.92	Agree
2	The girls like to marry early	2.57	0.88	Agree
3	Parents do not consider the daughter's opinion before giving her out for marriage	2.75	0.91	Agree
4	Parents support early Marriage	2.87	0.85	Agree
5	At present early marriage is not common	2.91	0.76	Agree
6	My parents support further education	2.80	0.96	Agree

Respondents agree that early marriage was common in Uzo-Uwani in the olden days but at present early marriage is no longer common. Parents now supported further education for their daughters.

Table 3: Mean Score on the Causes of Early Marriage [N 170]

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Poverty on the of parents	3.12	1.25	Agree
2	Illiteracy of parents	2.89	1.00	Agree
3	To prevent teenage pregnancy	2.31	0.96	Disagree
4	To get money to train the boys	2.19	0.19	Disagree
5	An only daughter is likely to marry early	2.47	0.97	Disagree
6	Peer group influence	2.65	0.89	Agree
7	It is our custom	2.38	0.96	Disagree

The data in TABLE 3 indicate that the respondents agree that poverty is one of the causes of early marriage with mean score of 3.12, illiteracy of parents 2.89 and peer influence 2.65 but they disagree that the cause of early marriage is to prevent teenage pregnancy 2.31, to get money to train the boys 2.19 and disagree that early marriage is their custom with mean score of 2.38.

Table 4: Mean Score on the Effect of Early Marriage on Girl Child Education.

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Prevention of further education	2.71	1	Agree
2	Could not go to tertiary institution	2.71	0.	Agree
3	Could not fulfill the ambition of being graduate	2.58	0.	Agree
4	Did not have life ambition	2.48	0.	Disagree
5	Blame parents for allowing early marriage	2.8	1.	Agree

The data presented in TABLE 4 showed that the respondents agree that early marriage prevented them from furthering their education giving a mean score of 2.71 and they blame their parents for their early marriage. 2.58 disagree that they did not achieve their life ambition with mean score of 2.48. To portray further the effect of early marriage on the girl child education, data were collected on their level of education. They were also requested to give reasons for not furthering their education.

Table 5: Frequency Distribution Level of Education

S/N	Item	Frequency	Percentage
1	First school leaving certificate	41	24.1
2	Dropped out of primary school	31	18.2
3	Completed Secondary School	37	21.8
4	Dropped out of Secondary schools	37	21.8
5	Did not go to school	24	14.1

The data in TABLE 5 shows that 24.1 percent of the respondents completed primary school: 18.2 percent and 21.8 percentages dropped out of primary and secondary school respectively while 14.1 percent did not go to school. Even though that 21.8 percent completed secondary education they did not go further.

Table 6: Mean Rating on Reasons for not Furthering Education

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Lack of interest in education	2.21	0.99	Disagree
2	My parents could not pay my school fees	2.61	0.99	Agree
3	I was pregnant and dropped out of school	2.57	0.97	Agree
4	I got married while in school	2.64	0.97	Agree
5	To work and earn money	2.58	1.02	Agree
6	I got married early	3.31	0.71	Agree

Data presented in TABLE 6 disagree that lack of interest in education prevented them from furthering their education but agreed that their parents could not pay for their schooling. Some dropped out of school because there were pregnant and got married while in school. The fact that they have interest in education has implications for policy makers. They admitted that they got married early giving a mean score of 3.31.

IV. DISCUSSION

The study revealed that the respondents got married within the age of schooling, which is between 12 and 19 years, and that 33.5 percent married early that is between 12 and 16 years old. The age range fell within the category described by [9] as “child wife” who was denied the fun and comfort of childhood and adolescence and are ill-prepared to play the role of a mother and such at such an early age. They also dropped out of school and were denied their right to education which will empower them, make them self sufficient and thereby contribute to the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Although the respondents agree that early marriage is no longer common in Uzo-Uwani LGA but they agree that girls like to marry early and that parents support early marriage. They also agree that parents do not consider their daughters’ opinion before giving her out for marriage. The situation seems like arranged marriage practiced by many Asian countries. Asian parents usually select their daughter’s husband with considerable care [3]. For them, the idea is that love should develop with marriage.

The data presented in Table3 highlighted the causes of early marriage. The major causes are poverty and illiteracy on the part of the parents. The findings agree with Action Aid International Nigeria (AATN) in [3] which identified cost of education as one of the factors affecting girl child education The Issue of Poverty bring to lime light the need for the enforcement of free and compulsory, good quality education for all children within school age. This is one of the ways to achieve universal basic education and then eradicate gender disparities in education at all levels by year 2015. There should be educational policies that specifically address gender issues. Illiteracy is identified as one of the causes of early marriage. The government at all levels should create adequate awareness and persuade parents to allow their daughters to go to school and make a law such that defaulters be prosecuted. Parents should show personal interest on what goes on in the education of the girl child.

With reference to the effect of early marriage on the girl child education the respondents agree that early marriage prevented them from furthering their education. This situation is similar to what obtains in Bakara council of Zamfara State Nigeria where no female pupil had gone beyond primary five before being withdrawn from marriage. It was only in the year 2000 that few girls were able to go to secondary school. But through the action of school management increased from 109 in 2005 to 152 in 2006 out of a population of 554 and up till this moment a little increase [10]. This situation shows that the universal Basic Education, UBE is yet to attain its objectives in the area.

Sequel to this, It is interesting to find that the respondents are interested in education as indicated by the data in TABLE 4 and 6. The ambition of some of them is to graduate and blame their parents for allowing them to marry early. It is generally acknowledged that knowledge is power and that education is a process of empowerment but unfortunately the respondents have not acquired that skill manpower which education provides. Hence most of them are petty traders, hair dressers, shop attendance seamstress, typist, farmers and house wives. Investing in girl-child education means to empower them; so as to contribute their quota to sustainable national development.

The study has revealed that outside formal classroom settings there are good number of girls who are potential agents of social change and development. Investing in the girl child through education and training means widening their knowledge choice of strategies on how to earn a living thereby reduce dependence on husband or children for status.

V. CONCLUSION

The study focused on educational reforms and the girl-child. The findings have shown that the predominant age of marriage is between 17 and 19 year (50.6%) and that there are still some elements of early marriage in the area of study. 33.5% married between 12 and 16 years. So, it is worthy of note that parents support further education for their daughters but also support early marriage. Poverty and illiteracy on the part of parents were identified as the major causes of early marriage. The research also revealed that some of them have high educational ambition but because they married early they could not further that education. Therefore, they have very low level of education majority completed primary school while some dropped out of primary and secondary schools. A few did not go to school at all. So a stitch in time saves nine.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing, the following are recommended.

1. Educational reforms should focus mainly on making education free and compulsory for children irrespective of sex.
2. Government must realize that investing in women and the girl child in particular should be a priority in order to attain Millennium Development Goals.
3. Non-governmental organization and women organization should organize seminars and workshops for illiterate parents to emphasize the benefits of educating girls.
4. Entrepreneurship education/technical education should be established to create more avenues for the girls to develop their talents.
5. This research should be carried out in other parts of Nigeria especially the northern states of Nigeria where girls and women are marginalized due to their culture and religion.

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