

EFFECTS OF EARLY MARRIAGE ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF FEMALE STUDENTS IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF IMO STATE UNIVERSITY, OWERRI

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Abstract

The study assessed the effects of early marriage on the academic performance of students in Imo State University, Owerri. In trying to ascertain the effect of early marriage, three research questions were formulated which sought the opinion of the respondents. A structured questionnaire was constructed with a 4-point type Likert scale of strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D), and strongly Disagree (SD). The respondents were two hundred (200) registered female students from the Faculty of Education. Findings revealed that causes of early marriage include poor financial standard of the family ($\bar{x} = 3.43$), pre-marital pregnancies ($\bar{x} = 3.30$), the quest to gain independence from parents/family members ($\bar{x} = 3.03$) among others. Findings revealed that reasons for early marriage include: parents coercing their daughters into early marriage ($\bar{x} = 3.15$), to reduce responsibility especially when they have so many (female) children ($\bar{x} = 3.36$), more so, the consequences of early marriage include: high rate of female drop out ($\bar{x} = 2.28$). The study recommends that creating awareness among parents, teachers, religious leaders and other influential adults to eradicate forced marriage among female students. Female children should be provided with entrepreneurial knowledge and skills early in life to keep them busy and occupied.

Keywords: Effects, Early Marriage, Academic, Performance, Female Students

Introduction

Marriage is a tradition practiced and expressed over the years in human history in an array of forms. This creates some flexibility and calls into question the exact nature of marriage and its functions. To be certain, the shared life of man and woman in marriage involves the most varied strata of human person as both spiritual and physical beings. This is because marriage is a life union and because of its demands, its challenges and benefits may not be entered into when one is a minor. It demands that one

must be physically, mentally, psychologically and emotionally mature (Dixon-Mueller, 2008). Education is the best guarantor to this maturity and so fosters a happier union in marriage, taking into cognizance especially, and the challenges of our parent secular society. Contrary to this, female students of higher academic institutions who may be considered minors for marriage go into marriage today. With rampant growth of this phenomenon, the educational fate of girls looks bleak as well as the rest of their life in

marriage. In the words of Santhya *et al.* (2010) young married girls are usually victims of long-term violence and are deprived of basic education (Lee-Rife *et al.*, 2012). That is why there is an urgent need to study this phenomenon so as to proffer solutions in order to forestall its negative consequences.

Early marriage has been an age long practice which unfortunately is getting more common today with more adverse effects. As it were, it has been a subject of deliberation among many authors. According to Lee-Rife *et al.* (2012) early marriage has been a lifelong problem inspired by the delusion that marriage is a means to achieving happiness and satisfaction, noting that early marriage could occur due to: girl-childish fantasy accorded to marriage, accidental pregnancy, financial difficulties in the family and societal, parental influence and probably due to the death of one or both parents early in a child-life. Wilkin (2000) concurred that the age at which people marry has been going down fairly and steadily since the beginning of the 20th century. Early marriage poses great threat to academic performance of students coerced into it. Poor attendance to class, limited time to read and study, digressed focus from academics to family's welfare, possible withdrawal and poor time management. To go into marriage at an unripe age is to launch oneself into an embarrassing situation arising from the demand of married status. Brown (2002) explained that there is need to study each intended couples before marriage; this can only be done by mature people. To enter into marriage without taking care of this, calls for disorganization, constant quarrelling and possible breakup of the marriage.

The study therefore assessed the effects of early marriage on the academic performance of students in Imo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to investigate the causes of early marriage among female students in Imo State University; determine reasons why female children are forced into early marriage; identify the consequences of early marriage and determine the effects of early marriage on the academic performance of female students.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Imo State, South-eastern Nigeria. The population of the study comprised of all the first and second year female students in Imo State University, Owerri. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample size of two hundred (200) female students from the entire population of one thousand, one hundred and nine (1109) registered female students in the Department of Education Economics. The questionnaire was structured on a four (4) – point Likert type scale of strongly agreed (SA) (4), Agreed (A) (3), Disagreed (D) (2) and strongly Disagreed (SD). (1) The values 4, 3, 2, 1 were added to obtain 10 which were further divided by 4 to get a cut – off mean of 2.5. Any mean value that is equal or greater than 2.50 was regarded as a cause, reason or a consequence of early marriage.

Results and Discussion

Causes of Early Marriage among Students of Higher Academic Institutions

Table 1 shows that pre-marital pregnancies (\bar{x} =3.30), quest to gain independence from parents/family members (\bar{x} = 3.03), poor financial standard of the family (\bar{x} =3.43) and urge to enjoy the privileges in marriage (\bar{x} =2.84) were some the causes of early

marriage among students of higher academic institutions in the study area.

Table1: Mean Response Causes of Early Marriage among Female Students of Higher Academic Institutions

Causes	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Remark
Pre-marital pregnancies	3.30	0.7015	Accepted
The quest to gain independence from parents/family members	3.03	1.2409	Accepted
Poor financial standard of the family	3.43	1.7443	Accepted
The urge to enjoy the privileges in marriage	2.84	0.8538	Accepted
Cluster			
Cut – off Mean ($\bar{x} = 2.5$)			

Reasons for Early Marriage

Entries in Table 2 reveal that the reasons for early marriage in the study area were parents forcing their daughters into early marriages ($\bar{x}=3.15$), quest for social status in the society ($\bar{x}=3.10$), Fear of premarital pregnancy ($\bar{x}=3.25$) among others. The act of parents

forcing female children into early marriage could be as a consequence of financial crisis, tradition and poverty. This concurs with Anju (2010) who stated that financial transactions at the time of marriage tend to push families to marry off their daughters at an early age.

Table 2: Mean Response on the reasons for Early Marriage

Reasons	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Remark
To overcome some family financial problem	3.28	1.139	Accepted
Parent force their daughters into early marriage	3.15	0.6732	Accepted
quest for social status in the society	3.10	1.150	Accepted
To do away with the female child especially when the child give them problem	2.78	0.131	Accepted
To reduce responsibility especially when they have so many children	3.36	1.072	Accepted
Fear of premarital pregnancy	3.25	0.239	Accepted
Cluster mean			
Cut – off Mean ($\bar{x} = 2.5$)			

Table 3: Consequences of Early Marriage on the Academic Performance of Female Students of Higher Academic Institutions

Entries in Table 3 observed that early marriage leads to high rate of female drop out ($\bar{x} = 3.28$), distraction of the female students leading to poor academic performance ($\bar{x} = 2.31$), increased rate of divorce ($\bar{x} = 2.96$) and high natality rate ($\bar{x} = 2.25$).

Table 3: Mean response of students on the consequences of early marriage on the academic performance of post-secondary school female students

Consequences	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Remark
It leads to high rate of female drop-out	3.28	0.131	Accepted
It distract the female students, this leading to poor academic performance	3.31	1.088	Accepted
It increases the rate of Divorce	2.96	1.278	Accepted
It results in giving birth to many children (high natality rate)	3.25	1.365	Accepted
Cluster			

Cut- off mean ($\bar{x} = 2.5$)

Effects of Early Marriage on the Academic Performance of the respondents

The effects of early marriage on the academic performance of the respondents includes: increased maternal and infant health risks ($\bar{x} = 3.7-5$), greater exposure to HIV and Aids (\bar{x}

$= 3.27$), exposure to domestic and sexual violence ($\bar{x} = 3.06$), divorce ($\bar{x} = 3.25$), retarded Education ($\bar{x} = 3.80$) among others (Table 4). The finding agrees with Wilkins (2000) that marriage contracted at an early stage is much likely to end in divorce.

Table 4: Effects of Early Marriage on the Academic Performance of the Respondents

Effects	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Remark
Increased maternal and infant health risks	3.75	0.85988	Accepted
Greater exposure to HIV and Aids	3.27	0.54811	Accepted
Exposure to domestic and sexual violence	3.06	0.28593	Accepted
Denial of a future	3.45	0.63982	Accepted
Divorce	3.25	0.53646	Accepted
Retarded Education	3.80	0.93766	Accepted
Deprivation of childhood	3.44	0.65933	Accepted

Cut- off mean ($\bar{x} = 2.5$)

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study assessed effects of early marriage on the academic performance of female students of Imo State University, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. Questionnaire was used to obtain data from two hundred (200) female students using simple random sampling technique from the faculty of education. The questionnaire was constructed with a 4-point type Likert scale of strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D), and strongly Disagree (SD). The study revealed the causes of early marriage as poor financial standard of the family, pre-marital pregnancies, and the quest to gain independence from parents/family members among others. Reasons for early marriage include: parents coercing their daughters into early marriage, to reduce responsibility especially when they have so many (female) children. Furthermore, the consequences of early marriage were observed as: high rate of female drop out. The study, thus, recommends that awareness should be created among parents, teachers, religious leaders and other influential adults to eradicate forced marriage among female students and the female children should be provided with entrepreneurial knowledge and skills early in life to keep them busy and occupied.

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