
A DISCOURSE ON THE DEVELOPMENTAL EFFECTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

JAMABO, Tamunoimama

Dept. of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Port Harcourt, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

In many developing countries, child [early] marriage is attributed to poverty, gender discrimination and migration for example in the State of Uttar Pradesh in India, studies of the District Level Household Survey (DLHS) conducted 1997 found that 40% of girls are married before the age of 18 despite the existence of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006. The UNICEF State of the World's Children Report 2007 noted that, "*premature pregnancy and motherhood are an inevitable consequence of child marriage. Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than women in their 20s.*" The goal of this study is to conduct an analysis on the development and human rights effects of early child marriage in Nigeria. The methodology employed in the analysis is predominantly based on secondary data. The author argues that early marriage violates the human rights of children that are coerced and abused by parents without the reasonableness of weighing the long term developmental effects on the child therefore, the social, mental and intellectual development of the children are disenchanting.

Keywords: Early Marriage, Child Abuse, Human Rights of Children, Early Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The starting point of this discussion is to affirm that child marriage is human rights violation. Many international agencies including UNICEF and the International Planned Parenthood Federation have been relentless in their condemnation of the illicit practices yet some parts of the world including some tribes in Nigeria considers the practice as part of their heritage and culture hence are unwilling to eradicate the practice.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) ratified (by Nigeria on 19 April 1991) defines a child as a human being below the age of 18 (Article 1). The Convention applies to all children wherever they may be irrespective of "their race, religion or abilities; whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from. It doesn't matter where children live, what language they speak, what their parents do, whether they are boys or girls, what their culture is, whether they have a disability or whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis" (Article 2 of the UNCRC cited in UNICEF, 2007). Article 3 preserves the best interests of the child in that adults are forbidden from making decisions that are on behalf of the child that is not of the child's best interests (long term or short term). Article 3 has wider implication beyond the parents to policy makers, State agents

and authorities. Article 6 guarantees children right to life and require governments ensure children's lives are protected. Article 12 of the Convention makes it mandatory for child's opinion to be considered in matters concerning their life and welfare. However, the Convention recognizes "that the level of a child's participation in decisions must be appropriate to the child's level of maturity. Children's ability to form and express their opinions develops with age and most adults will naturally give the views of teenagers' greater weight than those of a pre-schooler, whether in family, legal or administrative decisions" (cited in WHEC, 2011).

In the modern legal sense, marriage is a sacred relation in which two adults are bound with each other. It is made legal when the couple share their vows before witnesses and a clergy or a person with legal authority to join couples. A marital relationship usually involves some kind of contract, either written or verbal (as specified by tradition) which defines the partners' rights and obligations to each other, to any children they may have, and to their relatives. In most contemporary societies, marriage is certified by the government. In addition to being a personal relationship between two people, marriage is one of society's most important and basic institutions. Marriage and family serve as tools for ensuring social reproduction. Social reproduction includes providing food, clothing, and shelter for family members; raising and socializing children; and caring for the sick and elderly (Bala, 2003). In families and societies in which wealth, property, or a hereditary title is to be passed on from one generation to the next, inheritance and the production of legitimate heirs is a prime concern in marriage. However, in contemporary industrialized societies, marriage functions less as a social institution and more as a source of intimacy for the individuals involved.

Marriage is commonly defined as a partnership between two members of opposite sex known as husband and wife. However, scholars who study human culture and society disagree on whether marriage can be universally defined. The usual roles and responsibilities of the husband and wife include living together, having sexual relations only with one another, sharing economic resources, shared spiritual responsibility and being recognized as the parents of their children (Oyedepo, 1994). However, unconventional forms of marriage that do not include these elements do exist. For example, scholars have studied several cultural groups in Africa and India in which husbands and wives do not live together. Instead, each spouse remains in his or her original home, and the husband is a "visitor" with sexual rights. Committed relationships between homosexuals and lesbians (individuals with a sexual orientation toward people of the same sex) also challenge former previously accepted conventional definitions of marriage. Marriage is a potency of as an indissoluble bond between man and woman has both scriptural sanction and societal endorsement (Otonti, 1993). Throughout the world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life, when a marriage partner is imposed on a life of an individual, such a one may not be inclined to celebrate.

Early marriage is one of the ills that have eaten deep into the marrows of the third world countries, Nigeria is not an exception. Early child marriage means that a girl or boy's childhood is cut short and their fundamental rights are compromised. This has become a societal problem that can hardly be overlooked by parents, counsellors and other scholars (Azuma, 2001). Most often than not most people get married for the wrong reasons, some are carried away by the fantasies, illusions and material wealth, other get married due to unwanted pregnancies, others due to parental pressure and family background. Thus whatever be the case when two young people either an elderly man and a younger girl who are unprepared physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually gets married, their chances of having a healthy and long lasting marriage drops significantly.

There are several factors that influences or drive parents towards giving out of their child to early marriage these factors include among others the following: Materialism/poverty, the need to protect the girl, culture of that society etc.

2. THE CONCEPT OF EARLY MARRIAGE

According to Article 1 of the Convention on the Right of the Child, a child is any human being younger than 18 years old. While child marriage affects both sexes, girls are disproportionately affected as they are the majority of the victims. Their overall development is compromised, leaving them socially isolated with little education, skills and opportunities for employment and self-realisation. This leaves child brides more vulnerable to poverty, a consequence of child marriage as well as a cause. Child marriage is now widely recognised as a violation of children's rights, a direct form of discrimination against the girl child who as a result of the practice is often deprived of her basic rights to health, education, development and equality. Tradition, religion and poverty continue to fuel the practice of child marriage, despite its strong association with adverse reproductive health outcomes and the lack of education of girls.

Early marriage usually refers to two separate social phenomena which are practiced in some societies. The first and most widespread practice is that of marrying a young child (generally defined as under the age of eighteen) to an adult. Due to women's shorter reproductive life period (relative to men's), the practice of early marriage tends to be of young girls to fully grown men. The second practice is a form of arranged marriage, in which the parents of two children from different families arrange a future marriage. In this practice, the individuals who become betrothed often do not meet one another until the wedding ceremony, which occurs when they are both considered to be of a marriageable age. Although early marriages were not seen as improper in historical context as individuals were considered to be matured at an earlier age than in the modern West, an increase in the advocacy of human rights, whether as women's rights or as children's rights, has caused the traditions of early marriage to decrease greatly; it has been considered unfair and dangerous for the girls. Early marriages may have many purposes; the aristocracy of some cultures tends to use early marriage among different factions or states as a method to secure political ties between them. For example, the son or daughter of the royal family of a weaker power would sometimes be arranged to marry into the royal family of a stronger neighbouring power, thus preventing being taken over. In the lower classes, if they were fortunate, families could use early marriages as a means to gain financial ties with wealthier people, and to ensure their successions.

In child betrothals, a child's parents arrange a match with the parents of a child from another family (social standing, wealth and expected education all play a part), thus unilaterally determining the child's future at a young age. It is believed that, by adherents that physical attraction is not a suitable foundation upon which to build a marriage and a family. A separate consideration is the age at which the wedding, as opposed to the engagement, takes place. Families are able to cement political and/or financial ties by coercing their children marry. The betrothal is considered a binding contract upon the families and the children. The breaking of a betrothal can have serious consequences both for the families and for the betrothed individuals themselves.

3. FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage arises due to several reasons including economic and social status of families; Religious belief; Gender bias that promotes early marriage of girls; Lack of education; Myths and misconceptions about marriage; Communal pressures; and, the false belief in family expansion. Above all, two main factors are more prevalent in Nigeria – poverty and culture/religion. Where poverty is acute as it is in some parts of Nigeria, young girls are regarded as an economic burden and her marriage to a much older – sometimes even elderly – man, is a family survival strategy, and may even be seen as in her interests. In traditional societies in Sub-Saharan Africa, the bride's family may receive cattle from the groom, or the

groom's family, as the bride price for their daughter. In Nigeria, which is currently facing economic difficulties and political instability, age at marriage has barely risen, and in the northern Nigeria, the average age has fallen since 1990. Men are postponing marriage because of lack of resources, and parents have become anxious about the danger of their daughters becoming pregnant outside marriage. Thus any early opportunity for marriage may be seized upon.

Early marriage in many tribes is looked at as a way of protecting the girl, thus the wife is 'protected', or placed firmly under male control; that she is submissive to her husband and works hard for her in-laws' household; that the children she bears are thus legitimate; and that bonds of affection between couples do not undermine the family unit. Parents may genuinely feel that their daughter will be better off and safer with a regular male guardian.

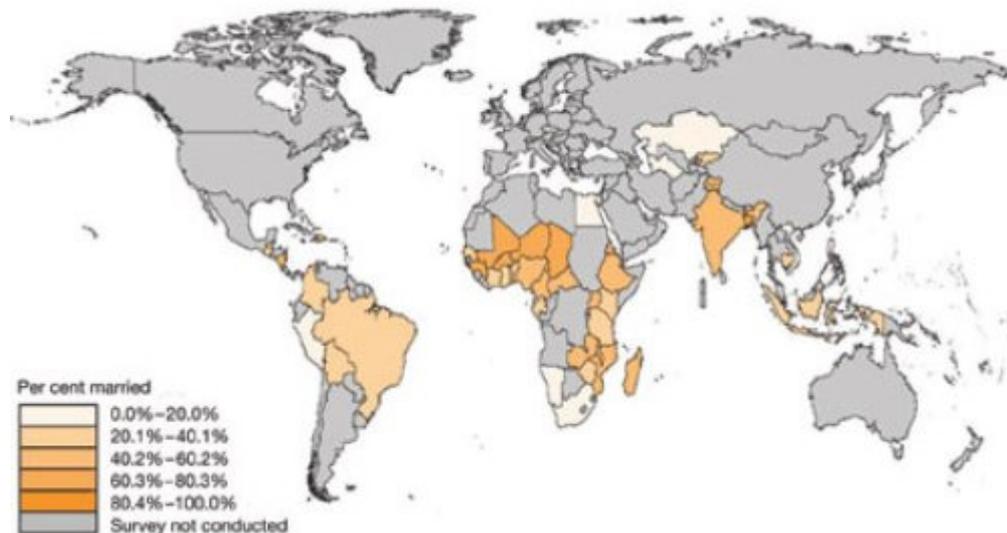


Fig 1: The map shows the countries in the world where child marriage is practiced. *Source:* UNFPA and UNICEF, 2005, Child Marriage Fact Sheet, <http://www.unfpa.org/>

According to the data reflected in fig. 1 above, children are being forced into marriage, although the data did not show the extent of the problems globally, it seems to indicate that the problem is concentrated in Asia and Africa. The source of the data also predicted that “100 million girls are expected to marry in the next decade”. The UNICEF (2005) also “estimated that 42 per cent of girls are married before the age of 18 and in some African countries the figure is much higher, such as in Niger where there is a 76 percent incidence of child marriage. The age at which children are married also varies between countries but marriage before the age of 15 is not uncommon and in some areas of West Africa and in Ethiopia, girls are sometimes married as early as age 7”.

4. ASSOCIATED PROBLEMS

The couples whose marriage was contracted at a very early stage of growth and development experience numerous problems. As earlier mentioned child marriage is also indicative of the levels of development of a region and country and is generally conducted between very young girls and older men. In many parts of the world child marriage is a gratification for overcoming the family deficient finances in order to cope with social needs. Amongst several problems of child are the following: Psychological and emotional trauma; Deprivation of early childhood and adolescent freedom; Deprivation of personal development; Forced puberty caused by sexual demands; Loss of paternal and maternal bond; Emotion loss caused by dissociation from siblings; Denial of personal development and education; Early

pregnancy, childbearing responsibilities and mental exhaustion; Danger of sexually transmitted diseases; Victim of domestic violence and associated problem of battery in polygamous marriage. These problems are explored further in section 5 of this paper.

Though the respective Governments and society is doing much to abolish child marriage through campaigns, laws, policies and individual support of people, it is still a far reaching dream for young girls who are still repeatedly forced into such liaisons. Early marriages have stretched far and wide through time and countries and finally reached America as well where children in their mid-teens are taking independent steps of tying the knot with their partners. Most child marriages are considered to be forced which is true but children entering into an early marriage out of choice should also be warned of various personal and health issues that can complicate their lives forever.

In many traditional societies, the idea of an adolescent period between puberty and adulthood is alien. A girl who menstruates can bear a child, and is therefore 'a woman'. This sits awkwardly with the fact that the Convention on the Rights of the Child covers everyone up to age 18 and regards childhood as a process of development – one that does not end with a definitive physical maturity marker (UNICEF, 2007). In some societies, the independent sense of self that a girl may develop during adolescence is seen as undesirable. While women may be revered in such societies, they are also required to be subservient to the wishes of fathers, husbands, and sons – for their own protective guard. It follows that if they are not, they deserve retribution; in Kenya for example, violence against disobedient wives is widely sanctioned. In many societies, a girl is raised to show the self-control and deference to men that will be expected of her throughout life. By the age of five, a girl in rural Pakistan has learnt to 'go outside' as little as possible, and adopt 'an attitude of care and service towards men.

4.1 EARLY MARRIAGE IN NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA

The Ikwerre tribe in Rivers State, like other hinterland neighbours, for example the Igbo groups were able to develop through exogamous marriages "an intricate mesh of personal relationships which bound one village group with several others", as Aderibigbe (1965) puts it. The labour needs of the Ikwerre who were predominantly agricultural communities made the marriage institution to function as a means of labour recruitment as more wives enhanced procreation and also served as work force in the arduous business of planting, tending and harvesting of crops. Wives who had a farming background were particularly cherished and looked for within and outside the ethnic group (Sam, 1993) The reciprocal links imposed by inter-ethnic marriages particularly with the Igbo, the Kalabari and Okrika groups guaranteed the stability and peace of the affected communities up till recent times when certain centrifugal forces such as ethnicity, power politics and personal interests have combined to whittle down and at times destroy time honoured cordial relationships emanating from marriage pacts. The typical Ikwerre citizen values his matrilineal connections highly. He may not be entitled to any inheritance of property or title in his mother's home; but his person there is virtually inviolate being a cherished child of the daughter of the land. This institution which is known as *rimene* is a factor promoting harmony or equilibrium between the affected parties.

In Ikwerre-land for the most part, offspring of persons not legally married suffer some disabilities in terms of access to ancestral stools and inheritance of property (Otonti, 1993). In relation to inter-group contacts, what makes the marriage institution so pertinent is the most important rule of exogamy which forbids a man to marry a woman from the same group or kindred. Social anthropologists recognize marriage as a centripetal factor as it promotes harmony between the parties involved through the kinship it creates. Onwuejeogwu (1975, 1992) rightly notes that "kinship cannot sustain itself without marriage".

In earlier times, parents had little role to play when it comes to marriage of their child as culture and tradition were highly upheld and fear of going contrary to the sacred tradition

abounds among its people (Otonti, 1993). Early marriage was on the high side between the age of 14 - 18 this is because farming was their major preoccupation, this therefore implies that population growth was a major determinant to the wealth a family can acquire through farming. A child of age 14 – 18 is considered ripe by tradition, thus parents cannot refuse a credible suitor who asks for her hands in marriage but to allow for tradition to take its course otherwise, the family will be stigmatized. In contrast, present day situation in many tribes in the Niger Delta, parents play more role in the marriage of their child as the effect of tradition is fading away gradually due to the outbreak of Christianity, education and urbanization (Gbanador, 1999). Holding tradition constants other factor such as economic hardship no account for the high rise in child marriage.

Aborosin, Ndiku and Peter (2002) confirmed that Obio Akpor, Okirika and Ahoada (three sub-urban communities in Rivers State, a state in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria) respectively engage in early marriage in the 1960's and 70's, marriage during this period for especially girl child was contracted between 14 and 17 years while the boy child were involved in marriage from the ages of 20 and above. Any girl who is still unmarried before the age of 18 and above is considered wayward. According to the study, early marriage during this period was as a result of the fact that less priority and importance was placed in female child education.

5. PHYSICAL, DEVELOPMENTAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Despite the prevalence of child marriage in Nigeria contrary to various international human rights laws and Convention; there is the lack of will to enforce the laws hence, the perverse nature of the consequences of child/early marriages. These consequences and implications are summarized hereinafter:

5.1 PHYSICAL CONSEQUENCES

When a child bride is married she is likely to be forced into sexual activity with her husband, and at an age where the bride is not physically and sexually mature this has severe health consequences. Child brides are likely to become pregnant at an early age and there is a strong correlation between the age of a mother and maternal mortality. Girls aged 10-14 are five times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than women aged 20-24 and girls aged 15-19 are twice as likely to die. Young mothers face higher risks during pregnancies including complications such as heavy bleeding, fistula, infection, Anaemia, and Eclampsia which contribute to higher mortality rates of both mother and child. At a young age a girl has not developed fully and her body may strain under the effort of childbirth, which can result in obstructed labour and obstetric fistula.

Obstetric fistula can also be caused by the early sexual relations associated with early marriage, which take place sometimes even before menarche. Good prenatal care reduces the risk of childbirth complications, but in many instances, due to the limited autonomy or freedom of movement, young wives are not able to negotiate access to health care. They may be unable to access health services because of distance, fear, expense or the need for permission from a spouse or in-laws. These barriers aggravate the risks of maternal complications and mortality for pregnant adolescents.

Child brides may also suffer vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Being young and female in Africa is a major risk factor for infection and young girls are being infected at a considerably disproportional rate to that of boys. Whilst early marriages are sometimes seen by parents as a mechanism for protecting their daughters from HIV/AIDS, future husbands may already be infected from previous sexual encounters; a risk which is particularly acute for girls with older husbands. The age disparity between a child bride and her husband, in addition to her low economic autonomy, further increases a girl's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. It exacerbates the

abilities of girls and women to make and negotiate sexual decisions, including whether or not to engage in sexual activity, issues relating to the use of contraception and condoms for protecting against HIV infection, and also their ability to demand fidelity from their husbands.

There is also a clear link between Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early child marriages. Communities who practice FGM are also more likely to practice Early marriages and in some FGM practicing communities FGM is carried out at puberty and then marriages are arranged immediately afterwards. It is also common in FGM practicing communities for a man to refuse to marry a girl or a woman who has not undergone FGM, or to demand that FGM is carried out before marriage.

5.2 DEVELOPMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Early marriage also has considerable implications for the social development of child brides, in terms of low levels of education, poor health and lack of agency and personal autonomy. The Forum on Marriage and the Rights of Women and Girls explains that 'where these elements are linked with gender inequities and biases for the majority of young girls their socialization which grooms them to be mothers and submissive wives, limits their development to only reproductive roles . Whilst girls in Africa are already less likely to go to attend school than boys, particularly in poorer households, the non-education of the girl child is a problem compounded by Early marriage, with studies showing a strong correlation between a woman's age at marriage and the level of education she achieves . Large numbers of the girls who drop out of school do so because of early marriage, leaving many women who married early illiterate. Early marriage plans can also discourage a girl's parent from educating their daughters because they believe that a formal education will only benefit her future family in law.

The lack of education also means that young brides often lack knowledge about sexual relations, their bodies and reproduction, exacerbated by the cultural silence surrounding these subjects. This denies the girl the ability to make informed decisions about sexual relations, planning a family, and her health, yet another example of their lives in which they have no control. The cyclical nature of early marriage results in a likely low level of education and life skills, increased vulnerability to abuse and poor health, and therefore acute poverty.

5.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

The loss of adolescence, the forced sexual relations, and the denial of freedom and personal development attendant on early marriage have profound psychosocial, social and emotional consequences. It is a huge responsibility for a young girl to become a wife and mother and because girls, do not adequately prepare for these roles this heavy burden has a serious impact on their psychological welfare, their perceptions of themselves and also their relationship.

Women who marry early are more likely to suffer abuse and violence, with inevitable psychological as well as physical consequences. Studies indicate that women who marry at young ages are more likely to believe that it is sometimes acceptable for a husband to beat his wife, and are therefore more likely to experience domestic violence themselves. Violent behaviour can take the form of physical harm, psychological attacks, threatening behaviour and forced sexual acts including rape. Abuse is sometimes perpetrated by the husband's family as well as the husband himself, and the girls that enter families as a bride often become domestic slaves for the in-laws. Early marriage has also been linked to wife abandonment and increased levels of divorce or separation and child brides also face the risk of being widowed by their husbands who are often considerably older. In these instances the wife is likely to suffer additional discrimination as in many cultures divorced, abandoned or widowed women suffer a loss of status, and may be ostracized by society and denied property rights.

5.4 ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND REPRODUCTION

The notion of good reproductive health covers all aspects of the reproduction process – including a satisfying and safe experience of sexual relations, the capability to reproduce, and the freedom to decide if and when to bear a child. The right not to engage in sexual relations and the right to exercise control over reproduction may both be violated by early marriage.

The risks of early pregnancy and childbirth are well documented: increased risk of dying, increased risk of premature labour, complications during delivery, low birth-weight, and a higher chance that the newborn will not survive. Pregnancy-related deaths are the leading cause of mortality for 15-19 year-old girls (married and unmarried) worldwide. Mothers in this age group face a 20 to 200 percent greater chance of dying in pregnancy than women aged 20 to 24. Those under age 15 are five times as likely to die as women in their twenties. The main causes are haemorrhage, sepsis, preeclampsia/ eclampsia and obstructed labour. Unsafe abortion is the other major risk for teenage women – most of those affected are unmarried.¹¹⁰ Some specific local studies show worse outcomes for the very young mother: in Zaria, Nigeria, maternal mortality among women younger than 16 was found to be six times higher than for women aged 20-24, and similar findings have been reported from Cameroon and Ethiopia.¹¹¹ For every woman who dies in childbirth, 30 more suffer injuries, infections and disabilities, which usually go untreated and some of which are lifelong. Part of this heavy toll has more to do with poor socio-economic status and lack of ante-natal and obstetric care than physical maturity alone. However, physical immaturity is the key risk for the under 15s.

The high rates of Vesico-Vaginal Fistula (VVF) are clearly identified with marriage and childbearing in the 10-15 year-old age group; in one study in Niger, 88 percent of women with fistula were in this age group at marriage.¹¹³ Mothers whose pelvis and birth canal are not fully developed often endure very prolonged labour. Unless the mother receives emergency obstetric care, relentless pressure from the baby's skull can damage the birth canal, causing breakages in the wall, allowing uncontrollable leakage from the bladder into the vagina. The same problem may also occur in relation to the rectum, with leakage of faeces (recto-vaginal fistulas or RVF). Fistula conditions are permanent without surgical intervention to re-seal the tissues; such intervention may not be sought or may be hard to access. The prevalence of VVF/RVF is not fully known, but WHO estimates that there are two million women living with fistulas and an additional 50,000-100,000 new cases every year, many of which go untreated. A girl with the condition is usually ostracized as unclean, and is often divorced. In Nigeria, where the condition affects around 150,000 women, 80-90 per cent of wives with VVF divorce by their husbands; in Niger Republic, VVF is the reason for 63.3 per cent of all divorces.

5.5 THE DENIAL OF EDUCATION

Early marriage inevitably denies children of school age their right to the education they need for their personal development, their preparation for adulthood, and their effective contribution to the future well-being of their family and society. Indeed, married girls who would like to continue schooling may be both practical and legally excluded from doing so. The interaction between the number of years of a girl's schooling and the postponement of marriage is firmly established by demographic and fertility studies. On average, women with seven or more years of education marry four years later and have 2.2 fewer children than those with no education. However, the precise nature of the interaction between education and marriage is not always evident. Are girls withdrawn from school to marry, or is lack of schooling for girls part of the pattern of traditional expectations and roles?

The situation in Bangladesh, however, is clear – a girl will be withdrawn from school if a good marriage prospect arises. DHS data also show a clear link in some other countries, including Nepal, Kazakhstan and Indonesia. Although attitudes towards the education of girls

have begun to change even in traditional societies, many parents still believe that investment in a girl's education is wasted when she is simply going to be married and work in another household. The costs of the investment in education reinforce the impetus towards the girl's withdrawal from school. In rural areas, secondary education often means that a girl must leave home to live in a school dormitory. Parents fear that this may expose her to risks including premarital sex and pregnancy. In Northern Nigeria, for example, girls are often kept out of school for this very reason. Even where girls can live at home while attending school, fears about their possible sexual activity, about sexual harassment, or about insecurity on the journey to and from school, discourage their attendance.

5.6 VIOLENCE AND ABANDONMENT

Many young girls are victims of prolonged domestic violence, but feel unable to leave the marriage because of economic pressures, lack of family support and other social circumstances. If a woman did feel able to challenge the situation, it often took her years to do so. If this is happening in a society where forced marriage is not the norm, it is safe to assume that such a challenge is far less likely from a girl in an environment where early and forced marriages are commonplace. Most available information on violent abuse is anecdotal, consisting of interviews with girls who have suffered trauma as a result of their marriages. However, DHS data from Egypt has found that 29 percent of married adolescents have been beaten by their husband (or husband and others), and of these 41 per cent have been beaten during pregnancy. Some girls in brutal marriages become desperate enough to run away. Those who do so, and those who choose a marriage partner against the wishes of their parents, may be punished, or even killed by their family.

Early marriage is often linked to wife abandonment, as shown by its association with divorce and separation. Violent behaviour towards a wife, including coercive sex, plays a major role in marital breakdown. In Java, it has been found that girls who marry early are three times more likely to be divorced than those married later. Divorce or abandonment often plunges a woman into poverty, as she usually assumes sole responsibility for dependent children. If she married young, is under-educated and has few income-generating skills, her poverty may be acute. Studies of young mothers in Latin America and the Caribbean found that they are more likely to be disadvantaged later in life; in Mexico they are six times more likely to be living in poverty than those who postponed childbearing. Thus early marriage contributes to the 'feminization of poverty' and its resulting impact on children (UNICEF, 2008).

6. CONCLUSION

Early child marriage is mostly driven by several factors that influences or drive parents towards giving out of their child to early marriage these factors include among others the following: poverty, the need to protect the girl (against promiscuity, unwanted pregnancy, and having children out of wedlock), the culture of that society etc. Whatever the reasons for early child marriage, everyone deserves the right to choose his or her partner.

The eradication of serious abuse of children in the name of culture, religion, tradition and to avert poverty should be the proper objective of any government, and should be pursued with real vigour. But the question is how? How should that objective be achieved? Even when the government is willing to address and tackle the issue, its policies would not achieve much in the face of poor data collection, and the lack of commitments by the traditionalists that are bent on the continuity of native and religious rites which causes the discrimination against women and young girls. What is needed is a response which will drive progress and make things tangibly better for the future, rather than just enacting laws and ratifying international

conventions and Treaties promising to curb child neglect, child abuse and other illicit activities against children especially young girls.

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