

**SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS RESPONSIBLE
FOR GIRL CHILD MARRIAGE IN SOKOTO
SOUTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT,
SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA.**

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Abstract

The study examined the socio-cultural factors responsible for girl child marriage in Sokoto South Senatorial District, Sokoto State, Nigeria. Since independent different laws are established including Child Rights Acts in Nigeria in order to protect the rights and ensure proper upbringing of children in the country. Despite the effort made, the practice of girl child marriage still continues in northern parts of the country. The practice hindered the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for eradicating poverty. The paper adopts qualitative method, multistage sampling method was adopted and seven (7) districts of Bodinga Local Government Area, Sokoto State, Nigeria. Also, twenty-one (21) girl child and six (6) Parents and Traditional rulers were selected as the population of the study in order to determine practice of early girl child marriage in the study area. Findings of the study revealed that poverty, cultural norm practice, and low level of education, religious reasons are factors responsible for early girl-child marriage. Finding also revealed that, girl-child marriage become disastrous to the victims as it leads to health, economic and psychological challenges. Many of the victims become dropped out because they are forced to get married against their wish. The study therefore recommends that frequent seminar on the challenges of girl child marriage should be organize by the government at all level, for the teachers, parents, community and religious leaders so as to transform the knowledge to young once to be

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comes aware of the implication of early girl child marriage. This will help in addressing the challenges caused by girl-child marriage in the country.

Key Words: Culture, Girl Child, Early Marriage, Implication, Sexual abuse.

Introduction

Prior to pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial era in Nigeria, more specifically in the northern part, the practice of girl child marriage is still spreading. Despite the policies aimed at eliminating it in Nigeria, early marriage is a widespread practice in northern part Nigeria. In most parts of northern Nigeria, it is permissible to marry a child as young as the age of 9 and sexual relations with her is postponed until attained puberty. But in all cases, the child brides are forced into sexual intercourse with their spouses as soon as they are married resulting in early pregnancy and resulting into vesico vaginal fistula (VVF) obstetric fistula, when such girls give birth eventually at very tender ages. This practice is certainly violence to the girl-child and it is prevalent in African countries (Nigeria) as well. Child marriage is sometimes called Early marriage and affect children who are young. Ironically some young girls reach puberty age in the houses of their husbands. Violence occurs when the child refuses sex and ends up being pregnant at early age (Chukwuemeka, Ugwu & Radietu, 2018).

Similarly, there is variation between and within countries. For example, Niger has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world at 76%, followed by the Central African Republic at 68% and Chad at 67%. Notably, the prevalence of child marriage below the age of fifteen is also very high at 14% for Africa, with Chad. Girl-child marriage (usually before age of eighteen) differs from regions and nations. For instance, the prevalence of child marriage in West and Central Africa is 41% four out of ten girls and young women (constituting nearly 60 million) were married before the age of eighteen (UNFPA and UNICEF 2018). As the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria is ranked eleventh among twenty countries in the world with the highest prevalence of child marriage (United Nations 2018). Although Nigeria is considered to have one of the highest numbers of child brides in Africa, with an estimated twenty-two million child brides accounting for 40% of all child brides in Africa (UNFPA and UNICEF 2018; Nzenwat 2018).

Kahinde, Oluwayomi, Adewumi and Jamila, (2023) conducted research on the causes and challenges of girl-child marriage in north western Nigeria. The paper discovered that poverty, cultural practices and religious influence contributes to early girl-child marriage in northern Nigeria. This affects the wellbeing of the girl-child at the matrimonial home. Against this background, the paper investigates the factors responsible for girl-child marriage practice in Sokoto South Senatorial District, Sokoto State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Research Problem

According to UNICEF (2021), the early girl child marriage is an oldest social phenomenon that have persisted spreading and surviving up to date (Contemporary Society). The most common contemporary social problem leading to an early girl child marriage in some places such as northern Nigeria is Family poverty, the inability to cover adequately family's basic needs of living like, the cost of housing, clothing, education, health care, as a result of insufficient income and/or access to basic social services.

The Nigeria Demographic Health Survey NDHS (2018) reported reduction in the practice of girl-child marriage. For example, the percentage of women marrying before the age of eighteen has declined from 48% to 43%, with the percentage of women marrying before the age of fifteen declining from 12% to 8%. A global reduction in the prevalence of child marriage in the last decade from one in four girls approximately one in five today. Despite the achievement, it is disturbing that twelve million girls every year still get married before the age of eighteen (UNICEF 2021)

The negative side of early marriage in Nigeria is that, poverty become rampant as parents are engrossed in day-to-day life demands. Poor families may be forced to adopt strategies jeopardizing the future of children, such as poor nutritious, postponing health-related care owing to expenses or taking children out of school so that they can contribute to the family income. Consequently, many children living in low-income households experience academic and behavioral problems. Poverty is considered to be the responsible factor that influence parents to give out their daughter for marriage in order to receive some benefit. Against this background, the

paper investigates the factors responsible for girl-child marriage practice in Sokoto South Senatorial District, Sokoto State, Nigeria.

Research objectives

The study provided explanations on the factors responsible for girl child marriage in Sokoto South Senatorial District, Sokoto State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

1. To find out whether severe poverty is a factor responsible for girl child marriage in Sokoto State.
2. To investigate if traditional/cultural contributes to girl child marriage in Sokoto State.
3. To find out if low level of education contributes to girl child marriage in Sokoto State.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework.

In Nigeria, section 277 of the Child Rights Act (2003) defines a child as a person under the age of eighteen years. Shehu (2019) added that, a child is any young person with 18 years and below. However, a child does not align to an easy definition. This is because the person considered to be a child in one context may not be a child in another. Kahinde, Oluwayomi, Adewumi and Jamila, (2023) define child marriage, also known as early marriage, is “a marriage carried out below the age of eighteen years. Hence, before a girl is physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing” (UNICEF 2021). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) states that any betrothal or marriage of a child should not have any legal status. The Committee that monitors this convention states in 21 (Article 16(2) that the minimum age for marriage for both male and female should be 18 years, the age when “they have attained full maturity and capacity to act”. Most early marriages are arranged and based on the consent of parents and often fail to ensure the best interests of the girl child (Chukwuemeke 2018).

However, child marriage means forced marriage, is a condition in which parents decided to marry their daughter within “in-kinship group or out

kinship group” in order to accomplish cultural or economic objectives. In Nigeria, by the virtue of S29 (4)(1), 'full age' means the age of eighteen years and above' while the Child Rights Act states that the age of marriage shall be 18 years.

Theoretical Framework

This paper used radical feminist theory as a theoretical explanation in the study. Radical feminist movement emerged in the 1960s by the Kate Millet, Andrea Dworkin, Catherine Mackinno, Valerie Solanas and Alice Walker. Radical feminist theory was propounded on the principle of Marxism. Radical feminism beliefs are based on the idea that the main cause of women's oppression originates from social roles and social institution or institutional structure being constructed from male supremacy and patriarchy. According to Valeric Bryson (1999), radical feminist sees women as an oppressed group who had to struggle for their own liberation against their oppression that is against men. Pamela Abbott, Claire Wallace and Melissa Tyler (2005), argued that radical feminism is concerned with women's right rather than gender equality, it does not seek to minimize the differences between men and women, but instead believes that there is female or feminine nature that has been concealed or distorted and devalued. Radical feminism seeks to abolish the patriarchy and to liberate unjust treatment against women in the society. Radical feminists reacted on why women have been oppressed and unjustly treated in the society (Lobber, 1990).

Evans (1995) also conceived, Radical feminism as the study of women's daily lives such as house work, serving men's, emotional and sexual needs, pregnancy and child birth. They disregard patriarchy and women's exploitation found both in private and public sectors. The theory argued that patriarchy is very hard to eradicate because of its belief that women are inferior. Radical feminism blames male for all problems in the society such as war, poverty, exploitation, subjugation, maltreating, wife battering, rape, and violence against women. Men have the potential to exercise influence against women. Based on the application to the study, radical feminism has significant relation in the examination of girl child marriage mostly

influenced and enforced by the parents. Girl child's rights are violated educationally, socially, psychologically, emotionally, economically, physically and religiously.

Factors Responsible for Girl-Child Marriage

There are many factors responsible for girl-child marriage in Nigeria. This includes:

Severe Poverty among Parents

Suyanto et'al (2023) observed that, limited economic resources and low level of education are related to early marriage and also inseparable from lifestyle development, prevailing discourses, and girls' wish to get free from the constraints of their own parents. Not all girls who are married young have a better socioeconomic condition than before marriage. Parents of poor families who marry off their daughters in hopes that their daughters will become free of poverty often turn out to fall even more deeply into poverty after their daughters' marriage. Instead, they the burdens of their daughters and the life needs. Many girls who are married still live with their parents as they are yet to own a house (Biswas, Khan and Kabir, 2019; Chauhan et al., 2020). In Nigeria, poverty is a social problem as considerable number of the population is affected by this scourge. For example, an estimate by World Bank indicates that over 45% of the country's population live below the poverty level and about two third (2/3) of this group are extremely poor (Shehu, 2019).

Cultural Practice and Traditional Beliefs

Early marriage is traditional started from the progenitors and also part of the cultural norms practice in some of the societies in the northern region of Nigeria.

Girls who have grown up in communities where the majority of their peers and family members are married early are, to some extent, encouraged to do the same, girls are not only victims of what is considered a counterproductive cultural practice for their futures, but also a reflection of the limited choices they have. For Kooijs cited in Suyanto et'al (2023),

expressed that limited premarital decision-making, poor level of education, and wrong cultural backdrop all take girls unknowingly into married lives, robbing them of their time as children. Kahinde et'al (2023), added that, Traditional understandings of gender roles still dominate the early marriage partners.

Low Level of Education

In some region, girls married at age 16-17 is common. In some of the societies in the region, the 20s is late for girls to marry. Girls who have completed elementary education or have pursued religious education from (Islamic boarding/day school) are usually married off quickly or get married to evade inappropriate rumors. Unlike urban societies in which women usually start marriage when they are older than 22 years, in the rural areas in some region, women who marry after aged 20 will be labeled women as spinsters. Across the research location, it was normal for girls who had graduated from elementary school or junior high school to have the idea of marriage as soon as possible; they are considered ready to assume the role of housewife. In rural areas, the interest of girls in pursuing education at the university level was generally low, most parents in villages were more inclined to marrying off their daughters as soon it was considered realistic(Suyanto et'al 2023).

Child Rights Act in Nigeria

Section 29(4)(a) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), provided that 'full age' means the age of eighteen years and above. Section 18 of the Marriage Act states that if either a party to an intended marriage, not being a widower or widow, is under twenty-one years of age, the written consent of the father, or if he be dead or of unsound mind or absent in Nigeria, of the mother..., must be produced and annexed to such affidavit as aforesaid before a license can be granted or a certificate (Marriage Certificate) issued. The Matrimonial Causes Act, 2004, S3 (1)(e), provides that a party to a marriage must not be an infant. He/she must be mature enough for marriage.

n the Northern States of Borno, Benue, Kwara, Sokoto, Kano, Kaduna, Kebbi, Katsina, Gombe, Yobe, Jigawa, and Zamfara, the marriageable age for girls has been fixed by various declarations of Marriage law and Custom Orders (NDHS 2018). Hence, Kwara 13 years, Idoma and Tiv in Benue, 12 years, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto 18 years, but with exception that muslim child can married from 14 years and above under Islamic law. Jigawa State signed the Child Right Act bill into law on December 22, 2021 (UNICEF 2021), but Jigawa State did not adopt eighteen years (18 years) as the age of maturity for marriage. Instead, it determined the childhood age of puberty because it is believed to be controversial to the predominant culture and religion (Abubakar 2021). Zamfara, on the other hand, passed the Child Protection Bill into law on August 16, 2022, without mentioning the age of marriage (Nwannah 2022). However, the Kano State Government is yet to assent to the Child Rights Act. The Kano State government commented, in January 2020, that it had forwarded the bill to the State House of Assembly (Odogwu 2020). As of May 28, 2022, the Kano State government promised the "Child Rights Act" would soon be enacted (Bello 2022). This decision implies that the Child Rights Protection Bill defines a child as someone below eighteen, Muslim children below eighteen can still marry due to the supremacy accorded to Sharia law over the Child Rights Bill. This indicated that, stopping the girl-child marriage practice in Northern Nigeria will be difficult, especially in Northwest Nigeria, where the practice becomes naturally promulgated.

Material and Methods

The study was conducted in Bodinga Local Government as one the seven (7) Local Government Areas Sokoto South Senatorial Districts of Sokoto State. Others include Dange-Shuni, Tureta, Yabo, Shagari, Tambuwal, and Kebbe Local Government respectively. Bodinga LGA was selected due to high rate of girl-child marriage in the state. The study was conducted in seven districts of Bodinga Local Government Area of Sokoto State Nigeria. Bodinga was created in 1957 with seven districts, surrounding the areas are towns and villages areas, The LGA has an area of 564km² and a population of 174,302 (NPC 2006). The current projected population is estimated at 241,384 (NPC, 2023). Most of the inhabitants speaks Hausa and Fulfulde languages. Islam is

commonly practiced in the area, civil and public service, farming and trading are the major occupations. The study adopted descriptive survey design, cross-sectional research design and a multistage sampling technique comprising simple random, snowball, and purposive sampling techniques. Bodinga LGA has seven districts. In the first stage, seven districts were selected using a simple random sampling. This include *Bodinga, Sifawa, Danchadi, Dingyadi, Bagarawa, Tulluwa and Badau*were selected for the study. In the second stage, three (3) victims of girl child marriage were chosen from each of the seven (7) selected districts for in-depth interview (IDI), three (3) traditional rulers and three (3) parents who married their daughter at early ages. For key informant interviews (KII) purposive sampling was used to identify the participants. A total of twenty-seven (27) participants were selected for the study area. Interviews were recorded on tapes, translated, transcribed, and arranged thematically.

Findings of the Study

In this section discussion has been made from the findings of the study based on the objectives that guided the study.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the respondents.

The descriptive data of the respondents on ages at first marriage were 18 and 19 years respectively, with a minimum age of fourteen (14) to eighteen (18) years old. Educational qualifications of the respondents revealed that, out of twenty-seven (27) respondents, nineteen (19) received both formal and informal education, while eight (8) had Islamic education respectively. However, all participants were purposively selected based on marital status.

Poverty as a Factor Responsible for Girl Child Marriage

This section discusses how poverty contributes to girl-child marriage.

In an in-depth interview with a young girl, age 14 on how severe poverty influenced her parents to married her revealed that:

Historically, as I had from our relatives, my husband took long times compensating our father before he shows interest for marrying me, unfortunately we came from poor socio-economic background facing a lot of

challenges of life more especially on basic necessities of life, i stand on my reasons such as the ages, education, child birth complication and vulnerable to abuse, hence, he rejected, saying that almost more than half of the survival strategies of his entire family(s) are assisted from him, beyond that he promised to help financially to settle all problems of marital activities finally, he said again, there is no option rather he prayed for many people like him to come. Therefore, to me, i remained a promiscuous daughter (IDI with Divorced, Bodinga, Sokoto State 2023).

Another in-depth interview with a young girl age 26 years, married at 16 years, SS 1 Drop-out, on how severe poverty pushes her parents to release her out for marriage revealed that:

I became a house wife accidentally, but my best ambition in life is to become a medical doctor. Unfortunately a rich successful business man saw me on my way to school and he followed me gradually asking one of our class room teacher from which family I came from, it's from there he has send his relatives for initial introduction, from that stage my parents accepted for the preparation of wedding ceremony, many things that distort and makes me emotionally distress is that, our parents revealed all our home secret telling him between our break-fast, lunch, and dinner is hard for we succeed in getting at least 2/3 in a day sometimes 1/3 in a day. Meaning that we slept with hungry occasionally, it's at that stage he scattered the family with bundle of money before he left our home, he took promise to provide all necessary things required for the success of marital events. Hence, "reverse is the case" from that period of married up to the time of his death, we experience many quarrels, misunderstanding, dispute, abuse, conflict and sometimes both we took unwanted or severe retaliation (IDI with Divorced, Bodinga, Sokoto State 2023).

In a key informant interview with a parent age 52 years, victim who married his daughter because of higher economic burden revealed that:

As a father, breed winner, great protector and superior leader at home, I suffered for long from social and economic challenges, under-go deep rooted social problem that can push me to commit crime unconsciously, I became hopeless and sometime behave abnormally as a result of poor economic situation that, I cannot cope with in which my son in-law have rendered favorable assistance to me were i cannot reject any request he solicited to me(KII a Parent, Bodinga, Sokoto State2023).

In a key informant interview with a traditional ruler, age 68 years with vast experience and witness many cases that lead to the collapse of early marriage revealed that:

From the time immemorial this type of early marriage do not last long, because, many parents respect materials wellbeing to marry their young child so that they benefit together, yet it generated conflict between wife and husband, parents and parents in-law, finally the 'deadly end' are divorce (KII a Traditional Leader, Bodinga, Sokoto State2023).

Cultural and Traditional Belief as Factors Responsible for Girl Child Marriage

This section presents how cultural practices become a factor to girl-child marriage. In an in-depth interview with a teenage girl, separated wife, age 21 years, married at 12 years whose her parents married her due to the cultural norm practice and conservative traditional belief system, revealed that:

Initially it was my sister that married my husband first before her dead. Then both our parents reach consensus secretly to remarried me with my deceased sister husband without my consent, in which i refused to accept

and the same time my deceased sister husband also rejected, from there, traditional influence started were both parents swoon that “if they are the pure biological parents of me and my husband”, this cultural arrangement must be done, but the greatest challenges at that time, am sexually incapacitated and it's the major issue raise from my blood mother and our parents said that, they made proper setting to the problem that is after marital ceremony are would always sleep in husband grandmother room, my own is to prepare food for him, sweep, clean, and worsh common appliances at home until I becomes sexually fit (mature) since, marriage is betrothally I have to care, rear, and socializes the blood son left by the deceased sister, hence many more misunderstanding between me and my husband is becoming complicated issues, finally our marriage ended with divorce and conflict of misunderstanding continues between my parents and his parents up to date(IDI with separated wife, Bodinga, Sokoto State2023).

In an in-depth interview conducted with an outcast prostitute girl age 24who ran away from her Parents home as a result of compulsory early married revealed that:

In our culture and tradition, we valued discipline, moral character, Obedient, and schooling as well as adequate social control, this is why my parents admitted me to school, it was during my studies that one of my relative decided to convinced my parents and his parents that he need blood marriage (kinship) with me, and it's the type of marriage, I hate physically and emotionally, my parents consulted me. I said no, therefore all our parents call my attention that, marriage ensure respect and protection against women and i remain on my reasons, to this they asked my brother to allowed me to continues with my education, but he logically pretended and rejected, as i

returned to school. Unknowingly, he consulted “**traditional healer**” for magic to ensure that both parents and bride accepted and things came in to reality, both parents accepted excluding me, it's at that stage another trouble emanated and i decided to move out of home where my interaction becomes strong with a home prostitute woman who accommodated me in her place, in which she develops my interest and influence me in to the business(IDI with an outcast prostitute girl, Bodinga, Sokoto State 2023).

In a key informant interview with a parent who age 62 on the implication of marrying a girl because of traditional beliefs and other cultural norms practice in their environment revealed that

At this era people should be able to distinguish and differentiate significantly between religion and culture. Today, many cultures are social ills and detrimental to the preservation and maintenance of harmonious society, because of culture and traditional ethics, many of my children rights has been violated such as giving them out for under- age marriage without their consenting agreement, this occurred with no reason but because of cultural norm practice and other materials possession that contributes to marital breakdown. I have married many more of my girls in that way but almost all of them are divorcee(KII with a parent, Bodinga, Sokoto State 2023).

In a key informant interview with a traditional ruler age 64 on the influence of cultural practices to girl-child marriage revealed that:

I am a traditional head ruler with a strong interest from our traditional heredity, culture, religion, artifact, and human friendship from both native and non-native person who develop interest to share things, or ideas with me. I normally encourage our people to marry their

daughter(s) at early age as a “HEAD”, sometimes we join our children as husband and wife without their consent at all, till they meet in their compound having experiencing enormous problems attached to it, i perceived to narrow my interest, yet unfortunately we are addicted to(KII with a Traditional Ruler, Bodinga, Sokoto State2023).

Low level of Education as a Factor Responsible for Girl Child Marriage

This section discusses how low level of education contributes to girl-child marriage. In an in-depth interview conducted with a young girl married dropped-out student, age 22, married at 16 years on the related key reasons why her parents remove her from school for marriage revealed that:

My father was a blacksmith in our village, I was among the fewer female students sent to a boarding secondary school after successful graduation from primary school, after three (3) years in secondary class, I started thinking and planning to study law in the university after my secondary education, from that stage my father makes arrangement to marry me with a one business man in our neighboring community. I told my father from my ambition and implication of missing it, he replied to me, i should thank “God” because his parents do not even carry him to primary school, only Qur'anic school attended in some few years before becoming adopted to his parents' business called “**blacksmith**”(IDI with a married Girl-Child, Bodinga, Sokoto State2023).

In an in-depth interview with another girl child lady married girl, age 24, married at 17 years whose her parents fought with head teacher during her wedding revealed that:

I can say naturally our “God” blessed me with high intelligent quotient (IQ), i took the first position in our class from primary one to six (1-6) and also whenever quiz or debate competition arise within or outside school i won the competition, it's for this reason our head teacher

pay attention to me and he ensure that, i proceeded to secondary education where i maintain same effort, when i was in SSI first term my father came back home from his place of business telling my mother that, he is going to marry me to a son of his market colleague, this process continues and my head teacher are not aware until the weeding day were he fight with my father and sent the case to the court, so that court will fight against my right(IDI with a married Girl-Child, Bodinga, Sokoto State2023).

In a key informant interview with a father, age 73, who refused to allow his girl child to attain any western education at all, revealed that:

I attended primary, secondary, and tertiary level of education where, I obtained my national certificate of education (NCE) and serves atDelta State in the southern part of Nigeria by then, as father i can only allowed my male child to pursue western education while female to for Islamic or Qur'anic Education, i discovered that women are physically emotionally weak as revealed from our religious holy book, today the way system of western education are going more especially on the issue of integration between teachers and students, or student and students, I strongly rejected the nature of relationship. I preferred to marry a girl at the period virginity before spinsterhood to avoid **"RUINED OF MIND"**. Marriage is the only solution that provide respect, protection and reduces the risk of being sexually active or harassed outside marriage home(KII with a father, age 73, Bodinga, Sokoto State, 2023).

In a key informant interview with a traditional ruler aged 65, who urge his people to send their children to school but they refused to answer his calls revealed that:

I preach them like a preacher to understand the value of education, this world is constantly changing, hence, they remain conservative they prefer to married their children from the first age of maturity more especially the girls, and the high number of illiteracy rate in the village are un-estimated(KII with Traditional Leader, age 65, Bodinga, Sokoto State, 2023).

Discussion of the Major Findings

Findings of the study revealed that poverty, cultural norms practice, and low level of education are factors responsible for girl-child marriage. Others include economic materials gains, sustaining basic necessities of life, reducing difficulties on the survival strategies, protection of girls to retain virginity(chastity), ensuring respect and protection on girl-child, retaining family lineage and kinship, preservation of virginity-hood against spinster-hood, and socio-cultural values, lack of parental interest on their children education (poor attitude to learning), crippling child ambition, as well using traditional healer to achieve a goal among other factors. This study strengthens an earlier study conducted by Suyanto, Sugihartati, Hidayat, Egalita and Mas'udah, (2023)who revealed that traditional understandings of gender roles still dominate the early marriage partners.

Findings also revealed that some girl-child brides were given out in early marriage with expectation that their prospective husbands could assist in supporting economic needs. This finding is consistent with the studies conducted by Kehinde, Oluwayomi, Adewumi and Jamila (2023)who observed that, limited economic resources and low level of education contributes to early marriage and also inseparable from lifestyle development. However, the influence of patriarchy on girl-child marriage cannot be ignored in Northern Nigeria. This study revealed that parents are the great protector and the decision-makers in given out a girl-child for marriage.

Findings shows that men impose their will on their daughters without their consent is rooted in values cherish and entrenched in patriarchy. The girl-

child experienced many challenges due to child marriage, ranging from magic, social, physical, and emotional challenges, as well as socio-economic burden, hence, some interviewees accepted forced marriage arrangements to protect their mothers from their own fathers' maltreatment. This is evident as most interviewees said they were given into marriage by their fathers against their wishes. Furthermore, the study reveals that girl-child marriage within a polygynous family structure experiences emotional trauma. Most participants had one or more co-wives reported of negative experiences within their matrimonial homes. Polygyny is prevalent in Sokoto State because most of the residents are Muslims, and Islam encourages polygyny. This finding corroborates with the work of NDHS (2018) describing Islam as the dominant religion in Sokoto State.

The study revealed that some respondents had lost their husbands, leading to economic burden for them to cope with feeding their children. Even some girl-child brides express difficulty sustaining themselves because their husbands do not allow them to work, this sometimes what attenuate their ability to exercise their potentiality and skills for human development. This finding supported the argument of radical feminist theory that pointed domination, exploitation and subjugation of women especially girl-child aids men in improving their economic status and satisfy their sexual instinct.

Conclusion

The study discovered that poverty, cultural norms practice, traditional beliefs, and low level of education are the root causes of early girl child marriage. All factors are interrelated and interdependent, not only economic reasons, but also involve sociocultural factors, poor education and patriarchal ideology to some extent influence early girl child marriage more especially the conservative societies in the rural areas. Early girl child marriage became harmful practice for girls not to have basic education as they abandon the pursuit of education and start early to rear children immediately, they enter into a husband's house. Indeed, early girl child marriage violates the Child Rights Acts in Nigeria, the violations of the rights of women in the society affect society as a whole.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Strong connection must be initiated between government and traditional rulers to raise awareness amongst people in the rural areas who practice early girl child marriage as a way of life. These people should be engaged in public orientation and incentive schemes to the parents, community leaders so as to understand the implications of early girl child marriage.
2. Government at all level should provide free education system (primary, secondary and tertiary level) for all citizens and encourage parents to send girls to school on time and keep them in school to have basic education.
3. Findings also revealed that early marriage threatens child's human rights, in other to protect child rights, the minimum of 18 years should be the basic minimum requirements of validity to every marriage across all culture in the country. The National Assembly should harmonize all laws irrespective of any culture necessary to deter girl child marriage in Nigeria.
4. Government at all level should provide adequate and sufficient entrepreneur skills for the girls to earn money and also continue their education while expanding their skill. This will give them ample opportunity to have available choice in life, and also serves as a strategy to delay marriage.
5. Frequent seminar on the contemporary issues of girl child marriage should be organize by the government at all level, for the teachers, parents, community and religious leaders so as to transform the knowledge to young once to be comes aware of the implication of early girl child marriage. This will help in addressing the challenges cause by girl-child marriage in the country.

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