

Original Research Article

Cultural Issues Influencing Early Marriage and the Educational Attainment of the Girl Child in Lebialem, Cameroon

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Abstract

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This study investigated some cultural issues influencing early marriage in Lebialem Division in Cameroon. Specifically the study focused on virginity, procreation and bride price and the impact on the educational attainment of the girl child. The study employed the cross-sectional survey design. The simple random and purposive sampling technique was used to obtain a sample size of one hundred (100) participants and they were between the age range of 12-20 years. The mixed method was used for data collection. Quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire which had opened and closed ended questions and a focus group discussion (FGD) was used for the qualitative data. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics presented in frequencies, percentages and charts. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic and verbatim statements. The findings revealed the cultural issues of bride price was the most influential factor for early marriage with a 71.11% followed by Procreation with 46.51% and virginity with 36.66%. This greatly impacted on the educational attainment of the girl child since the highest qualification obtained was the first school leaving certificate as shown with the percentage score of 57.0%. The results also revealed that though some of them aspired to attained university education, none of them ever had the opportunity of realizing this dream. The participants reported that "our parents say that girls who are educated do not bear children because they have aborted all their children in the years of schooling". Also that education undermines cultural practices, and it teaches the girl to reject tradition. Parents should be sensitized on the negative consequences of early marriage and the need to be educate the girl child.

Keywords: Cultural Issues, Early Marriage, Educational Attainment, Girl Child

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that the children born to the woman are recognized as legitimate offspring of both partners (Kottack, 2009). It is an important institution both for the individual and the society at large. For the individual, it is a significant and memorable event in one's life cycle as well as the most important foundation in the family formation process. It is also a rite of passage that marks the beginning of an individual's separation from the parental unit, even if

generations continue to be socially and economically interdependent. For the society as a whole, it unites several individuals from different families and represents the creation of a production and consumption unit of relationships as well as one for the exchange of goods and services. In the African context, marriage is not an option, but an obligatory experience for all adults. It is also the desire of every African parent especially in Lebialem to see their children get married and bring forth

children. Thus, marriage is greatly linked with procreation and virginity. It was associated with procreation and without procreation there was no marriage (Kihuha, 1992; Mbiti, 1990). In an appreciable number of societies, marriages are arranged, and negotiations are handled by the immediate families or by go-betweens. Some of the causes of this early marriages are as a result of these marital arrangements just at the birth of the child. The western concept of marriage is different in that the two people getting married choose their partners and decide when to get married and whether or not to have children. In this case, marriage is seen as a companion between two people to the exclusion of all others and procreation need not result from the union (Mbiti, 1990).

The concept of early marriage and the educational attainment of the girl child has been a topic of debate in many avenues. It is no longer a matter of argument that females constitute more than fifty percent (50%) of world's active population (UNICEF, 2001). Early marriage refers to a marriage in which even though one of the parties to the marriage may not have reached the minimum marriageable age, majority status will nevertheless be conferred at marriage through a legal process of emancipation (UNHCHR, 2014). The overall prevalence of child marriage in Africa is higher than the global average and if current trends continue, Africa will become the region with the largest number and global share of child marriages by 2050 (UNICEF, 2015). In Cameroon, DHS data from 2011 indicate that 13.4% of women aged 20 to 24 reported being married by the age of 15 and 38.4% by the age of 18 years. Child marriage is prevalent in the North, East, North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon. Despite the existence of a law prohibiting early marriages in Cameroon, the practice is still there especially in the rural areas Lebialem inclusive. In rural areas, early marriage is high among girls compared to males. Forty-three per cent (43%) of girls are married when they are 18 years compared to boys at 11.6%. Some statistics about the practice of earlier marriage in Cameroon reveals that child marriage is extreme in the northern part of the country. The (Population Council 2011) indicates the statistics of the prevalence rates as follows; highest in North (73%), Extreme North (72%), Adamawa (59%), East (59%), South (43%), Centre (34%), South West (28%), West (24%), North West (17%) and Littoral (13%). With such statistics, it is evident that this practice of early marriage has far reaching consequences on the girl child. Early and forced marriage in some of these regions can be seen as a strategy for punishing or controlling girls who rebel against their family or communities expectations and are from rural areas with poverty being their greatest challenge.

The girls who are most vulnerable to early marriages are those who are from poor families and live in rural areas. In a study conducted by UNFPA (2012), it was realised that women between the age bracket of 20-24,

79% had no education and 45% of women with primary education were married before 18 years in comparison to 13% of women who had attained secondary education. In addition, girls from 20% of the poorest families were 6.5 times more susceptible to marriage in comparison to girls from 20% of the richest families. The study also found that women aged 20-24, living in rural areas, were more likely to be married before 18 in comparison to women living in urban areas (UNFPA 2012). Furthermore, there are a number of traditional or cultural practices that surround early and forced marriages which are essentially a means of consolidating relations between families or a way of settling disputes or sealing deals over land and property. Such practices greatly limit the potentials of the girl child in promoting personal and collective development. A key area of concern in this regard is that of their education, which can only at best be described as dwindling as and less than equal to that of the male (UN, 2010).

Marriage is ordained and governed by veritable legislation the world over. In accordance with Article 1 of the Convention on the Right of the Child, early marriage refers to any marriage of a child younger than 18 years old. This robs the girls of their youth as they are required to take up roles for which they are not psychologically and physically prepared. Many have no choice about timing of marriage with their partner. Some are coerced into marriage, while others are too young to make an informed decision. Premature marriage deprives them of the opportunity for personal development as well as their rights to full reproductive health (RH), and well-being, education and participation in civic life (Saxena, 1999). Early marriage implies that a girl's childhood is cut short and her fundamental rights are compromised. Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, 1964 Article 1, makes clear that no marriage shall be legally entered into without the full and free consent of both parties, such consent to be expressed by them in person as prescribed by law. Article 2, States Parties to the present Convention shall specify a minimum age for marriage ("not less than 15 years" according to the nonbinding recommendation accompanying this convention). No marriage shall be legally entered into by any person under this age, except where a competent authority has granted a dispensation as to age, for serious reasons, in the interests of the intending spouses. Article 3, All marriages shall be registered by the competent authority. These conventions are often not respected by the people of Cameroon. Besides, law No 794 of 29th June 1979 on the organization of Customary and Akali courts in Anglophone Cameroon and as well as decree No 69/DF/544 of 19th December 1969, does not stipulate a minimum age for marriage. It is determined by the physical maturity of the individual and most often puberty, showed by the enlargement of the breast, menstruation and ability to procreate.

The Cameroonian Penal Code states the minimum age of marriage at 15 for girls and 18 for boys (Civil Status Registration Ordinance, 1981) with a clause that such marriages should involve the consent of both parties and equally recognized by an official document. In effect, by setting the minimum marriageable age at 15 years, it becomes acceptable for parents to marry their daughters off before 18 years whilst not physically, emotionally and psychologically mature to enter into marriage. Also, this same code does not provide sufficient safeguards to protect young girls on this issue of early marriage. According to the United Nation Fund for Population (UNFPA) child marriage advocacy program (2005) and article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which states that "all human beings are born free with equal dignity and rights". Early marriage is punishable under article 356 of Cameroon's Penal Code. Nevertheless, the phenomenon is still very common in many rural areas of Cameroon.

The marriage institution is most cherished and talked about in the Lebialem tradition as it is a very vital aspect of social life in most societies. However, the timing and the resultant impact of early marriage is a source of concern for many who cherish the equitable participation of female in modern education. When girls are married at early ages, their educational careers are disrupted especially if an avenue for second chance learning is not provided. Once girls are left behind in this process, they add to the burden of development of the society and their positive roles and contributions are limited early. The impact of early marriage on the life of the girl child is a real cause for concern in our modern day society which has become a global village due to technological advancement. Furthermore, the most talked about education for all and the need for gender equality and equity in society today. Once the girls are left behind in this process, they add to the challenges of development in the society and their positive roles and contributions are limited or completely lost.

Education is a basic human right that every child is entitled to. Article 26 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has a right to education which should be free and compulsory at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Marsha, Christine, and Beate, 2012) contain comprehensive sets of enforceable commitments on the right to education and gender equality. Millennium Development Goal 2 (Nwonwu, 2008) also stresses the need for gender equality in education. However, as much as these conventions and treaties are being enforced, early marriage is persistently being practiced especially in sub-Saharan African countries, and this is acting as a deterrent to girl-child education. UNICEF (2001), for example, states that in many developing countries, transition from adolescent to adulthood is abruptly cut

short and the fundamental rights of female adolescents are compromised by early marriage, a practice that has serious consequences for their health and development. Early marriage is an appalling violation of human rights and robs girls of their education, health and long-term prospects (UNICEF, 2001). Young mothers with no decision making powers, restricted mobility and no economic resources are likely to transmit this vulnerability (early marriage) to their off-springs.

Statement of the problem

Early marriage contributes to a series of consequences both for young girls and the society in general. It is a violation of human rights in general and of girl's rights in particular. For both girls and boys, early marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and economical impacts; cutting off educational and employment opportunities and chances of personal growth. Besides early marriage impacts on the girls themselves, their children, families, and society as a whole. UNICEF (2000) argues that it is not only girls that pay for early marriage but also the society as a whole. Throughout the world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life. The practice of early marriage gives no such cause for celebration. All too often, the imposition of a marriage partner upon a child means that a girl or boy's childhood is cut short and their fundamental rights are compromised (UNICEF, 2001). Young girls are robbed of their youth and required to take on roles for which they are not psychologically or physically prepared. Many have no choice about the timing of marriage or their partner. Their parents coerced them into these marriages, reason most often known by their parents. While others are too young to make an informed decision about the person they are to marry. This study therefore sets out to explore some of the reasons that lead parents into accepting and giving their children for early marriage. This study therefore aims at finding out how cultural issues (virginity, procreation and bride price) influences early marriage and the effects on the educational attainment of the girl child in Lebialem Division, Cameroon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Issues Influencing Early Marriage

Inasmuch as parents would like to see their children educated, a traditional African parent and especially from Lebialem would prefer to educate the boy child more than the girl. This is the patriarchal nature of African culture, value is placed on the boy-child's education than that of the girl-child. Girls are subordinated and undervalued such that they do not have educational opportunities

equal to boys. In homes where there is poverty with few financial resources, girls will be forced to drop out of school prematurely in favour of the boys. This is because some parents believe that boys are more intelligent, that they perform better in school and that they are a better educational investment than girls (Odaga and Heneveld, 1995). A factor often ignored in discussions of parental preference for boy's education is the prevalence of patrilineal inheritance systems. As the prime beneficiaries of family assets, boys are favoured in human capital investment decisions. In addition, parents worry about wasting money on the education of girls who are likely to get pregnant or married before completing their schooling (Odaga and Heneveld, 1995).

Dolphyne (1991) has rightly observed that marriage arrangements or child betrothal and subsequent early marriage may have worked well in the past. In modern times, however, things have changed, and continue to change so that a girl may refuse to marry the man she has been chosen for when she was a child. This may create problems if she cannot be persuaded to marry the chosen partner or suitor. The bride wealth that may have been already transferred to the girl's father has to be refunded which sometimes may not be possible as the parents, depending on their economic status, may have already used it. This may be followed by coercion or tricking the girl and sometimes outright force. At times the girls may try and succeed in running away and may be lucky to find rescue from outsiders since such girls do not expect any sympathy from their families as they are supposed to have let them down. The experiences the young brides and would-be brides who may be as young as 12 years go through can be quite traumatic. Due to the young girls' age and given the fact that their bodies are not yet fully developed to cope with child bearing, young brides sometimes suffer permanent damage to their health in the process of child bearing (Gikenye, 2001). In many countries the importance of preserving family 'honour' and girls' virginity is such that parents push their daughters into marriage well before they are ready. Equally, where girls become pregnant, either through consensual sex or rape, the stigma attached can lead families to view the girls' rights and wellbeing as secondary to the preservation of family 'honour'. Early and forced marriage can also be seen as a strategy for punishing or controlling girls who rebel against their family or communities' expectations Plan, (2003).

Across many religions and societies, high value is placed on the virginity of the bride (Broude and Greene, 1976; Schlegel, 1991; Schneider, 1971). The perceived threat of a daughter losing her virginity before wedlock are often cited as a motivation for parents to send their girl child for marriage early (Elizabeth Yarrow et al., 2015; Gottschalk, 2007; Nicola Jones et al., 2014; Nour, 2009). Wahhaj (2015) develops a theoretical model of early marriage, in which the bride's "purity" is considered an asset on the marriage market that cannot be observed

directly. Based on the assumption that "purity" is constantly at risk and may get lost over time, agents in this model use the age of a bride as an indicator of her expected "purity". An interesting feature of this model is that it can explain how the practice of early marriage may persist even in the complete absence of any intrinsic preference for young brides. This is even more so because parents see the act of bearing children before marriage as a taboo and disgrace to the family.

The cultural issues of virginity, procreation and protection of young girls stand out very strongly as a reason for early marriage. Early marriage is one way to ensure that a 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 legitimate, (UNICEF 2001; Mathur, 2003 and Nour, 2006). On the other hand, for many societies that prize virginity before marriage, early marriage can manifest itself in a number of practices designed to 'protect' a girl from unsanctioned sexual activity. The loss of adolescence, the forced sexual relations, and the denial of freedom and personal development attendant on early marriage have profound psychosocial and emotional consequences. The impact can be subtle and insidious and the damage hard to assess. It includes such intangible factors as the effect of a girl's loss of mobility and her confinement to the home and to household roles (UNICEF, 2001).

In North-East Africa and parts of the Middle East in particular, control may also include the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) to restrict sexual pleasure and temptation. Some parents withdraw their girls from school as soon as they begin to menstruate; fearing that exposure to male pupils or teachers puts them at risk. The practice of female genital mutilation is also practiced in Cameroon. These practices are all intended to shield the girl from male sexual attention, but in the eyes of concerned parents, marriage is seen to offer the ultimate protection measure. Khasiani (1995), says Low age at marriage exposes women to longer reproductive spans and increases their chances of higher fertility. This increases chances of poor health to women and reduces their opportunities to engage in higher education and employment activities outside the home as well as deciding on the number of children they can support (Kihuha, 1992).

Dowry and bride prices are another cultural practice. Dowry and bride prices are among the most often cited potential drivers of child marriage. This is a system in which gifts or money change hands in exchange for a bride, as it offers powerful financial incentives for families to consider early marriage. Payments between the respective families of the bride and the groom at the time of marriage have been a cultural practice in most societies over the course of history. The prevalence, size, and direction of such payments however varies both between countries and across time. Both bride prices and

dowries have been cited as important incentives for early marriage. Moreover, younger brides often have to pay lower dowry relative to older brides, presumably because the youth of the former is associated with beauty, virginity, fertility, or obedience (Elizabeth Yarrow et al., 2015). Hence, parents may have incentives to marry off their daughters early, since this means both lower dowries and one less mouth to feed. Sometimes girls are sent off for marriage in order to meet up with financial challenges. Corno and Voena (2016) affirms that adverse economic shocks, increase the probability of getting married, which suggests that girls may be “sold off” to overcome an unexpected financial bottleneck.

Early Marriage and the Educational Attainment of the Girl

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 wellbeing of their family and society. Indeed, married girls who would like to continue schooling may be both practically and legally excluded from doing so. Education empowers girls to be economically and socially independent and therefore reduces their vulnerability to child marriage. In countries with lower education and lack of access to education and child marriage is usually high. It also explains why educating adolescent girls has been an important factor in the increases in the age of marriage observed across the region thus far UNICEF, (2013). 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 (UNFPA, 1990). The precise nature of the interaction between education and marriage is not always evident because some of the girls are withdrawn from school to marry while others lack access to schooling. Muhammad, (2000) says the situation in Bangladesh, is clear as girls are withdrawn from school if a good marriage prospect arises.

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. 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

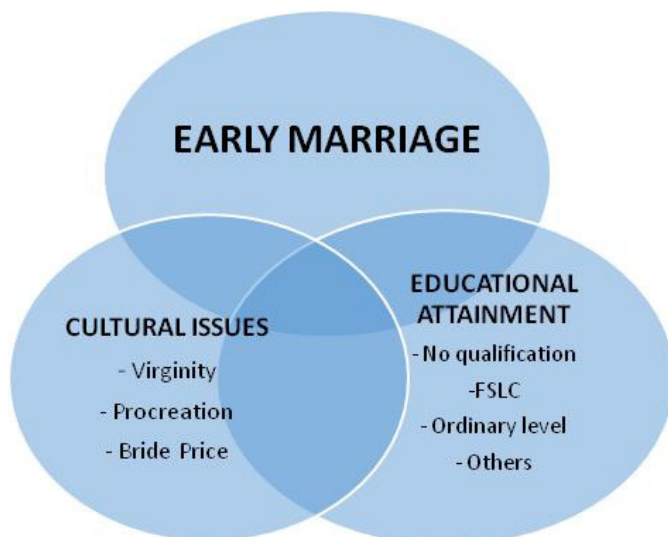
harassment, or about insecurity on the journey to and from school, discourage their attendance (Change Newsletter, 2000). The school is the most important institution outside the family involved in socializing young people into all dimensions of adult roles and responsibilities.

More years of schooling have been associated with many positive outcomes, including later ages of marriage, lower fertility, and healthier and better educated children, economic development. However, 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 wellbeing of their family and society. Indeed, married girls who would like to continue schooling may be both practically and legally excluded from doing so. The essence of the rights to education and to health is that they facilitate and ensure the effective enjoyment of other human rights. For a number of poorer families, the potential rewards of educating daughters are too far off and therefore their education is not recognized as an investment. Families perceive that a girl's education will only benefit her husband's household, and not her parents. Additionally, some parents believe that girls do not need an education for their roles as wives and mothers, that education undermines cultural practices, and it teaches the girl to reject tradition (Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 2003). The removal from school of a young girl to marry, or to work in her parents' or another household in preparation for married life, limits her opportunities to develop her intellect. She also loses out on socializing, making friends outside her family circle, and many other useful skills. This reduces her chances of developing her own independent identity. Indeed, in the old patriarchal view this is an important reason for taking her away. The most important implication of this loss is that the girl grows up with no sense of the right to assert her own point of view – and little experience in articulating one (WHO, 1989).

Education, even at a basic level, is not only about livelihood and technical skills but more importantly provides social ‘connectedness’ or aptitude which enables one to access key resources to alleviate poverty. By interacting with others, individuals acquire the social skills and personal capacities needed to access resources and opportunities, and to form social networks for support and assistance when required in the future. Individuals can also develop their self-esteem and confidence to voice their opinions and to take control over their own actions, lives and bodies. Other positive benefits of education are linked to improved reproductive health and child survival and welfare, (Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 2003). The universal right to education has been affirmed by the world's governments for more than 50 years, most recently by the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the 191 member states of the United Nations in 2000. However, some 115 million

children-among them 62 million girls-are still denied this right. According to data from UNICEF (2004), outside of the developed world, only 76 percent of all boys and 70 percent of all girls attend primary school.

Marriage does not imply that a girl's or boy's education is finished. Rather, the attitudes of parents, schools and spouses in many societies mean that it often does. Husbands of young wives are often older men, who expect their wives to follow tradition, stay home and undertake household and childcare duties. A girl may be unable to go against her husband's wishes and the husband's family may refuse to invest their scarce resources in the wife's continued schooling. Some schools often have a policy of refusing to allow married or pregnant girls or girls with babies to return. They may believe that it will set a bad example to other pupils or that other parents will be angry to see the school go against the traditional beliefs. Even if they do permit girls to return, the school environment - rules, timetables and physical conditions - can make it too difficult for a girl to attend school and perform her duties as wife and mother at the same time. Bullying and abuse by teachers, pupils and other parents can further reduce girls' self-confidence and sense of security, forcing them to give up on schooling. When girls drop out of school to get married, there is a knock-on effect for the community as a whole, and for future generations. Evidence suggests that children of young, uneducated mothers are less likely to have a good start to their education, do well in class or continue beyond the minimum schooling. Their daughters especially are likely to drop out, marry young and begin the cycle again (Ingrid, 2009). From the foregoing literature it is clear that there is an intersection of the cultural issues influencing early marriage and the educational attainment of the girl child as presented in the conceptual diagram below.



Conceptual framework for the study:Zinkeng, (2020)

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the survey design and the mixed method was employed for data collection. The participants were one hundred (100) girls who fell in the category of early marriage and their age range was between 12-20 years. They were purposively selected using their duration of stay in marriage which was at least five years into marriage life. Quantitative data was collected using both opened and closed ended questions and a focus group discussion (FGD) for the qualitative data. The quantitative data was analyzed using frequencies, percentages and charts while qualitative data was analyzed using thematic and verbatim statements from the responses of the participants. The area of study was in Wabane Sub Division in , Lebialem Division, South West Region of Camereroon. Wabane Sub Division is made up of Lower and Upper Munadani. Lower Munadani is made up of seven villages namely; Bechati, Folepi, Egumbo, Banti, Besali, Bangang and Nkong. The participants all freely consented to participate in the study, the right of withdrawal from the study was guaranteed as well as their assurance with respect to confidentiality.

FINDINGS

Cultural Issues Influencing Early Marriage

The information about the respondents on the cultural issues of early marriage is given in the table 1 below. The cultural issues that were the focus of this investigation are; virginity, procreation and bride price.

The findings in table 1 below shows that 36.66% of the girls get married early because they want to protect their virginity, 71.11% get into early marriage because their parents see the bride price as a source of income to help allievate family poverty. Some others 46.51% go in for early marriage because they want to have children and uphold family pride.

"Getting a girl married at an early age is the best protection for her and the family pride of seeing our grandchildren."(procreation).

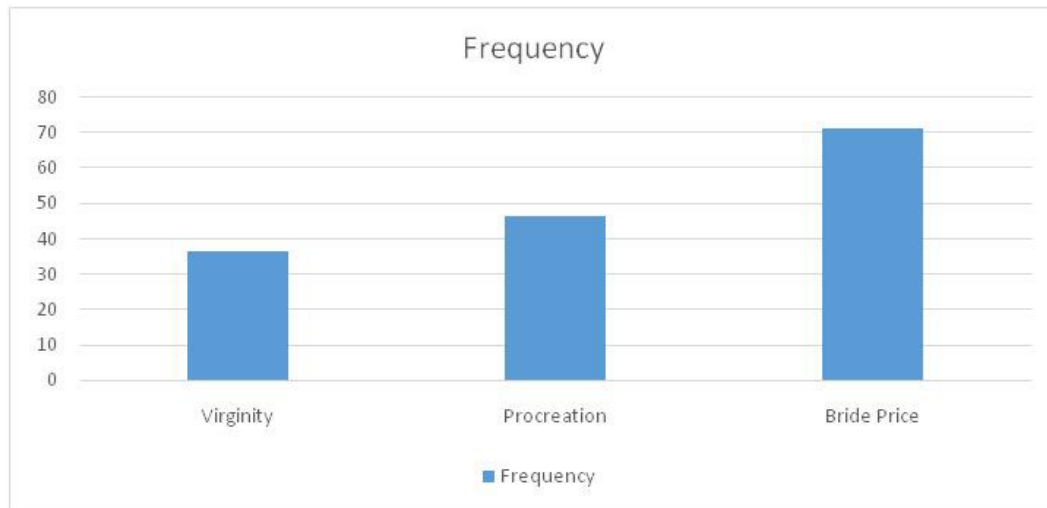
"My father told me that girls who go to school endup not having children, and they do not have respect for their husband because they lost their virginity to other men." (Virginity and procreation).

"my father told me that he collected money from my future husband immediately I was born."(pride price).

"my father's house was constructed by my would-be husband since I didn't have the money to build a house".

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents on the cultural issues of influencing early marriage

What cultural issues make you to get married?	Frequency	Percentage
Virginity	55	36.66%
Bride Price	32	71.11 %
Procreation	13	46.51 %

**Figure 1.** Responses from respondent for cultural reasons of marrying early**Table 2.** Distribution of respondents according to level of education attained

Distribution of respondents on the highest academic qualifications		
Highest academic qualification	Frequency	Percentage
No qualification	36	36.0 %
First school leaving certificate	57	57.0 %
Ordinary level/ cap certificate	7	7.0 %
Advanced level certificate/bacc certificate	0	0.0 %
Bachelor degree and above	0	0.0 %

(Bride price). Figure 1 above presents this result more clearly.

Ordinary Level and none had the Advanced Level and any other higher qualification.

Effects Of Early Marriage On The Educational Attainment Of The Girl Child

Table 2 above demonstrate the effects of early marriage on the educational attainment of the girl child. It shows the highest academic qualification, the dreamt level of education and the attained dreamt level of education.

From table 2 and figure 2 below, it was realised that a greater percentage of the respondents did not obtain any academic qualification (36.0 %) either because they did not go to school at all or they were withdrawn from school to get married. This percentage increased to 57.0% for respondents who got the First School Leaving Certificate and drastically fell to 7.0 % for respondents who had the

Early Marriage And Aspired Levels Of Education

The table below present the findings on the aspired or dreamt levels of education for the girls who were sent for marriage at early age. Table 3, Figure 3 and 4

“When I see my friends who went to school and are working in offices today, I regret so much because my parents withdrew me from school at an early age and sent for marriage.”

“my hope of becoming a university graduate were disrupted.”

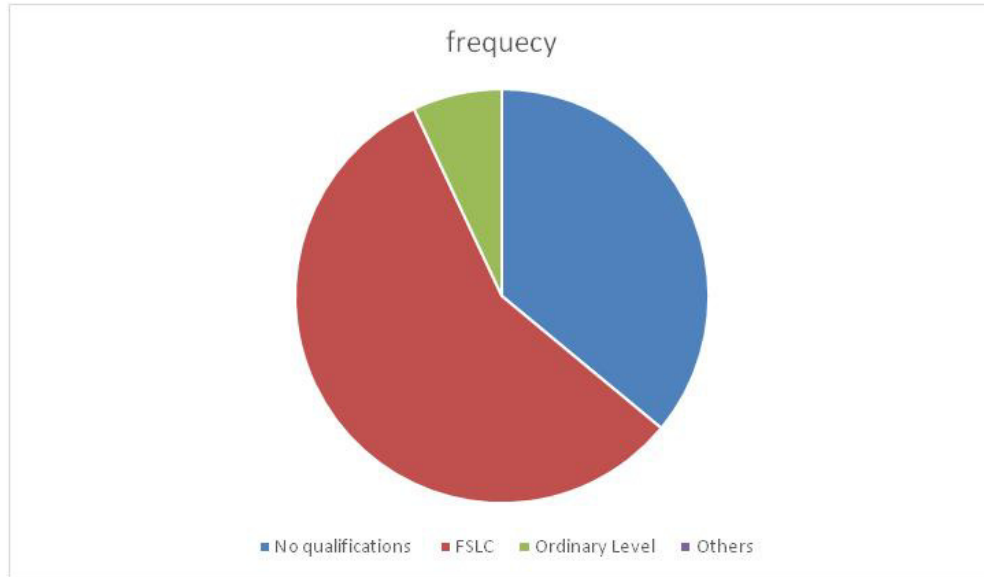


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents according to the educational qualifications attained.

Table 3. Responses for dreamt levels of education

Distribution of respondents on the dreamt level of education			
Dreamt level of education	Frequency	Frequency of attainment	Percentage attainment
No dream of education	8	8	25.39%
Primary school	18	10	55.50 %
Secondary school	35	4	11.42 %
High school	26	2	7.69 %
University	13	0	0.00 %

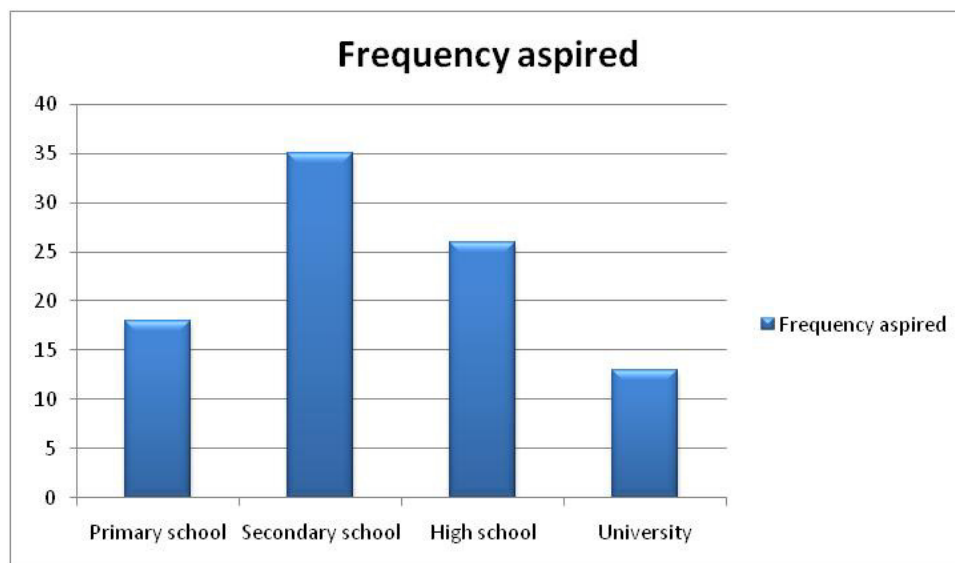


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents according to the dreamt level of education and the attainment

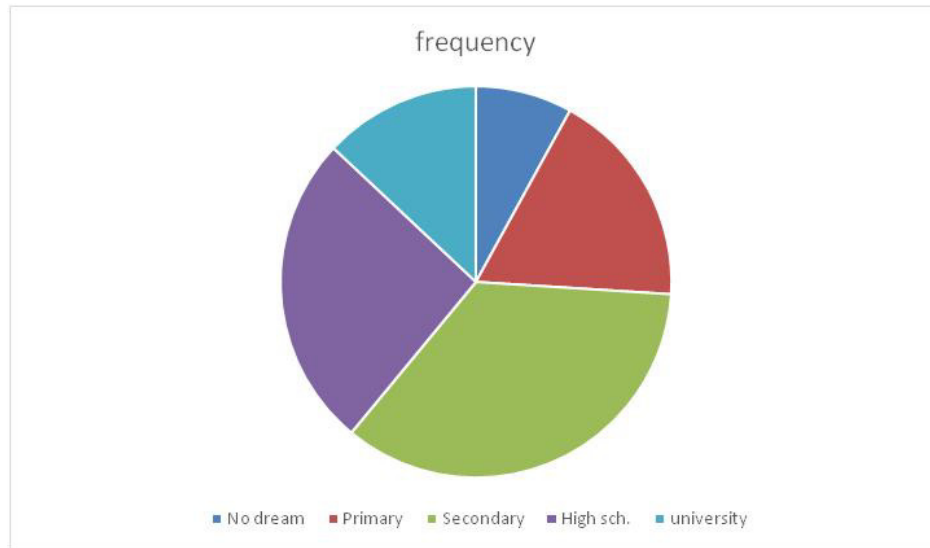


Figure 4.

"I will never forgive my parents for not sending me to school."

"I don't want to get married and have children, at least not anytime soon... I want to work and study. I don't want to be like another girl I know who is 13 years old and already pregnant." (Aspired educational attainment).

"I wish I go to school and get to university level."

Early marriage is a distraction for the future of young girls - educationally, socially and economically. When a girl is married young, she will not find time to socialize with other people or go to school. When a girl is married when she is still under-age, she will suffer from poverty and ignorance. She will not have any say in her matrimonial home because she just has to tolerate whatsoever the man says. Also due to lack of education, she will not feel free in front of her mates that have gone to school because she cannot speak good English (grammar).

From the above results it can be seen that many of the girls who were sent for early marriage have regrets. On the other hand we also see that these cultural issues have a strong force that push the parents of these girls to send them forth for marriage at this early ages.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings revealed that cultural issues especially bride price and procreation played important roles in sending forth the girl child for early marriage. Parents mostly want the bride price as evidenced in the percentage gotten in this study

which stood at 71.11%. This is so because parents see the bride price as a source of income to help alleviate family poverty. This finding is supported by the study of Corno and Voena (2016) which affirms that adverse economic shocks increase the probability of getting married, which suggests that girls may be "sold off" to overcome an unexpected financial bottleneck.

"my father told me that he collected money from my future husband immediately I was born."(bride price).

"my father's house was constructed by my would-be husband since I didn't have the money to build a house."(bride price).

Another cultural issue that came up strongly was the issue of procreation which had 46.51%. Marriage is greatly linked with procreation. It was associated with procreation and without procreation there was no marriage (Kihuha, 1992; Mbiti, 1990).

"Getting a girl married at an early age is the best protection for her and the family pride of seeing our grandchildren."(procreation).

"My father told me that girls who go to school end up not having children, and they do not have respect for their husband because they lost their virginity to other men." (Virginity and procreation).

In the lebialem community, men who have only girls and no boys end up pushing the girls to marry and give them male children in the form of in-laws who can help them in their family activities. Customs here include the general acceptance that a girl at puberty is ripe for marriage and

the fact that the girl's duty is reduced to getting married and building a family. This was supported by UNICEF (2001) that carried out a study and found out that bride wealth and family ties enhances the practice in most African communities as it is highly valued and encourages parents to marry of their children early.

A general view of unmarried girls at about 20 years is seen as wayward. It has become a sort of taboo for a girl who is not schooling in the village to be unmarried at a tender age of 18. Even students, especially the girls that go to the university become gossip topics on how they will never get married again because they have chosen the wrong path to life. Thus in the village, life has been reduced to giving birth to a child whose main purpose is to grow up quickly, get married and give birth to other children. There were several accounts I got from girls who married after university and professional education of how their mothers in particular were mocked on because they, the girls, were not going to get married.

This has affected education to an extent that most girls who succeed to go up to the university either grew out of the village or have relatives out of the village to push her to study first before marriage. Coupled with the current crisis in the Anglophone regions where schools are perturbed, a quasi-totality of the girls have gone out for marriage.

Effects of Early Marriage on the Educational Attainment of the Girl Child

The purpose of this study was to find out the effect of early marriage on the educational attainment of the girl child in Lebialem. Early marriage denies the girl-child the right to education. The study revealed that most 100.0% of the respondents said early marriage has negative effects on the educational attainment of the girl child. The results it could be seen that a majority (57.0%) of girls obtained only the primary school certificate (FSLC). While 36.0% had no certificate at all and only 7.0% obtained the ordinary level certificate from secondary school. The finding is in agreement with UNICEF (2001) statement that early marriage denies children of school age their right to the education they need for development, their preparation for adulthood and their effective contribution to their future family and community. Children who do not go to school may never know anything about their rights. They may never have a chance to climb above poverty or learn to protect themselves from abuse and disease.

The findings also showed that a majority of them never had the opportunity of realizing their aspired educational levels.

"When I see my friends who went to school and are working in offices today, I regret so much because my

parents withdrew me from school at an early age and sent for marriage." "My hope of becoming a university graduate were disrupted."

"I will never forgive my parents for not sending me to school." Some of these parents themselves did not go to school or ended after primary education hence reasons why they do not know the importance of education for their children especially the girls. They know that the girls will marry and go and will be of no use to them after marriage.

In line with UNFPA, (2006) said when having a mother without a proper education; this in turn increases the difficulty of retaining her children in school, which causes further complications in a negative cycle. This findings support Muhammad (2000) who said the situation in Bangladesh is clear as girls are withdrawn from school if a good marriage prospect arises. School dropout/ withdrawal from school is seen a hindrance to girl child education. School dropout can be also as a result of lack of means to continue education especially after primary school. Some girls from poor families where the parents are not even in haste to send them out for marriage end up dropping out of school especially after primary school due to lack of means to continue their education. These are evidence of the importance of the bride price for some families, since they see it as a means of curbing poverty.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, despite the cultural constrains that push parents to sending forth their girl child early for marriage, the long term effects continue to be on the family generation after generation. The times are changing and parents should move with the time. It is recommended that, educationists, counselors and state legislations should give a helping hand to the young girls out there whose rights are being violated for cultural reasons.

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