

ATTITUDE OF PARENTS TOWARDS ADOLESCENTS EARLY MARRIAGE IN OMUMA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE. IMPLICATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELLING

By

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Abstract

The study investigated the attitude of parents towards early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State. Descriptive survey research design was used for the study. One research question and three hypotheses were used to guide the study. The population of the study comprised all parents in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State. The sample of the study consisted of 200 parents drawn through stratified random sampling technique. A self made questionnaire titled: Parental Attitude Towards Adolescent's Early Marriage (PATAEM) was used as an instrument for data collection. Simple percentage was used to answer the research question while chi-square was used to analyse the hypotheses formulated for the study at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the research shows that: (1) majority of the parents in Omuma Local Government Area had positive attitude towards early marriage (2) There is significant difference in the attitude of male and female parents towards adolescent's early marriage in the area. (3) There is a significant difference in the attitude of educated and uneducated parents towards early marriage in the area. (4) Socio-economic status had great influence towards early marriage in the area. Based on the findings of the research work, recommendations were made.

Key words: concept of marriage, attitude of parents, adolescent's early marriage.

Introduction

Marriage could be defined as a legal union of a man and a woman as husband and wife. It is a relationship in which two adults of opposite sex make emotional and legal commitment to live together. Marriage being a social institution (Adegoke & Esere, 1988) fosters the coming together of two totally different

individuals with different personality traits, psychological make-ups and oftendifferent socio-economic backgrounds, to form a family. Probably because of these differences, the institution of marriage is seen to breed more conflicts than most other social institutions. (Alhassan, 1988, Esere & Idowu, 2000) and require a great

deal of adjustment by the two players. Marriage is equally regarded as the highest position of responsibility, caring, tolerance among couples. The inability of couples to fulfill these traits incapacitates the individuals in marriage and tends to lead to maladjustment.

Marriage can be an exciting and beautiful adventure. God designed the opposite sexes to complement each other. He united man and woman in marriage so that they might give each other what each lacks. Therefore, God's whole purpose for dividing His spiritual self into pairs of fathers and mothers is to dramatise His love nature. This is done by the romance of equal and opposite entities and the **Concept of Early Marriage**

Beckett and Macey (2009) defined early marriage as the practice of marriage before or during adolescence. They further argued that the practice of early marriage prevails across most parts of Africa, Asia and America and in some form or another, it exists throughout the world. Early marriage involves both girls and boys but girls from low income families.

Unicef (2009) noted that early marriage is a child or teenage marriage which can be described as any marriage carried out below the age of eighteen years or before the girls are physically and

interchange of love. Through the balanced interchange of love between father and mother, they find unity, which gives them the ecstasy of the divine nature of God.

According to Juvva & Bhatti (2006) marriage is perhaps as old as human life on the earth. They believed that marriage and family as an organized form of living does not exist among other living beings, except among the human races and as a result marriage and family constitute the basic and essential unit of society. Bhatti (1993) therefore proposed that marriage is an enduring relationship between an adult male and female, as two individual units, known as husband and wife.

psychologically ready to shoulder responsibilities of marriage and child bearing.

Unicef (2014) stated that early marriage is a formal or informal marriage union entered into by an individual before reaching the age of maturation. Akindele (2012) stated that early marriage was common throughout history for a variety of reasons including poverty, insecurity, as well as for political and financial reasons.

Early child marriage can be disadvantageous in every aspect of life. The draw backs accompanied by early child marriages are very drastic, leading to

total destruction. Early marriage makes responsibilities to be cared for by the husband at a very young age. Household responsibilities including up bringing of children are handled with no adult to guide or help them out. At the end of the day, children who are supposed to be trained by mature and well to do parents end up becoming unproductive as they are trained by young men who had little or nothing to offer.

If this practice does not stop, it will destroy the destinies of our younger generation as their health can be affected as early pregnancy can have a negative impact on their over all well being. This is because their bodies are not yet matured to go through pregnancy. In most cases, they end up having Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF) and the men usually run away causing breakdown of the marriage and psychological trauma to the girl. Since the young couple is not matured to handle major responsibility, they may end up fighting regularly as adjustment problems may arise and their education will be affected. Since they are not able to pursue higher education because of early family responsibilities, work opportunities are limited since they have low education. They may not be able to get highly paid jobs and bringing up children become difficult as their knowledge of child care

may be limited and parental guidance is also not there.

Adolescents' Early Marriage

Adolescence is the period in which the growing child experiences developmental changes. It is the stage when children of between 10-18 years begin to experience transformation in their physique, emotions, cognitive and social interaction (Fieldman, 2000; and Fayombo, 2004). The way adolescents feel about themselves as well as how others treat them have serious counselling implications.

Challenges confronting adolescents include risky sexual behaviours that subsequently expose them to high risk of sexually transmitted infections, such as gonorrhea, syphilis including HIV/AIDS and other sexual health related problems and abortion among others (Okanlowon, 2004).

Several researchers, (Arkutu, 1995, Uwakwe, Moronkola & Ogundiran, 2001; Owojaiye, Sunday & Funsho, 2007) reported that the black African adolescents (60-70%) are sexually active and about 70% of girls have been pregnant at least once by the time they are 18 years of age. Adolescents are very sexually active and also involve in at-risk sexual practices with serious health complications.

Esen (1994) reported that the Nigerian adolescent girl is increasingly no longer adhering to cultural regulations regarding sex rather they tend to regard sex as the private affairs of individuals and not of family, let alone the community. What was once regarded and recognized as acceptable sexual behaviour like sexual abstinence before marriage, pregnancy by married women, mode of dressing, non exposure to obscene and pornographic materials and limited relationship between the opposite sexes have in many societies been neglected and abused. They have been replaced with modernized unacceptable sexual behaviours like premarital sex, prostitution, indecent dressing, teenage pregnancies and sales of obscene and pornographic materials. One consequence of this moral decadence is adolescent pregnancy and subsequent drop out from school for the school going ones.

In his findings about general attitude of parents towards adolescent's early marriage, Riggio and Weiser (2010) noted that parents often look forward to witnessing the celebration of their children's marriage as an honour or blessing, but when it comes to marrying of the child at an early age than is expected there are marked difference in the attitude of the couples towards marriage. These differences are based on so many factors

traceable to religion, culture, poverty, ignorance and so on.

In discussing about gender and attitude of parents towards adolescent's early marriage, Inter Africa Committee (2012) reported that in countries like Paraguay, many men were observed to hold positive attitude towards early marriage at adolescents. Most of these men believe that girls do not need to study in order to get married. They are of the opinion that most of the girls who were sent to school run after men in pretence of studying. Therefore, the only means for the father to retain his supremacy over his daughter is to marry her off at an early age to avoid the ugly consequences of disgracing him.

Gautam (2010) also noted that most men view girls and women as inferior with an innate role as wives and mothers. Thus early marriage is seen as the best option for women and the earlier the marriage the better.

Regarding the attitude of most female parents towards adolescents early marriage, Unicef (2000) noted that in most societies, many mothers believe that girls who are not married at an early age bring bad luck. Girls are considered eligible for marriage at the onset of puberty (at about 13 years), while boys are eligible after several years of adolescence. Anti-slavery

international 1999 revealed that the positive attitude most mothers in Northern Nigeria have towards early marriage is borne out of the fact that most of these mothers were married off in their early childhood. They therefore view early marriage as cultural norm that must be adhered to. Most of the mothers from the Northern part of the country were married out as early as eight (8) years old to teenage boys.

Educational level of parents to some extent influence their attitude towards early marriage.

Guatam (1990) remarked that among other variables such as society, religion, economy, culture of people and literacy of individuals in a society greatly influence their attitude towards marriage practices.

Hinshalwood (2000) notes that in many parts of Africa, illiterate parents with tribal beliefs are the most observant of early marriage practice. This is in line with the findings of Petchesky and Judd (1990) who noted that attitude of many literate parents towards early marriage varies across countries and cultures. This they observed include respect for tradition that dictates that girls should marry early, the honouring of pledges to family benefactors, the strengthening of community ties, unmarried girls viewed as

omens or bad luck to their parents and that young girls should not have their first menstruation while still living with their parents. The researchers also noted that in some parts of Ghana, young girls are married off early by their illiterate parents because these parents believe that early marriage tend to solve the problem of barrenness which tend to arise as a result of late marriage.

Trotter (2010) conducted a study on how literate couples view early marriage. The findings of the research indicate that many literate couples view early marriage as a form of child abuse and a subsequent failure in the organized order of marriage relationships. Literate couples also believe that early marriage relationship increase the high rate of divorce and transmission of sexual diseases because the children were unable to obey marital divine laws. Riggio and Weiser (2008) also observed that many educated parents perceived early marriage as not beneficial or positive even if they are the folk ways of the people.

In his findings about socio-economic status of parents and early marriage Bala (2003), noted that in some families of low socio-economic status (SES), the parents of the bride may receive cattle from the groom as the bride price offered for their daughter. Most men have been observed to

be changing tactics towards marriage because of lack of viable economic resources that could be used as dowry. Many parents, both the wealthy and the poor are becoming anxious about the dangers of their daughter becoming pregnant outside wedlock, so they are ready to cut down the huge amount of money involve for marriage.

The United Nations Commission of Human Rights 2000 noted that in most parts of Africa, huge bride price payment to the parents of the bride is a huge factor to them marrying off their daughters early. In cases of bride price payment where the future husbands must pay his in-laws, the girls are married off to a man older than them because he can afford to pay the designated brides price.

Thus, early marriage in most African nation is still prevalent because of greed, poor economic status and influence of wealth and not because of tradition. This is because higher number of families are below average. In addition, parents fear of the shame of children gotten out of wedlock makes the parents allow their children marry early.

Statement of problem

The alarming rate of empirical evidence on early marriage in Omuma Local

Government Area of Rivers State and distinct patterns of family relationships that contribute greatly to this tragedy is growing speedily. There is an increase in the number of early child marriage from children born out of wedlock and abandoned by their fathers, as well as an increase in the number of children affected by divorce.

In addition to poverty and community environment, the rising incidence of early child marriage in Omuma Local Government Area, if nothing is done to find a remedy for it will deteriorate the socio-economic progress of the area in the near future.

The setbacks accompanied by early child marriages are very drastic, leading to total live destruction. Early child marriage makes responsibilities to be cared for by the husband at a very young age. Household responsibilities, child rearing responsibilities and so on are handled with no adult to guide or help out. At the end, children who are supposed to be trained by matured and well to do parents end up becoming unproductive as they are trained by young men who had little or nothing to offer.

This if allowed will destroy the destiny of our younger generation.

Health can also be affected as early pregnancy can have a negative impact on the overall health of the girls since their bodies are not yet matured to go through pregnancy. In most cases, they end up having vesico vaginal fistula (VVF) and the men usually run away causing breakdown of the marriage and the psychological effect that follows it.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the attitude of parents toward adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State. Specifically, the study will:

- (i) Investigate the attitude of male and female parents towards adolescent's early marriage.
- (ii) Investigate the attitude of literate and non-literate parents towards adolescent's early marriage.
- (iii) Investigate the attitude of parents from high and low socio-economic background towards adolescent's early marriage.

The following research question guided the study:

1. What is the general attitude of parents towards adolescent's early

marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State?

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance;

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female parents towards adolescent's early marriage.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the attitude of educated and non educated parents towards adolescent's early marriage.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the attitude of parents of high and low socio-economic status towards adolescent's early marriage.

Methodology

The study examined the attitude of parents towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State. A sample of two hundred (200) parents was selected using stratified random sampling technique. A self designed questionnaire titled Parental Attitude Towards Adolescent's Early Marriage (PATAEM) was used as instrument for data collection. Simple percentage was used to answer the research question while chi-square was used to analyse the hypotheses formulated for the study at 0.05 level of significance.

The results were presented in line with the research question and hypotheses.

Research Question

What is the general attitude of parents towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Simple percentage was used in answering this research question as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: The percentage of parents response on their general attitude towards adolescent's early marriage.

Parents Attitude	No. of Parents	Percentage (%)
Positive	119	59.5
Negative	81	40.5
Total	200	100

Table 1 shows that 119 respondents representing 59.5% of the parents had positive attitude towards early marriage while a minority of 81 respondents representing 40.5% of the parents had negative attitude. Since majority of the parents have positive attitude, the result is that the general attitude of parents towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area is positive.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female parents towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State. The hypothesis was answered with Chi-Square statistics as shown below.

Table 2.1: Response of male and female parents on their attitude towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area

Sex of parents	No. of Respondents		Total
	Agreed	Disagreed	
Male	64 (103)	136 (97)	200
Female	142 (103)	58 (97)	200
Total	206	194	400

Table 2.2: Analysis of the response of male and female parents towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area

O	E	O – E	(O – E) ²	(O – E) ² /E
64	103	-39	1521	14.77
136	97	39	1521	15.68
142	103	39	1521	14.77
58	97	-39	1521	15.66
Total				$\sum X^2 = 60.88$

Table 2.2 above shows that the calculated X^2 value of 60.88 is greater than the critical value $X^2_{0.05}$ 3.841

Decision: Since the calculated X^2 value of 60.88 is greater than the critical value $X^2_{0.05}$ 3.841, we therefore reject the null

hypothesis. The result hence indicates that there is significant difference in the attitude of male and female parents towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the attitude of educated and non educated parents towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State. The hypothesis was answered with chi-square statistics and analyzed as shown below.

Table 3.1: Response on the attitude of educated and non educated parents towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area

Parental Education	No. of Respondents		Total
	Agreed	Disagreed	
Educated	13 (66)	187 (134)	200
Non educated	119 (66)	81 (134)	200
Total	132	268	400

Table 3.2: Analysis of the response of educated and non educated parents towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area

O	E	O – E	(O – E) ²	(O – E) ² /E
13	66	-53	2809	42.56
187	134	53	2809	20.96
119	66	53	2809	42.56
81	134	-53	2809	20.96
Total				$\Sigma X^2 = 109.04$

Table 3.2 above shows that the calculated X^2 value of 109.04 is greater than the critical value $X^2_{0.05}$ 3.841

Decision: Since the calculated X^2 value of 109.04 is greater than the critical value $X^2_{0.05}$ 3.841, we therefore reject the null

hypotheses. The result hence indicates that there is significant difference in the attitude of educated and non educated parents towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference in the attitude of parents of high and low socio-economic status towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State. The hypothesis was answered with chi-square statistics and analyzed as shown below.

Table 4.1: Response on the attitude of parents of high and low socio-economic status towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area

Parental Socio-economic status	No. of Respondents		Total
	Agreed	Disagreed	
High SES	15 (87)	149 (113)	200
Low SES	123 (87)	77 (113)	200
Total	174	226	400

Table 4.2: Analysis of the response of parents of high and low socio-economic status towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area

O	E	O – E	(O – E) ²	(O – E) ² /E
51	87	-36	1296	14.90
149	113	36	1296	11.47
123	87	36	1296	14.90
77	113	-36	1296	11.47
Total				$\Sigma X^2 = 52.74$

Table 4.2 above shows that the calculated X^2 value of 52.74 is greater than the critical value $X^2_{0.05}$ 3.841.

Discussion

The discussions of the findings are based on the research question and hypotheses stated.

The research question formulated to find out the attitude of parents towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State revealed that a majority of 119 representing 59.5% of the parents used in the study had positive attitude towards adolescent's early marriage. This means that majority of the parents encourage this children to get married early.

This present study is in agreement with the study of Riggio and Weiser (2010) that revealed that parents often look forward to witnessing the celebration of their

children's marriage as an honour or blessing, but when it comes to marring of the child at an early age than is expected, there are market difference in the attitude of the couples towards marriage.

The study is also in line with the report of the Inter Africa Committee (2012) that in some countries, many men had positive attitude towards adolescent's early marriage. Most of these men believe that girls do not need to study in order to get married. They are of the view that if girls are sent to school, they pretend that they are studying but they are going out with men. Therefore the only means for the fathers to retain his supremacy over their daughters are to marry them off at early age to avoid the ugly consequences of disgracing them.

The findings of the first hypothesis shows that the calculated X^2 value of 60.88 is greater than the critical value $X^2_{0.05}$ 3.841, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected. The result hence indicates that there is significant difference in the attitude of male and female parents towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State. The result showed that greater number of female parents agreed to early marriage. Their reasons are; it gives them respect among their fellow women and it gives them an opportunity to travel when their daughter gives birth; it makes them feel satisfied that they have given their daughter required domestic training, hence the early marriage of their children is a mirror to reflect their good motherhood qualities.

The good number of male parents that disagreed to early marriage see early marriage as another kind of child abuse and a way to tell the society that they are fit to train their children. This result is in line with the study of Gautam (2000), he noted that there is significant difference between male and female parents attitude towards adolescent's early marriage. He is of the view that girls and women are inferior with an innate role as wives and mothers. Thus early marriage is seen as the best option for women and the earlier the

marriage the better. Regarding the attitude of most female parents towards early marriage, UNICEF (2000) noted that in most societies, many mothers believe that girls who are not married at early age bring bad luck.

The finding of the second hypotheses shows that the calculated X^2 value of 109.04 is greater than the critical value $X^2_{0.05}$ 3.841, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected. The result hence indicates that there is significant difference in the attitude of educated and non educated parents towards adolescent's early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State. The result revealed that a few educated parents agreed to early marriage while great number of illiterate parents agreed and encourage early marriage. Most educated parents who disagreed to early marriage said that one of the ways a child can make right choice of a life partner is been matured, trained and exposed and these can be achieved by rejecting early marriage. They also said that one of the causes of the high number of divorce is related to early marriage. The illiterate parents believe that the education of a girl ends in the kitchen, so they see no reason sending a girl to school. This study is in agreement with the study of Hinshawood (2000) that reported that in many parts of

Africa, illiterate parents with tribal beliefs are the most observant of early marriage practice.

Parents reason for or against early marriage from literature varies across countries and cultures. Petchesky and Judd (1990) reviewed that many girls marry early to respect their tradition, honour pledges to family benefactors, the strengthening of community ties, unmarried girls viewed as omen or bad luck to their parents. This is because according to them young girls should not have their first menstruation while still living with their parents. The researchers also noted that in Ghana, young girls are married off early by their illiterate parents because these parents believes that early marriage tend to solve the problem of bareness which tend to arise as a result of marring late.

Trotter (2010) reported that literate parents see early marriage as a form of child abuse and a subsequent failure in the organized order of marriage relationship. Trotter also reviewed that educated parents believe that early marriage relationship increase the high rate of divorce in our society.

The result of the third null hypotheses revealed that the calculated X^2 value of 52.74 is greater than the critical value $X^2_{0.05}$ 3.841, the null hypothesis was

therefore rejected. The result hence indicates that there is significant difference in the attitude of parents of high and low socio-economic status towards early marriage in Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State. Parents of high socio-economic status feel the only way for their children to marry to their level of class, they must go to school therefore they dislike early marriage because it does not give the children the opportunity of going to school.

Implications for mental health counselling

This paper reviewed that the period of adolescents is characterised by different types of sexual activities and experimentations. They engage in unsafe sexual activities. They also keep multiple sexual partners as well as embark on risk sexual activities ignorantly without knowing the consequences. This demand the services of the counsellors to monitor, guide, advice and provide sexuality education for adolescents' right from primary, secondary to tertiary institution. This is necessary because sexual activities at this developmental stage are risk laden.

Adolescents should be given factual information that inappropriate sexual intercourse involves risk of contacting sexual transmitted infections or facing

expulsion from homes and schools, teenage pregnancies with all its attendant problems including child abandonment, abortion to death.

The knowledge of these consequences of inappropriate sexual practice among adolescents is very important because most parents are of the opinion that their adolescent children do not have any idea about sexual issues. This will empower parents of what the adolescents are capable of doing so as to guide them properly.

Sexuality education should be taught in schools right from secondary level. This should be complemented by parents, teachers and religious leaders, seminars and workshops on how to relate appropriately to sexual issues by adolescents. Parents should also be taught on how to relate with their children to improve parent-child communication, show love to their children so that they will have no reason to look elsewhere for sexuality education. Since adolescents learn by observation, experimentation and imitation, parents should become good models to their children.

Lastly, guidance counsellors and health educators should continue to guide adolescents towards proper conduct and modification of their sexual behaviour.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the research work, the following conclusions were drawn.

1. Majority of the parents in the area had positive attitude towards early marriage. According to them, early marriage give them honour and reduce financial burden of training the children in school.
2. Child marriage occur as a result of some factors such as poverty, socio-economic, environment, illiteracy, cultural belief and laws of the land. We need to increase public awareness in order to emancipate its victims and thus promote an egalitarian society.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made;

1. The federal ministry of women affairs need to design a programme that focus on child marriage eradication. Such focus should expose and explain the provision of the human and child right acts.
2. The National Human Rights Commission, women and child labour eradication foundation, National

Agency for prohibition of trafficking in persons and other related matters, National council of women societies, federation of women lawyers, UNICEF and the civil societies should synergies and forge a common and realistic front aimed at designing and implementing programmes of action.

3. The mass media need to hold government and relevant agencies accountable for their actions and inactions as regards the eradication of child marriage in the land. Issues relating to child marriage and right abuses are under-reported. Because the media is more or less urbanized, rural journalism suffers, depriving them the much needed data and statistics on incidences of child marriage and child abuse.
4. The girl child should be granted equal access to education and economic opportunities just like her male counterparts.
5. Cultural agencies and traditional institutions should collaborate and organize programmes and activities to discourage child marriage. Traditional rulers should use their positions to organize parents and community forum to provide enlightenment on human

and child's right as well as explain the disadvantages of child marriage.

6. Lastly, the curriculum of our educational institutions at primary, secondary and tertiary institutions should be reviewed to emphasize the teaching of human and child rights and thus enhance the affective domain of the national educational objectives.

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