

## IMPACT OF GIRL-CHILD EARLY MARRIAGE ON THE LEVEL OF DIVORCE AMONG SOME NORTHERNERS IN KANO STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*The study examined the impact of girl-child early marriage on the level of divorce among some Northerners in Kano State, Nigeria. Two research hypotheses guided the study. The study was limited to underaged married women from four local government areas of Kano State namely Nasarawa, Dawakin Tofa, Sumaila and Takai. Descriptive survey research design was used in the study. Two hundred (200) underaged married women were sampled using simple random sampling technique. A 20 item Researcher constructed questionnaire titled *Impact of Early Marriage on Level of Divorce Questionnaire (IEMLDQ)* was used for data collection. The questionnaire has a reliability coefficient of 0.76. The data collected were analysed using *t-test* statistical tool at 0.05 level of significance. The results of the analysis showed that there is a significant impact of girl-child early marriage on the level of divorce and there is a significant impact of maturity on the level of divorce among some northerners. Counselling implications based on the findings were discussed among them is that counsellors should campaign against girl-child early marriage by creating awareness about negative impact of girl-child early marriage. Based on these findings, the study recommends among others that people from northern states should be counselled on the dangers of girl-child early marriage and their impact on level of divorce. Again, parents should be encouraged to send their girl-child to school because education is the key.*

**Keywords:** *Girl-child, marriage, early marriage, Divorce.*

### Introduction/ Background

Marriage is a sacred institution which cuts across every culture, religion and society with some differences in the way and process of executions. Marriage is a formal union of a man and a woman to live together for the purpose of raising their own family (Anyama, 2011). Marriage is one of the fundamentals in many societies which need adequate preparations and maturity for positive outcome. It is basically the union of a mature man and woman, whether educated or not, the rich and the poor (Badejo, 2010). Presently, parents expect their daughters to get married to their choice of husbands especially when they are physically, socially and emotionally ready and they have attained marriageable age. Sometimes, some parents may also have considerations for level of education, financial status, religious belief, social status, age and ethnicity which may affect their daughters' choices in marriage. Many young people seem so anxious to go into marriage with little or no knowledge of the intricacies of marriage which may adversely affect marriage stability. Once a girl is married, she is expected to assume the multiple roles of wife, daughter-in-law, housekeeper, caretaker and a mother (Adedokun, Tochukwu & Adedeji, 2012). The transition can be psychologically and emotionally stressful for a young girl. Again, in accordance with the customs and traditions in some communities, parents have an overriding say in deciding when and whom their daughters marry irrespective of their ages, choices or level of maturity which advertently leads to girl-child early marriage. In rural customary practice in Nigeria, parental decision plays a larger role in determining marriages, specifically for

their daughters (Abdallah, 2011). Early marriage is defined as any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years old, before the girl is physically, physiologically and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and child bearing (Al Hassan, 2010). Child marriage occurs when one or both of the spouses are below the ages of 18 (Nuruddin, 2013).

Early marriage seems to be commonly practiced in the northern parts of Nigeria. In Kano state, apart from cultural reasons, economic considerations tend to be the main cause of early marriage among girls leaving the girl with no choice as to whom she will marry or when to marry. Again, from Islamic view point, early marriage is encouraged to avoid *fitna* (fornication) and *zina* (adultery). Early marriage is encouraged under the article 16 of the Muslim code, the minimum marriageable age is 15 for both sexes (Nuruddin, 2013). Despite all the reasons for engaging in early marriage by the girl-child, the fact remains that it causes more harm than good because they are not mature enough to assume responsibilities of marriage. Marriage before the age of 18 should not be permitted since children do not have the full maturity and capacity to act (Bayisenge, 2012). Researchers agree that early marriage contributes to a series of negative consequences such as domestic violence and sexual abuse, high maternal mortality and morbidity, divorce or abandonment and early widowhood both for young girls and the society at large (Akpan, 2013; Salih, 2010). Presently, child marriage is widely recognized as a violation of child right, a direct form of discrimination against the child who as a result of practice is often deprived of her basic rights to health, education, development and equality. Tradition, religion and poverty continue to fuel the practice of child marriage, despite its strong association with adverse reproductive health outcomes and the lack of education of girls (UNICEF, 2011). The practice of child marriage is classified as violation of human rights (Bala, 2013).

Marriage before 18 years is a violation of human rights, compromising the development of girls and often resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, with little education and poor vocational training reinforcing the gendered nature of poverty (Bayisenge, 2012). The age at which a person gets married is believed to influence the likelihood of divorce; delaying marriage may provide more opportunity or experience in choosing a compatible partner (Nock, Steven, Martin and Willets, 2010). Bala (2013) observed that early marriage will likely lead to early divorce that is why it is not surprising that teenage marriages usually fail. He opined that women who marry early are at increased risk of intimate partner violence. Thus, early marriage is associated with low involvement in the decision to marry, fewer interactions with one's spouse and elevated risk of intimate partner violence, showing that there is an association between early marriage and the rate of divorce among young women.

Janssen (2014) asserted that there is a strong association between marital age differences and propensity to divorce. Larger differences in age, especially when the husband is far older than the wife (mostly in the case of child marriage), have been found to have an adverse impact on marital stability (Lehrer, 2011). Marriages contracted during the teens are known to be highly unstable, a result that has been interpreted as a "maturity effect." There is a greater likelihood of mistaken expectations in the case of such marriages (Oppenheimer, 2008). At very young ages, people often have inadequate self-knowledge and are uncertain about their own future prospects and potentials. They are also prone to misjudge the characteristics and likely trajectories of their partners. As Oppenheimer (2008) observed an early marriage may preclude a premarital matching on adult attributes that have not yet emerged. Thus the "maturity effect" is much broader than just emotional maturity. It seems likely that the maturity effect also includes a learning effect: an individual who enters marriage at a late age, after having spent most of the young adult years in the single state, probably has a deeper understanding of the foregone gains from marriage and is less likely to terminate the union even if it turns out to be far from perfect.

The ability to tolerate the inadequacies of one another sustains marriage a great deal. Marriage requires a lot of compromises by each of the partners (Ojo, 2012). These compromises come in form of tolerance of the shortcomings of each other. Another dimension to tolerance is the ability to accept and ignore some of the inadequacies of the partner's relation.

Tolerance is the ability of people or things to live or exist together without problems. A relationship is all about tolerance; at times, the opposite comes in. Too many opposites will not help any relationship to be successful (Ayodele, 2011). Tolerance in a marriage is something that many people experience and learn about the longer that they are married (Kalafut, 2013). Tolerance does not mean that you constantly have to "put up" with your spouse; it means that there are times when you need to be patient and choose not to argue when it is not necessary. Tolerance and patience are two virtues that should be practiced when a person is in a marriage (Badejo, 2010). No matter how much you love your spouse there will always be times when your patience may be tested and your character as well. Marriage is a relationship which requires a great deal of effort and compromise, without the effort of both spouses, marriage cannot work.

Disagreements are mild and rare and never dampen the strong bond of positive feelings between spouses. Partners may not always fully agree or appreciate each other, but they have learned to accept and become tolerant of each other's differences. Couples at this level share a strong bond of positive feelings (Akinwande, 2011). They are always seen to be loving and considerate to one another. Their mutual acceptance, trust, respect and admiration make their relationship stable and beautiful.

Kirby (2011) was of the opinion that early marriage will likely result in early divorce, which is why it is not surprising that teenage marriages usually fail. The probability of divorce in the early marriage was nearly four times as high for couples married while still under 20 years old than for couples who were 25 years or older at the time of marriage. Early marriage is often times associated in the long term with a higher probability of divorce and separation. In turn, marriage dissolution creates social and economic challenges for women who, as a single parent, often assume full responsibility for dependent family members (Shah, 2012). Salih (2010) found that there is a definite relationship between early marriage and subsequent unhappiness and divorce.

The probability of divorce in the early marriage was nearly four times as high for couples married while still under twenty years old than for couples who were twenty five years or older at the time of marriage. An early marriage is associated in the long term with a higher probability of divorce and separation (Bala, 2013). Studies on marital happiness tend to show that there is a definite relationship between early marriage and subsequent unhappiness and divorce (Khabir, 2014; Akpan, 2013 ).

The maturity effect, which is the way age at first marriage is postulated to directly affect the probability of divorce, predicts a pattern of steadily declining marital instability as age at marriage rises (Oppenheimer, 2008). Age at marriage also influences the risk of dissolution indirectly, in two ways. First, the age at which a woman enters her first marriage is systematically associated with other characteristics she has at that time that are relevant to marital stability. Age at marriage is one of the leading factors in divorce. It seems that it is best not to marry too young or wait too long before marrying. Women who marry while still in their teens are twice as likely to divorce as women in their thirties. But those who marry in their thirties are half again as likely to divorce as those who marry in their twenties (Komblum 2001). It has been observed that, higher ages at marriage are typically thought of as an indicator of female autonomy.

Age at marriage is often found to have a considerable positive effect on marriage stability, both in a western context and African population (Martin and Burmpass 1989; and Reiners 2003). Some young girls are not matured enough to face the realities of marriage due to the intricacies of marriage. As a result, the rate of divorce due to girl-child early marriage is high. Rhyme (2010) argued that the biggest factor in marital disharmony is immaturity.

Although psychological maturity is specifically grounded in the autonomy of one's decision-making ability, these outcomes are deeply embedded in not only cognition, but also in lifelong processes of emotional, social and moral development (Hollingshead, 2007). Various theorists have provided frameworks for recognizing the indicators of maturity. Erikson's stages of psychosocial development describe progression into adult maturity, with each maturational stage characterized by a certain kind of psychosocial conflict. The "Identity" stage is characterized as being mainly concerned with issues of role exploration and role confusion, and also the exploration of sexual and other identities (Hollingshead, 2007). They have to be psychologically prepared to play the role expected of their new status. The marriage of an immature person to a mature person is not pleasant, but it happens day after day, year after year, all over the world. Sometimes mature people marry immature people assuming they will mature in the future and hoping for 'soon' (Akinwale, 2009).

The consequences of marriage affect every aspect of the society. It occupies the most intimate aspect of personal privacy and personal love and reaches the pillars of society, among others. It infiltrates every aspect of human life not only for the married but also for the unmarried. When marriages proper, the society grows, when marriages fail, the society also fails. Divorce not only rattles the foundation of the judicial system and psychiatry, but through its influence on children, alters the course of the next generation (Adedokun, Tochukwu and Adedeji, 2012).

There is a relationship between marriage and culture. Culture refers to social value, beliefs norms and standard, when marriages fail the impact upon the rest of a culture is disastrous. The way in which marriage is conducted and its rules and ramification has changed over time, as has the institution itself, depending on the culture or demographic of the time (Adedokun, et al., 2012). Aminu (2010) found that, among young wives, teenage parenthood did not appear to increase the risk of divorce or separation, whereas teenage marriage significantly raised the probability of disruption.

Couple's ethnic/cultural background, coupled with other issues, has been another factor causing divorce, and adversely affects marriage stability. In Nigeria, divorce is frowned upon and seen as an element of culture diffusion. No ethnic group has been found to be in favour of divorce. Despite this, divorce cases in Nigeria seem to be very high (Okunola, 2012). It was observed that most northerners in Nigeria are still practicing early marriage, which may cause some health issues such as Vesico-Vaginal Fistulae (VVF). It can also be seen as violation of human right that takes place almost exclusively within the context of poverty and gender inequality. It also has social, cultural and economic dimensions. Most countries, including Nigeria, have declared 18 as a minimum legal age of marriage. Despite the sanction of child marriage, however, more girls are going into early marriage as a result of cultural values among northerners in Kano state. Therefore there is urgent need to investigate the impact of girl-child early marriage on the level of divorce among northerners in Kano State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are some basic norms, beliefs and cultural practices that guide the people in every society. In Nigeria, girl-child early marriage has been a common practice among many ethnic groups despite the fact that child

marriage is globally recognized as a violation of child's right. In Northern Nigeria, the practice is more prevalent due to cultural, religious and economic considerations such as poverty, unwanted pregnancy, parental and peer pressures among others with no regard to national laws and international agreements against girl-child early marriage. Some parents have predominant decision in choosing when and whom their daughters' marry irrespective of their ages, choices or level of maturity due to cultural, traditional and religious reasons. Some of the girls are forced into marriage, while others marry do to parental or peer pressure since they are too young to make informed decisions, thus, they seem so anxious to go into marriage with little or no knowledge of the intricacies of marriage which may adversely affect marriage stability. Again, despite all the aforementioned reasons for engaging in girl-child early marriage, the fact remains that they are not physically and psychologically matured enough to assume the responsibilities of marriage. Moreover, girl-child early marriage tend to have physical, social, psychological, educational and health implications such as emotional and mental distress, intolerance, school drop-out, Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF), high maternal mortality and morbidity, early widowhood, frustration and hatred for the man which may negatively affect the stability of the marriage.

Again, some of the researches on girl-child early marriage focused more on how it affects their education. However, the current study examines the impact of girl-child early marriage on the level of divorce among northerners in Kano state.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of girl-child early marriage on the level of divorce among northerners in Kano State. Specifically, the study among other things seeks to:

1. Determine the impact of early marriage on the level of divorce among northerners in Kano State.
2. Examine the impact of maturity on the level of divorce.

### **Research Questions**

In order to provide direction for this study, the following questions were asked:

1. What is the impact of girl-child early marriage on the level of divorce?
2. What is the impact of maturity on the level of divorce?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses guided the study:

1. There is no significant impact of early marriage on the level of divorce among northerners in Kano State.
2. There is no significant impact of maturity on the level of divorce among northerners in Kano State.

### **Significance of the study**

Young girls would benefit from this study because this study would add to girls' knowledge about the impact of early marriage on level of divorce among couples. The outcome of this work would portray a vivid idea of peoples' perceptions and impressions on early marriage in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the ideas in this work would help immensely in implementation and meaningful decisions and policies on developmental implications of early marriage as it affects girl child and the entire society. The findings and recommendations of this research work will help tremendously to restore adequate dignity, rights and values of girl child in Nigeria especially in northern parts of Nigeria.

The study would be of great significance in the sense that young girls should know that early marriage and polygamy is not a solution to the search for economic survival.

## Research Methodology

The research design used for the study was descriptive research design.

A 20 item researcher-developed questionnaire titled “Impact of Girl-Child Early Marriage and on the Level of Divorce Questionnaire (IGCEMLDQ)” was used for data collection. The instrument has a reliability value of 0.76. A total of two hundred (200) married women aged between 12 and 35 years make up the sample. They were selected through simple random sampling technique from Women Development Centres organized by Kano State Ministry of Women Affairs, Programme and Poverty Reduction in four local government areas in Kano state namely: Nasarawa, Dawakin Tofa, Sumaila and Takai. Simple random sampling technique was also used to select fifty (50) married women from each of the local government areas selected for the study.

## Results

### Hypothesis One

In the null form, the hypothesis stated that there is no significant impact of early marriage on the level of divorce among northerners in Kano State. The hypothesis was tested using t-test statistics. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Independent t-test analysis on impact of early marriage on the level of divorce**

Early marriage	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal
Low	72	14.35	2.84	2.78*
High	128	18.74	3.06	

\* Significant at 0.05 df = 198; critical t = 1.96

Table 1 shows that a calculated t-value of 2.78 resulted as the impact of early marriage on the level of divorce. This calculated t-value of 2.78 is significant since it is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 given 198 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This means that women who marry early significantly manifest higher tendency to divorce. The null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant impact of early marriage on the level of divorce among northerners in Kano State.

### Hypothesis Two

In the null form, the hypothesis stated that there is no significant impact of maturity on the level of divorce. The hypothesis was tested using t-test statistics. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 3.

**Table 2: Independent t-test analysis on impact of maturity on the level of divorce**

Integral maturity	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal
Low	73	21.95	2.38	2.32*
High	127	18.80	3.84	

\* Significant at 0.05 df = 198; critical t = 1.96

Table 2 shows that a calculated t-value of 2.32 resulted as the impact of maturity on the level of divorce. This calculated t-value of 2.32 is significant since it is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 given 198 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This means that women who have high maturity significantly have lower tendency of proneness to divorce than those who have low maturity. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, it can be deduced that there is a significant impact of maturity on the level of divorce.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Hypothesis one states that there is no significant impact of early marriage on the level of divorce among northerners. The hypothesis was rejected. This shows that there is significant impact of early marriage on the level of divorce among northerners. This finding supports Khabir (2014) who noted that girls are not adequately prepared for the roles expected of them in the family. This therefore becomes a burden and has serious impact on their psychological welfare, their perception of themselves and also their relationship. Khabir concluded that early marriage can lead to divorce. Bala (2013) found association between early marriage and the rate of divorce among young women. Janssen (2014) asserted that there is a strong association between marital age differences and propensity to divorce. Kirby (2011) was of the opinion that early marriage will likely results to early divorce that is why it is not surprising that teenage marriages usually fail. The probability of divorce in the early marriage was nearly four times as high for couples married while still under twenty years old than for couples who were twenty five years or older at the time of marriage. An early marriage is associated in the long term with a higher probability of divorce and separation. Salih (2010) found that there is a definite relationship between early marriage and subsequent unhappiness and divorce. The reason for this finding could be that early marriage deprives young girls of the opportunity for personal development as well as their emotional well being. With this, married girls are susceptible to the increased risk of divorce. The girls that are coerced and forced into early marriage are almost always not emotionally and mentally prepared for the responsibilities a marriage brings.

Hypothesis two states that there is no significant impact of maturity on the level of divorce among northerners. The hypothesis was rejected. This shows that there is significant impact of maturity on the level of divorce among northerners. This finding collaborates with Reiners (2003) who confirmed that many broken families have been associated with the immaturity and youthfulness of the married couple who get married in their teens (13-17). Marrying too young is destructive and has a tremendous impact in a relationship. Jones (2000) explicitly links increasing ages at marriage to a greater degree of self-arrangement of marriages, and that is considered as powerful mechanism of declining divorce rates. Akinwale (2009) reported that the marriage of an immature person to a mature person is not pleasant, but it happens day after day, year after year, all over the world. Sometimes mature people marry immature people assuming they will mature in the future – and hoping for ‘soon’. Badejo (2010) observed that marriage is the union of a mature man and woman, whether educated or not, the rich or the poor.

The reason for this finding according to the researcher could be that some girls are not experienced enough to face the realities of life. As a result, it is no wonder that the rate of divorce linked to early marriage is high. This finding supports Ojo (2012) who reported that the ability to tolerate the inadequacies of one another sustains marriage a great deal. Marriage requires a lot of compromises by each other partner. Ayodele (2011) stated that similarity of interest tends to bring couples closer and reduces frictions. Badejo (2010) asserted that tolerance and patience are two virtues that should be practiced when you are in a marriage. No matter how much you love your spouse there will always be times when your patience may be tested and your character as well. Marriage is a relationship which requires a great deal of effort and compromise, without the effort of both spouses, marriage cannot work.

In the opinion of the researcher, the reason for this finding could be that the ability to tolerate the inadequacies of one another sustains marriage a great deal. Marriage requires a lot of compromises by each other partner. These compromises come in form of tolerance of the shortcomings of each other.

### **Summary and conclusion**

It was found that girl-child early marriage has significant impact on level of divorce among northerners in Kano state and that those who have high level of maturity significantly have lower tendency of proneness to divorce than those with low maturity level. Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded among northerners in Kano State, Nigeria and that low maturity level in marriage have increased the level of divorce among northerners in Kano state. Again, since girl-child early marriage is associated with physical, social, psychological, educational and health implications such as emotional and mental distress, intolerance, school drop-out, Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF), high maternal mortality and morbidity, early widowhood, frustration and hatred for the man and high level of divorce, thus, there is need to implement international agreements and enacted Acts that will further enhance the rights of the girl-child in most Northern states has been controversial as some of the states are also being guided by Islamic laws that encourage on early marriage.

### **Counselling implications**

Counsellors should sensitize the general public especially the girl-child and parents in the northern part of Nigeria on the physical, social, psychological, educational and health implications of early marriage and its impact on the level of divorce. Sensitization on developmental implications of early marriage from time to time will increase women's awareness and growth within the family and the society at large so as to reduce the high divorce rate caused by girl-child early marriage. Thus, attitudinal change on girl-child early marriage should be the watchword.

Counsellors and all stakeholders in girl-child education, child care and welfare, and those who are interested in saving the younger generation should encourage the government to make provisions such as incentives and grants (such as scholarship awards) to support female children from poor parental backgrounds so that they may enjoy a happy childhood, uninterrupted basic education, and good health.

Counselling programme should therefore not be restricted to schools only, rather, it should be extended to the local communities with packages on importance of girl-child education.

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