

**EARLY MARRIAGE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE GIRL CHILD USING  
EFFIUM LOCAL GOVERNMENT AS A CASE STUDY.**

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BENIN CITY**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND  
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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this project was carried out by Eze Abigail Chimaobi, Department of Sociology and Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Bachelor Degree (B.SC) in Sociology and Anthropology, University of Benin.

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**(Head of Department)**

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**Date**

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**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for his grace towards my life and academic pursuits and also to my mother for her endless prayers, encouragement and financial support.

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examines the effects of early marriage on the girl child. To find out peoples perceptive on early marriage, to examine the factors that promote early child marriage, to access the psychological health and emotional consequences of early marriage on young girls, to explore strategies for reducing the prevalence of early marriage. The study adopted the survey design on the bases of which data was sourced; simple percentage instrument was employed to analyze the data collected. The findings reveal that early marriage negatively affects the physical, emotional and psychological health of the affected girls in general. Childbirth complications, domestic abuse and exploitation are some of the consequences of early marriage. The study recommends that legal intervention as well as sensitization should be taken into consideration. Laws should be enforced and public awareness should be encouraged. Basic education should be made compulsory and economic empowering programs should be established and implemented. Families who force/ coerce their children into early marriage should face the consequences as stipulated in the law.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Child marriage is a common practice all around the world, where children are given out well before attaining the age of puberty as in most cases or the age to get married as stipulated in the law. The United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2023) defines child marriage as any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states that any betrothal or marriage of a child should not have any legal status. Sadly, this is often not considered in some countries. Yemen, for example, has no law stating the age at which a person should be eligible for marriage. This has led to child marriage of the Yemeni girl child. While the prevalence of child marriage has decreased worldwide from one in four girls a decade ago to approximately one in five today, the practice remains widespread across the globe.

Child marriage is often the result of entrenched gender inequality, making girls disproportionately affected by the practice. Globally, the prevalence of child marriage among boys is just one sixth than among girls.(UNICEF,2023) . Child marriage robs girls of their childhood and threatens their well-being. Girls who marry before 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence and less likely to remain in school. They have worse economic and health outcomes than their unmarried peers, which are eventually passed down to their own children, straining a country's capacity to provide quality health and education services.(UNICEF 2023). Child brides often become pregnant

during adolescence, when the risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth increases. The practice can also isolate girls from family and friends, taking a heavy toll on their mental health. The practice of child marriage has continued to decline globally. Today, one in five young women aged 20 to 24 years were married as children versus nearly one in four 10 years ago. (Girls not Brides, 2023).

Nearly half of child brides live in South Asia (45 per cent) with the next largest share in sub-Saharan Africa (20 per cent), followed by East Asia and the Pacific (15 per cent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (9 per cent). (UNICEF 2023). Marriage before the age of 18 is a fundamental violation of human rights and many factors interact to place a child at risk of marriage, including poverty, the perception that marriage will provide ‘protection’, family honor, social norms, customary or religious laws that condone the practice, an inadequate legislative framework and the state of a country’s civil registration system. (UNICEF, 2023) The practice is more common among girls and child marriage often compromises a girl’s development by resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, interrupting her schooling, limiting her opportunities for career and vocational advancement and placing her at risk of domestic violence. In Nigeria, early marriage is a widespread practice. There is an unfounded belief that when a girl is married off early, she does not have the opportunity to become promiscuous. (Nwakoby and Ihediuche 2023) This places a heavy societal burden on young girls and the reality is different. More than a third of girls in Nigeria end up in child marriages, and with 22 million married before the age of 18, the nation has the highest number of child brides in Africa (UNICEF ,2018).

Even though early marriage is prevalent in Nigeria, Northern Nigeria has some of the highest rates of early marriages in the world where 39% of girls are married off before the age of 18 and 16% are married before they turn 15 years old. However, according to Save the Children network, the number of Nigerian girls that are married before their 18th birthday is as high as 58.2%. (Save the Children,2021) The prevalence of child marriage varies widely across the country, but figures are as high as 76% in the North West region, compared with 10% in the South East. It is also believed among Muslims in most parts of northern Nigeria that it is permissible for a man to marry a child as young as 9 years, as long as sexual relations with her is postponed until she has attained puberty. However, it is clearly seen in the Northern parts of Nigeria that child brides are usually forced to have sexual intercourse with their spouses as soon as they are married, and many get pregnant in their first year of marriage. These early pregnancies often lead to Vesicovaginal Fistula (VVF) or Rector Vaginal Fistula obstetric fistula as these young girls are giving birth at a very tender age when their bodies are not physically able to deliver a fetus. The pregnancy also puts them at a greater risk of sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, human papilloma virus (HPV) and Gender Based Violence (GBV). (Nigeria Health Watch,2021)

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Child marriage is a widespread phenomenon that has resulted in societal collapse in terms of the victims and how it affects them in the long run. Addressing child marriage requires recognition of the factors that enable it. While the roots of the practice vary across countries and cultures, poverty, lack of educational opportunities and limited

access to health care perpetuate it. Some families marry off their daughters to reduce their economic burden or earn income. Others may do so because they believe it will secure their daughters' futures or protect them. (Relief Web,2019). It is a common belief amongst the inhabitants of the Effium community that a girl child who is married off early has little to no chance of becoming wayward or promiscuous. This indicates that most families engage in such practices as a form of security blanket to fall back on as well as insurance on the well-being and secured future of their girl child.

A firm refusal to turn away from these cultural old practices is also a contributing factor which encourages the practice and the prevalent rate of child marriage among some group of people. Children who have no immediate family also fall prey to this societal vice as the extended family may decide to give the child out as a way to cut down on expenses such as education, feeding and shelter (Veronica Longo et al.,2024).

### **1.3 Research Questions**

1. What is the perception of early child marriage among the Effium community in Ebonyi State?
2. What are the factors that promote early child marriage in Effium community
3. How do they access the psychological, health and emotional consequences of early marriage among young girls in Effium community?
4. What measures are to be taken in curbing the rate of child early marriage in Effium community?

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

At the end of this research study, we hope to have attained some insights into early

marriage and its implications on the Girl child. Other objectives are:

1. To find out the people's perspective on child marriage in Effium community.
2. To examine the factors that promote child marriage.
3. To assess the psychological, health, and emotional consequences of early marriage on young girls.
4. To explore strategies for reducing the prevalence of early marriage.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it addresses a major issue in our society. This study will assess and address the problem of early marriage by looking deeply at reasons that enhance its practice, the socio-economic costs and impacts, as well the effect it has on the individuals involved with more emphasis placed on the girl child. These individual effects include both the psychological and physical health. This study will at great lengths, examine the issue of child marriage, looking closely at the basis of the problem, the family. Furthermore, the implications of such acts will be clearly expressed, especially in rural areas such as the Effium Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. In addition, there will be thorough and comprehensive research study of cases on early marriage among the community members and the real-life effects this has had on the individuals involved, directly or indirectly. Conclusively, suggestions on how this issue might be tackled will be made, with realistic and humane measures taken into consideration.

The study findings will inform the general public on the ills of this practice as well as ways to tackle them. It should be noted that there are more than one way to

combat a problem and the least provocative and problematic one should always be considered first.

## **1.6 Scope of the Study**

This research work will center around the Effium community members and the socioeconomic factors that contribute to the practice of early marriage. Ethnic values and traditions will also be studied so as to ascertain the roles they play in determining the continuous cases that emerge every day. The study will cut across girls and women of different ages, ranging from 12- 50. This is to ensure that all needed experiences from these women covered the study, appropriately in the community.

## **1.7 Operationalization of Key Terms**

1. Child bride: a very young bride, usually coerced or pressured into nuptials with a much older man, as practiced in some cultures
2. Girl child: a young female child.
3. Human rights: rights inherent to all human beings regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion or any other status
4. Practice: the actual application or use of an idea, belief or method as opposed to theories relating to it.
5. Tradition: the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way; a doctrine believed to have divine authority though not in the Scriptures.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Conceptual Clarification

##### 2.1.1 Overview of Early Marriage and Its Prevalence Globally and Regionally

Early marriage remains a significant global issue, particularly affecting young girls, with its prevalence varying across regions due to a multitude of socio-economic and cultural factors. Globally, early marriage is often rooted in gender inequality, poverty, and cultural traditions, which perpetuate the cycle of disadvantage for young girls. In Indonesia, for instance, early marriage is frequently triggered by these circumstances, alongside limited economic resources and low educational attainment, which are compounded by societal pressures and the desire of girls to escape parental constraints (Suyanto et al., 2023). This pattern is echoed in various regions, where early marriage is seen as a means of securing a girl's future, especially in communities where opportunities for women outside of marriage are scarce (Saleh et al., 2022).

The implications of early marriage on young girls are profound and multifaceted. Early marriage often leads to the premature termination of education, significantly hampering a girl's future prospects and contributing to a cycle of poverty (Ahmed et al., 2014). The psychosocial health burdens associated with early marriage are considerable, as young brides face increased risks of early childbearing and the associated health complications, which can have lasting effects on their physical and mental well-being (Ahmed et al., 2014). Furthermore, the socio-cultural context plays a crucial role in the prevalence of early marriage; for instance, in Ghana, early marriage is more common in

remote rural areas, where socio-cultural practices and economic conditions converge to create an environment conducive to such unions (Johnson et al., 2019).

Regionally, the prevalence of early marriage varies significantly. In Ethiopia, studies have identified hotspots of early marriage in regions such as Amhara, Afar, and Tigray, where socio-cultural norms and educational disparities contribute to higher rates of early unions (Alem et al., 2020). This geographical variation highlights the importance of addressing local cultural practices and improving educational opportunities for girls as strategies to combat early marriage. In Iraq, similar socio-economic factors, including poor family economic status and community traditions, have been identified as significant contributors to the prevalence of early marriage (Saleh et al., 2022).

### **2.1.2 Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to Early Marriage**

#### **Poverty and Financial Constraints**

Economic hardship plays a significant role in perpetuating early marriages, particularly in developing countries where financial constraints are prevalent. Research indicates that girls from poor households, those with no education, and those who are unemployed are significantly more likely to marry before the age of 18. This trend highlights the detrimental impact of early marriage on the educational and economic opportunities available to young girls, thereby reinforcing cycles of poverty and limiting their potential for upward mobility (Johnson et al., 2019).

In many regions of Asia and Africa, the practice of marrying off daughters at a young age is often influenced by financial transactions associated with marriage. Families facing economic difficulties may view early marriage as a viable strategy to

alleviate their financial burdens, thereby linking poverty directly to the prevalence of early marriage (Wahyudi et al., 2019). This connection is further emphasized by the observation that in wealthier nations, where girls have better access to education and employment opportunities, the incidence of early marriage is significantly lower (Wahyudi et al., 2019).

The situation is exacerbated in contexts of conflict and instability, such as among Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon, where poverty, lack of educational access, and fears of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) contribute to the increased likelihood of early marriages. In these settings, financial resources are often cited by men as a primary factor driving the decision to marry young, framing early marriage as a financial coping strategy for families facing economic hardship (Bartels et al., 2018).

Moreover, emotional and financial resources play a critical role in the decision-making process surrounding early marriage. Factors such as familial relationships, societal expectations, and the promise of financial stability can influence young girls' decisions to marry early, often overshadowing their aspirations for education and personal development (Segal-Engelchin et al., 2016). This complex interplay of socio-economic factors underscores the need for targeted interventions that address both the immediate financial pressures and the broader social determinants that contribute to early marriage.

### **Cultural and Traditional Practices**

Cultural norms and practices significantly influence the prevalence of early marriage, particularly in Nigeria, where various ethnic and religious contexts shape

societal expectations and behaviors. Early marriage is often viewed as a cultural tradition that secures social status and economic stability for families, especially in communities where educational opportunities for girls are limited. For instance, Mobolaji et al. highlight that in Nigeria, Muslim girls experience higher rates of child marriage compared to their Christian counterparts, largely due to the socio-cultural dynamics and religious customs prevalent in predominantly Muslim states, which often enforce Sharia law that does not align with the Child Rights Act (Mobolaji et al., 2020). This legal and cultural framework creates an environment where early marriage is normalized and perpetuated.

Moreover, the interplay between religion and cultural practices plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards early marriage. Opesemowo notes that religious beliefs significantly influence gender-related behaviors and practices across Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups, with child marriage being more prevalent among Muslim communities (Opesemowo, 2023). This trend is corroborated by evidence suggesting that systemic cultural norms, rather than isolated incentives, are pivotal in the decision-making processes surrounding early marriage (McDougal et al., 2018). The findings suggest that while girls may express a desire for education and autonomy, entrenched cultural practices often override these aspirations, leading to early marriage as a socially accepted norm.

Economic factors also contribute to the persistence of early marriage in Nigeria. Saleh et al. discuss how families facing economic hardship may view marrying off their daughters at a young age as a means of financial relief or social security (Saleh et al.,

2022). This perspective is echoed by Olaide et al., who argue that the denial of education and the perpetuation of poverty are critical factors that drive families to prioritize early marriage over the educational advancement of girls (Olaide et al., 2017). The lack of economic opportunities for women outside of marriage further reinforces this cycle, as families may believe that securing a marriage for their daughters is the best path to ensure their future well-being.

### **Gender Inequality and Patriarchal Systems**

The societal attitudes towards girls and women in Nigeria are deeply rooted in patriarchal systems that perpetuate gender inequality. These attitudes manifest in various forms, including the belief that girls are economic burdens, which often leads families to marry them off at an early age to alleviate financial strain. This practice is particularly prevalent in regions where economic pressures are acute and where cultural norms dictate that girls should be married young to ensure their security and that of their families (Olaide et al., 2017). The implications of such societal attitudes are profound, as they not only limit the educational and economic opportunities available to girls but also entrench cycles of poverty that are difficult to escape (Olaide et al., 2017; Okunade, 2023).

Gender roles and expectations significantly contribute to the prevalence of early marriages in Nigeria. Traditional views often dictate that women should prioritize domestic responsibilities over education and career aspirations, reinforcing the notion that their primary role is to be wives and mothers (Egbue, 2010; Ajemba, 2023). This societal expectation is compounded by a lack of political will and effective governance

to address gender inequality, resulting in insufficient support for educational initiatives aimed at girls (Ajemba, 2023). Furthermore, the intersection of ethnicity and religion plays a crucial role in shaping these gender norms, with certain communities exhibiting higher rates of child marriage, particularly in Muslim-majority areas where cultural practices are intertwined with religious beliefs (Mobolaji et al., 2020).

The consequences of early marriage are dire, as they often lead to significant health risks for young mothers, including increased maternal mortality rates and adverse health outcomes for their children (Olaide et al., 2017). The denial of educational opportunities further exacerbates these issues, as girls who marry early are less likely to pursue higher education, thereby perpetuating a cycle of poverty and dependency (Okunade, 2023). To combat these entrenched practices, a multifaceted approach is necessary, which includes dismantling patriarchal structures, promoting women's empowerment, and implementing culturally sensitive policies that prioritize the rights and education of girls (Okunade, 2023; Mobolaji et al., 2020).

### **2.1.3 Impact of Early Marriage on Educational Attainment**

#### **Disruption of Formal Education**

Early marriage is a significant barrier to school enrollment and completion for girls, particularly in Nigeria, where cultural norms and economic pressures often prioritize marriage over education. Studies have consistently shown that girls who marry early are at a higher risk of dropping out of school compared to their unmarried peers. For instance, research indicates that married girls are ten times more likely to leave school than those who remain single, highlighting the detrimental impact of early

marriage on educational attainment (Sampa et al., 2018). This trend is not isolated to Nigeria; similar patterns have been observed in various contexts, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where married girls have completed significantly less education than their non-married counterparts (Landis et al., 2018).

The implications of early marriage extend beyond mere school dropout rates; they also affect the overall educational landscape for girls. In regions where child marriage is prevalent, such as South Asia, the lack of educational opportunities is compounded by socio-economic factors that perpetuate the cycle of poverty and limited educational access (Raj et al., 2014). For example, a qualitative analysis in Ethiopia and India revealed that societal beliefs and norms surrounding marriage often impede girls' educational pursuits, reinforcing the notion that education is secondary to marital responsibilities (Raj et al., 2019). This cultural context creates a risk environment that not only discourages girls from continuing their education but also normalizes early marriage as an expected life trajectory.

Moreover, the consequences of dropping out of school due to early marriage are profound and multifaceted. Research has shown that girls who leave school early often face adverse mental health outcomes in adulthood, linked to the stressors associated with early marriage and childbearing (Yadav et al., 2022). The interplay of factors such as poverty, low academic achievement, and domestic violence further exacerbates the challenges faced by these girls, leading to a cycle of disadvantage that is difficult to escape (Yadav et al., 2022). Thus, addressing early marriage as a barrier to education is crucial for improving the educational outcomes and overall well-being of girls in Nigeria

and similar contexts.

### **Long-Term Effects on Skills and Employment Opportunities**

The phenomenon of early marriage significantly limits the educational and economic opportunities available to young girls in Nigeria, perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependency. Early marriage often results in the cessation of formal education, as young brides are expected to assume domestic roles and responsibilities, which severely curtails their career prospects. Research indicates that girls who marry early are more likely to drop out of school, leading to lower levels of educational attainment, which in turn restricts their employment opportunities and earning potential throughout their lives (Muhammed et al., 2022). The correlation between early marriage and educational dropout rates is well-documented, with studies showing that the earlier a girl marries, the more likely she is to disengage from her education entirely (Muhammed et al., 2022).

Moreover, the socio-economic implications of early marriage extend beyond individual educational outcomes; they also affect broader community dynamics. In many cases, families view daughters as economic burdens, leading to the decision to marry them off at a young age as a means of alleviating financial strain (Olaide et al., 2017). This practice not only limits the girls' autonomy and freedom but also reinforces a cycle of poverty that is difficult to escape. The lack of education resulting from early marriage confines these young women to low-paying jobs or informal employment, thereby diminishing their economic independence and perpetuating gender inequality (Olaide et al., 2017).

Testimonies and case studies further illustrate these consequences. For instance, in a qualitative analysis, girls who participated in early marriage prevention programs expressed a strong desire to continue their education but felt pressured by familial and societal expectations to marry early (Raj et al., 2019). These narratives highlight the internal conflict faced by many young girls who recognize the value of education yet are constrained by cultural norms that prioritize marriage over personal development. Additionally, the health implications of early marriage cannot be overlooked, as young mothers often face significant maternal health risks, further complicating their ability to pursue education and employment opportunities (Olaide et al., 2017).

#### **2.1.4 Psychological, Health, and Emotional Consequences**

##### **Health Risks and Maternal Complications**

Early marriage remains a pressing issue in Nigeria, significantly impacting the health and well-being of young girls. One of the most critical health risks associated with early marriage is the increased vulnerability to early pregnancies, which can lead to severe maternal complications. Research indicates that girls who marry before the age of 18 face a higher likelihood of experiencing pregnancy-related complications and maternal mortality compared to those who marry later (A., 2023). This is corroborated by findings from Groot et al., which highlight that early childbearing is a leading cause of death among women aged 20–24 years and the second leading cause among adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years globally (Groot et al., 2018). The lack of adequate healthcare during and after pregnancy further exacerbates these risks, as many young brides are often unprepared for the physiological demands of childbirth (A.K.2023).

Statistical analyses reveal a concerning correlation between early marriage and maternal health outcomes. For instance, studies have shown that early marriage is associated with poorer maternal and reproductive health, increased risk of sexually transmitted infections, and intimate partner violence (Groot et al., 2018). Additionally, the prevalence of child marriage is linked to poor fertility control and a lack of awareness regarding contraceptive use, which can lead to unintended pregnancies and subsequent health complications (Ahmed et al., 2014). Ahmed et al. emphasize that the physiological and psychosocial burdens stemming from early marriage are profound, as these young girls often lack the necessary knowledge and resources to navigate their reproductive health effectively (Ahmed et al., 2014).

Moreover, the implications of early marriage extend beyond individual health risks to encompass broader societal concerns. Alem et al. found that educated women are less likely to marry early, suggesting that education plays a crucial role in altering perceptions of marriage age and increasing awareness of the health risks associated with early pregnancies (Alem et al., 2020). This highlights the importance of educational interventions in mitigating the adverse effects of early marriage and improving health outcomes for young girls. Furthermore, the relationship between early marriage and maternal mortality is underscored by the fact that girls who marry young often have limited decision-making power within their marriages, which can further compromise their health and well-being (Groot et al., 2018).

### **Psychological and Emotional Impact**

Early marriage has profound psychological and emotional implications for the

girl child, particularly in Nigeria, where cultural and socio-economic factors often perpetuate this practice. One of the most significant impacts of early marriage is the heightened risk of mental health issues, including depression and anxiety. Research indicates that early marriage can lead to a heavy emotional burden due to the pressures of adapting to adult responsibilities at a young age, which often overwhelms these young women (Ningrum, 2023). The psychological condition of couples entering early marriages is concerning, with studies showing that a significant percentage—56%—of these individuals experience poor mental health, primarily due to their immature emotional development, which hampers their ability to understand and support one another (Ernawati et al., 2023).

Moreover, the social isolation that often accompanies early marriage exacerbates these mental health challenges. Young brides frequently lose their childhood and the support networks that come with it, leading to feelings of loneliness and anxiety (Ernawati et al., 2023). The lack of decision-making power in their marriages further compounds their emotional distress, as many young women find themselves in situations where they cannot advocate for their own needs or desires (Ernawati et al., 2023). This loss of autonomy can lead to feelings of helplessness and increased anxiety, as they navigate the complexities of family life without the necessary skills or support (Ernawati et al., 2023).

Additionally, the implications of early marriage extend beyond immediate mental health issues. Studies have shown that early marriage is associated with a range of health problems, including gynecological issues and depression, which are significantly more

prevalent among early married women compared to their peers who marry later (Manandhar & Joshi, 2020). The psychological ramifications of these health issues can be severe, contributing to a cycle of poor mental health and diminished quality of life. The interplay between mental health and physical health in early marriage contexts highlights the urgent need for comprehensive support systems that address both psychological and physical well-being (Ningrum, 2023; Manandhar & Joshi, 2020).

### **Risk of Abuse and Exploitation**

Early marriage is a significant issue in Nigeria, particularly affecting the girl child, and is closely linked to domestic violence and abuse. One of the primary drivers of early marriage is the economic pressure faced by families, where marrying off daughters can be seen as a financial strategy to alleviate household burdens. McAlpine et al. highlight that early marriage is often viewed as a means to cope with financial needs, either through bride price or by reducing the number of dependents in the household (McAlpine et al., 2016). This economic rationale can lead to a cycle of exploitation, as young girls are married off at an age when they are not physically or emotionally prepared for the responsibilities of marriage, increasing their vulnerability to domestic violence (McAlpine et al., 2016).

The implications of early marriage extend beyond financial considerations; they also encompass significant risks of abuse and exploitation. For instance, girls who marry early often face pressure from their husbands and families to bear children, which can lead to serious health risks due to their physiological immaturity (Avogo & Somefun, 2019). This pressure not only increases the likelihood of maternal and infant morbidity

and mortality but also perpetuates a cycle of poverty and lack of education, as early childbearing often curtails educational opportunities for young mothers (Avogo & Somefun, 2019). Additionally, the lack of education and economic independence makes these girls more susceptible to domestic violence, as they may lack the resources or knowledge to escape abusive situations (Uzodimma et al., 2013).

Moreover, the context of conflict in Nigeria, particularly with the rise of groups like Boko Haram, exacerbates the risks associated with early marriage. Awa notes that early child marriage and limited access to education increase girls' vulnerability to abduction and exploitation by terrorist groups, which often resort to forced marriages as a means of control (Awa, 2021). This not only highlights the intersection of early marriage with broader issues of violence and exploitation but also underscores the urgent need for interventions that address both educational access and the socio-economic factors driving early marriage (Awa, 2021).

Furthermore, the global perspective on child exploitation emphasizes that early marriage is a form of child sexual exploitation, which can lead to a range of negative health outcomes, including unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (Laser-Maira et al., 2020). The systematic review by McAlpine et al. also indicates that early marriage is often a response to perceived threats of sexual violence, which paradoxically places girls in even more dangerous situations post-marriage (McAlpine et al., 2016). This cycle of abuse and exploitation calls for comprehensive strategies that not only aim to prevent early marriage but also provide support for those who have already been affected by it.

## **2.1.5 Strategies for Reducing Early Marriage and Supporting Affected Girls**

### **Policy Interventions and Legal Frameworks**

The issue of early marriage in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with various legal frameworks and policy interventions aimed at addressing its prevalence and implications for the girl child. Early marriage, defined as marriage before the age of 18, poses significant risks to the health, education, and overall well-being of young girls. The Nigerian legal landscape includes several policies intended to combat early marriage, yet enforcement remains a critical challenge. One of the primary legal frameworks addressing early marriage in Nigeria is the Child Rights Act of 2003, which sets the minimum age of marriage at 18. However, this law is often undermined by cultural practices and regional variations in enforcement. For instance, studies indicate that child marriage is particularly prevalent in northern states such as Sokoto, Kebbi, and Kano, where traditional norms often supersede statutory laws (Bolarinwa et al., 2022). This discrepancy highlights a significant challenge in the enforcement of national policies at the state level, where local customs may perpetuate early marriage despite existing legal prohibitions (Bolarinwa et al., 2022). Moreover, the effectiveness of policies aimed at reducing early marriage is contingent upon their implementation and the socio-economic context in which they operate. For example, while the Nigerian government has introduced free maternal and child health care policies, the benefits of these initiatives are not uniformly realized across the country. Women who marry early may utilize these services, but access remains limited in rural areas due to logistical challenges such as distance and transportation costs (Ibrahim, 2023). Therefore, while policies exist to

support maternal health, their effectiveness is hampered by the socio-cultural barriers that influence early marriage practices. Education emerges as a critical factor in addressing early marriage. Evidence suggests that improving girls' access to education is vital for delaying marriage and childbearing (Melesse et al., 2021). Gender-sensitive policies that promote educational opportunities for girls can significantly reduce the incidence of early marriage and its associated risks, including health complications and socio-economic disadvantages (Melesse et al., 2021). However, the lack of comprehensive data on child marriage and its correlates complicates the formulation of effective interventions. Without adequate monitoring and data collection, policymakers struggle to identify at-risk populations and assess the efficacy of existing programs (Cordova-Pozo, 2023).

### **Community-Based Awareness Campaigns on child marriage**

Community-based awareness campaigns play a crucial role in addressing early marriage and its implications for the girl child in Nigeria. Education and sensitization are fundamental components in changing entrenched cultural norms that perpetuate early marriage. By engaging communities, particularly women, community leaders, and religious figures, these campaigns can effectively communicate the risks associated with early marriage and promote alternative socio-cultural norms that support delayed marriage (Gausman et al., 2020).

The importance of education in this context cannot be overstated. Research indicates that educating adolescents about the consequences of early marriage—both physical and psychological—can significantly reduce the incidence of such marriages

(Ririnisahawaitun, 2023). Increased awareness leads to a better understanding of the maturation process and the implications of marrying at a young age, which can empower girls and their families to make informed decisions (Ririnisahawaitun, 2023). Moreover, programs that integrate mental health services with sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) services can further enhance the effectiveness of these campaigns by providing comprehensive support to at-risk populations (Gausman et al., 2020).

Successful community programs have demonstrated the potential of education and sensitization in changing cultural norms surrounding early marriage. For instance, initiatives that build community protection committees and link them to existing structures, such as parent-teacher associations and child-friendly spaces, have shown promise in mobilizing community resources against early marriage (Gausman et al., 2020). These programs often involve a participatory approach, where community members are educated about the negative impacts of early marriage and are encouraged to advocate for the rights of girls (Gausman et al., 2020).

Additionally, qualitative studies from other contexts, such as Ethiopia and India, highlight the necessity of understanding the decision-making processes surrounding early marriage (McDougal et al., 2018). These studies reveal that families may perceive early marriage as beneficial under certain circumstances, which underscores the need for programs to address these contextual factors rather than simply advocating for delayed marriage without considering local realities (McDougal et al., 2018). Therefore, effective community-based campaigns must not only disseminate information but also engage with families to reshape their perceptions and highlight the long-term benefits of

delaying marriage for girls (Abera et al., 2020).

### **Empowerment and Support for Affected Girls**

Early marriage remains a significant challenge for girls in Nigeria, with profound implications for their education, health, and psychological well-being. Empowerment initiatives aimed at addressing these issues are crucial for supporting affected girls. Such initiatives often encompass education, healthcare, and psychological support, which are essential for fostering resilience and improving life outcomes for these girls.

Education plays a pivotal role in delaying early marriage and enhancing the prospects of girls. Research indicates that educational retention is directly linked to a reduction in early marriage rates, as it empowers girls with knowledge and skills that extend beyond traditional marital roles (Raj et al., 2019). Programs that focus on changing societal norms and increasing the perceived value of girls' education can significantly impact their choices and opportunities (Kohno et al., 2019). For instance, community-based interventions that engage not only girls but also their families and broader societal structures have shown effectiveness in reducing child marriage rates in various contexts, including Nigeria (Kohno et al., 2019). These educational initiatives can include peer education programs, which have been demonstrated to decrease early marriages and pregnancies while increasing school retention rates among girls (Duru et al., 2021).

Healthcare support is equally vital in addressing the consequences of early marriage. Girls who marry early often face significant health risks, including complications from early pregnancies and limited access to reproductive health services.

Empowerment programs that educate girls about the health implications of early marriage can lead to better health outcomes. For example, nurse-led initiatives that provide educational resources and community awareness campaigns have been effective in informing girls about the adverse health consequences associated with early marriage (Atia, 2023). By equipping girls with this knowledge, such programs not only empower them but also encourage community-wide shifts in attitudes towards early marriage.

Psychological support is another critical component of comprehensive empowerment initiatives. The trauma associated with early marriage can lead to long-term psychological effects, including anxiety and depression. Programs that incorporate mental health support can help girls process their experiences and build resilience (Duru et al., 2021). Furthermore, creating safe spaces for girls to share their experiences and receive counseling can foster a sense of community and support, which is essential for their emotional well-being.

Case studies of rehabilitative programs in Nigeria highlight the importance of a multifaceted approach. For example, initiatives that combine educational support with healthcare and psychological counseling have shown promising results in improving the overall well-being of girls affected by early marriage. These programs not only aim to prevent early marriage but also to rehabilitate those who have already experienced it, ensuring that they can reintegrate into society and pursue their educational and personal goals (Duru et al., 2021).

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

Kohno et al. (2019) explored the reasons for child marriage in Kelantan, Malaysia,

using a qualitative study with interviews involving 18 women married before 18 and five key informants. Findings revealed three main themes: immaturity in decision-making, family poverty, and religious and cultural norms. The study recommends implementing sex education and awareness programmes targeting adolescents, families, and the wider community, coordinated by experts in law, religion, psychology, social welfare, and public health, to address the drivers and consequences of child marriage.

Atia et al. (2023) evaluated the impact of an empowerment programme on rural adolescent girls' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding the health consequences of early marriage. Conducted with 100 students in Zagazig city using a quasiexperimental design, the study found significant improvements in all three areas after the programme ( $p < .0001$ ). Knowledge scores positively correlated with attitudes ( $r = .379$ ) and practices ( $r = .399$ ). The study concluded that empowerment programmes effectively enhance awareness and behaviours concerning early marriage and recommended further research to address its determinants and promote girl-centred interventions, especially in rural areas.

Mobolaji et al. (2020) highlight the persistently high prevalence of girl-child marriage in Nigeria, influenced by ethnicity and religion. Using data from the 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, the study found the highest prevalence among Northern ethnic minorities such as Kambari (74.9%) and Fulfude (73.8%), with Hausa/Fulani (54.8%) also significantly affected, compared to much lower rates in Southern ethnic groups. Girls from Muslim and traditionalist religions faced higher risks of early marriage than Christians. The findings underscore the need for culturally and

religiously sensitive interventions to address deeply rooted social norms sustaining girl-child marriage.

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

### **Gender Inequality Theory**

The theory of gender inequality elucidates how societal norms and structures perpetuate gender disparities, particularly in contexts such as early marriage. This theory posits that patriarchal systems often regard girls as subordinate to boys, primarily valuing them based on their reproductive roles rather than recognizing their rights to education, autonomy, and personal development. Such a perspective is critical in understanding the implications of early marriage, especially in Nigeria, where cultural and economic practices significantly limit opportunities for girls (Asadullah & Wahhaj, 2018).

Early marriage is frequently rooted in gender discrimination, where societal norms dictate that girls are married off at a young age, often to alleviate financial burdens or conform to traditional expectations. Families may prioritize boys' education over that of girls, reflecting a pervasive bias that reinforces gender inequality (Asadullah & Wahhaj, 2018). This practice not only undermines the educational prospects of girls but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and marginalization, as girls are often denied the chance to develop skills and gain economic independence. The transmission of gender norms through social networks further exacerbates this issue, as early marriage becomes a conduit for reinforcing traditional roles and limiting the rights of women within households (Asadullah & Wahhaj, 2018).

Understanding the patriarchal attitudes that contribute to early marriage is

essential for informing interventions aimed at promoting gender equality and empowering girls. By addressing the underlying gender norms that facilitate early marriage, stakeholders can develop strategies that not only delay marriage but also enhance educational and economic opportunities for girls. The recognition of these dynamics is crucial for creating a supportive environment that values girls as individuals with rights and potential, rather than merely as future wives and mothers (Coleman-Minahan, 2017). The theory of gender inequality provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the implications of early marriage on the girl child in Nigeria. By examining the intersection of gender norms, economic practices, and societal expectations, we can better understand the mechanisms that perpetuate these inequalities and work towards effective solutions that promote gender equity and empower young women (Williams et al., 2012).

### **Social Ecological Model (SEM)**

The Social Ecological Model (SEM) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted influences on early marriage, emphasizing the interplay between individual, relational, community, and societal factors. This model is particularly relevant in addressing the complexities surrounding early marriage, as it highlights that this practice is not merely an individual or familial decision but is deeply embedded in broader socio-cultural contexts. At the individual level, girls often face significant barriers to autonomy, primarily due to limited education and agency. Research indicates that educational support can substantially reduce the incidence of early marriage among vulnerable populations, such as orphaned girls in Zimbabwe, where

school support was linked to a decrease in marriage rates over time (Luseno et al., 2016). However, despite such interventions, some girls still opt for early marriage, often influenced by socio-economic pressures and cultural expectations. This underscores the need for targeted educational initiatives that empower girls and enhance their decision-making capabilities.

At the relational level, families frequently arrange early marriages to strengthen economic ties or enhance social status. In Ethiopia, the spatial distribution of early marriage has been shown to correlate with economic factors, suggesting that families in economically disadvantaged areas may be more inclined to marry off daughters early as a strategy for financial stability (Alem et al., 2020). This relational dynamic is further complicated by community norms that often endorse early marriage as a culturally accepted practice, thereby reinforcing familial decisions (Zahra et al., 2021). The normalization of such practices can perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit opportunities for young women, making it essential to challenge these community-level norms through education and advocacy.

Community-level factors are critical in shaping attitudes towards early marriage. Cultural traditions and local norms often legitimize and perpetuate the practice, as seen in various studies that highlight the influence of social norms on marriage aspirations (Zahra et al., 2021). For instance, interventions that address community attitudes towards early marriage have been identified as crucial for changing perceptions and reducing the prevalence of child marriage. This indicates that community engagement and the modification of social norms are vital components of effective intervention strategies.

At the societal level, weak enforcement of laws and policies against early marriage further exacerbates the issue. In India, for example, early marriage has been linked to increased risks of intimate partner violence, illustrating the broader societal implications of this practice (Speizer & Pearson, 2010). The lack of stringent legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms allows early marriage to persist, often with detrimental effects on women's health and well-being. Strengthening policy enforcement and creating supportive legal environments are essential for combating early marriage on a larger scale.

The SEM provides a robust framework for addressing early marriage by advocating for interventions at multiple levels. Empowering girls through education, engaging families in discussions about the implications of early marriage, challenging harmful community norms, and reinforcing legal protections are all critical strategies that can collectively contribute to reducing the incidence of early marriage. By addressing the issue from these various angles, stakeholders can create a more supportive environment that fosters the rights and opportunities of young women.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **3.1 Research Methodology**

This chapter explains the procedures used in carrying out this research, it describes the methods used in gathering relevant data for this study. The chapter covers the following subheadings: research design, population of the study, sample size and sample technique, instrument for data collection, method of data collection, validity of the research instrument and method for data analysis.

### **3.2 Research Design**

The research work adopted by the purposive survey research design which is aimed at collecting data on the analysis of effects of early marriage and its implications on the girl child. The reason for using it is because it is an efficient way of gathering data to help address a research question and can also determine the quality of the research.

### **3.3 Population of the Study**

The population of the study comprises of young girls and all women in Effium community, because the women and girls are major victims of early child marriages. The major respondent for the purpose of the study due to its sensitive nature 1000 women and girls as the target population.

### **3.4 Research Instrument**

The quantitative study instrument was used for the study. For this purpose, we have collected data from 100 women living in Effium Local Government Area. The data was collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to only women and girls. The research instrument employed was a well structured

questionnaire containing a list of comprehensive questions and their possible answers which the respondents would select all options that were applicable to them.

### **3.5 Sample and Sampling Technique**

In social research, it is almost impossible to study the whole population due to several factors including financial and time constraints as well as sourcing for materials. A small section of the population known as sample, is studied with views to represent the entire population. For the purpose of this research a 10% sample size of 100 respondents was drawn using the purposive sample technique. Purposive sample technique is a non-probability sampling method where researchers intentionally select individuals, groups, or events based on specific characteristics or criteria that are relevant to the research.

### **3.5 Validity of the Instrument**

The research instrument was presented to the supervisor who ascertained its validity after necessary corrections and modifications.

### **3.6 Reliability of the Instrument**

Validity refers to the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. This was achieved by vetting in terms of relevance to the subject matter, coverage of the content areas, appropriateness of language usage and clarity of purpose.

### **3.7 Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected from respondents was analyzed using descriptive statistics which included tables, simple frequency and percentage. The data analysis is in line with the quantitative data analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the data presentation and analysis. Data presentation and analysis from primary data sourced from the administered questionnaires. This section starts with the demographic data of respondents which includes age, sex, marital status, educational attainment and religion which are all aimed at giving a better understanding and perspective on the social and personal factors that influence this phenomenon. The last section includes summary, conclusions and recommendation on the quantitative presentation with tables, and graphs.

#### 4.2 Analysis of Respondents Characteristics

##### SECTION A: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of The Respondents

TABLE 1: SEX OF RESPONDENTS

SEX	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
MALE	0	0
FEMALE	100	100
TOTAL	100	100%

Source: Field survey 2025

Table 1 shows the sex of the respondents. As shown above, all 100 of the respondents were female with a representation of 100% .50 % women while the others 50% girls.

TABLE 2: AGE OF RESPONDENTS

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
12-20	40	40%
21-30	45	45%
31 and above	15	15%

Total	100	100%
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**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 2 shows the age range of the respondents. As shown above, 40% of the respondents were within age 12-20, 50% were within 21-30 and 10% were 31 and above. This indicates that respondent who had experienced child marriage where from ages 21-30 years while others were 12-20 years and 31 and above respectively.

**TABLE 3: RELIGION OF RESPONDENTS**

RELIGION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Christian	78	78%
Muslim	22	22%
TOTAL.	100.	100%

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 3 shows 78% of the respondents to be Christian and 22% are Muslim. Majority of the respondent were Christians.

**TABLE 4: LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

LEVEL OF EDUCATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Primary	32	32%
Secondary	30	30%
Tertiary	28	28%
None	10	10%
TOTAL	100	100%

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 4, above clearly indicates that 32% of the respondents only had primary education, 30% had secondary and 28% progressed to tertiary. 10% of the respondents had no formal education. This indicates that the level of education might be considered as a factor, or a cultural reason for child marriage

**TABLE 5: MARITAL STATUS**

MARITAL STATUS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Married	62	62%
Divorced	10	10%
Widow	12	12%

Separated	16	16%
TOTAL	100	100%

**Source: Field survey 2025:**

Table 5 shows the marital status of the respondents. 62% are married, 10% are divorced, 12% are widowed and 16% are separated from their spouse.

**TABLE 6: OCCUPATION OF RESPONDENTS**

OCCUPATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Employed	40	40%
Self-employed	47	47%
Homemaker	13	13%
TOTAL	100	100

**Source: Field survey 2025**

According to Table 6 on the occupation of the respondents. 40% are employed, 47% are self-employed and 13% are homemakers. Most of the respondents are self-employed women and girls.

**TABLE 7: SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS**

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
20,000-50,000	64	64%
50,000-100,000	25	25%
100,000 and above	11	11%
TOTAL	100	100

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 7 shows the economic status of the respondents with 64% earning #20,000-#50,000, 25% earning #50,000-#100,000 and 11% earning #100,000 and above.

The level of income for most of the respondent is between 20,000 -50000.

Socio-economic factor is another factor.

## **SECTION B:**

### **4.3 Presentation of Results and Findings**

Table 8: At what age did you get married?

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
11-15	33	33%

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
16-20	57	57%
21-25	10	10%
TOTAL	100	100%

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 8 shows the respondents' age at which they got married. 33% got married before 16, 57% got married between the ages of 16-20 and 10% got married between ages 21-25.

TABLE 9: Was your marriage arranged?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	75	75%
NO	25	25%
TOTAL	100	100%

**Source: Field survey 2025:**

Table 9 shows that 75% of these respondents marriages were arranged and 25% were not arranged. According to the report, child marriage was cultural supported and encouraged by parents and family relative as a source of financial upgrade and improvement to change family status.

TABLE 10: Were you forced or coerced?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	60	60%
NO	40	40%
TOTAL	100	100.0

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 10 shows that 60% of these respondents were either forced or coerced and 40% were not. Majority of the respondent were forced into early marriage.

TABLE 11: Has early marriage impacted your career?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	70	70%
NO	30	30%
TOTAL	100	100

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 11 shows that the careers of 70% of respondents were impacted from early marriage. This indicate that they were influenced, and it changed their perceptions and

desires.

TABLE 12: Do you believe early marriage affects education?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	92	92%
NO	8	8%
TOTAL	100	100

**Source: Field survey 2025**

In table 12 above, respondents believe that early marriage affects education with 92% saying yes. Majority of the respondent had issues going back to school due to the pressure of early marriage.

TABLE 13: Did early marriage affect your education?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	60	60%
NO	40	40%
TOTAL	100	100

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 13 shows that early marriage affected the education of 60% of the respondents.

Hence in Effium community most of the respondent had only primary education.

TABLE 14: What are the reasons for early marriage?

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Ignorance	40	40%
Lack of awareness	20	20%
Parental pressure	50	50%
Cultural or religious reasons	70	70%
Economic reasons	37	37%
Limited opportunities	20	20%

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 14 above outlines the reasons for early marriage. A huge number of the respondents believe cultural or religious reasons are major factors about 70(70%), parental pressure 50(50%), ignorance 40%, economic reasons 37%, lack of awareness 20% and limited opportunities 20% respectively.

TABLE 15: What are the possible consequences of early marriage?

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
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OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Higher risk of domestic violence	70	70%
Childbirth complications	32	32%
General health complications	25	25%
Restricted access to education	41	41%
Limited personal development	35	35%
Limited career opportunities	40	40%

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 15 shows the possible consequences of early marriage. Domestic violence is shown to have a higher probability, restricted access to education 41%, limited career opportunities 40%, limited personal development 35%, child birth complications, 32%, general health complications 25%

TABLE 16: Do you believe early marriage affects the overall wellbeing of an individual?

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (#)
YES	85	85%
NO	15	15%
TOTAL	100	100

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 16 above indicates the overall wellbeing of an individual being affected with 85% in the affirmative. Early marriage can affect the overall wellbeing of the respondent

TABLE 17: Has early marriage affected your relationship with your friends and family?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	60	60%
NO	40	40%
TOTAL	100	100.0

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 17 shows that relationship with friends and family is affected due to early marriage.

TABLE 18: Have you experienced any form of social isolation or exclusion due to early marriage?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	60	60%
NO	40	40%
TOTAL	100	100.0

**Source: Field survey 2025**

According to the data in table 18, 60% of respondents have been isolated/excluded due to early marriage.

TABLE 19: Has early marriage impacted your self- esteem?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	62	62%
NO	38	38%
TOTAL	100	100.0

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 19 indicates that early marriage impacted the self -esteem of most of the respondents.

TABLE 20: Have you experienced any form of exploitation in your marriage?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	59	59%
NO	41	41%
TOTAL	100	100.0

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 20 above shows that 59% of respondents have been exploited in their marriage. Due to their age, ignorant and level of education.

TABLE 21: Have you experienced any form of abuse or domestic violence in the course of your marriage?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	70	70%
NO	30	30%
TOTAL	100	100

**Source: Field survey 2025**

In table 21, responses reveal that 70% of the respondents experienced domestic violence in their marriage. Early marriage and parental pressure often expose the young girls to violence or any form of abuse in marriage.

TABLE 22: Should there be stricter laws against early marriage?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	78	78%
NO	22	22%

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
TOTAL	100	100

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 22 shows that stricter laws against early marriage should be made, but most have strong alignment with the cultural laws to be able to influence the community on the need to reduce early marriages for more development.

TABLE 23: Should there be penalties for families who force their children into early marriage?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	86	86%
NO	12	12%
TOTAL	100	100%

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 23 shows that respondents would like penalties for families who force their children into marriage. Due to their health risk and other health challenges.

TABLE 24: Which of these factors can help prevent early marriage?

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Access to quality education	54	54%
Legal Intervention	55	55%
Public awareness	50	50%
Economic empowerment	35	35%

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 24 shows that legal intervention factors which can help prevent early marriage the most due to strict religious and cultural inclination. Other factors are access to education, public awareness, and economic empowerment.

TABLE 25: Have you sought help or support for any marital challenges?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	75	75%
NO	25	25%
TOTAL	100	100.0

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 25 shows that 75% of respondents sought support at one point or the other from family and relatives and trending sources like social media.

TABLE 26: Are there any resources you wish were available to you?

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (#)
YES	85	85%
NO	15	15%
TOTAL	100	100%

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 26 shows that more of the respondents wish there were resources available to them. Such as marital advices, access to health facilities and sensitization in the community.

#### **4.4 Discussion of Findings**

##### **Based on the objectives:**

##### **To find peoples perspectives on child marriage**

The findings show that child marriage is often forced on the girls and as such they are not given the opportunity to choose when or who they would like to marry. This is viewed as a generally negative in the long run

##### **To examine the factors that promote child marriage**

The responses show cultural reasons as the leading reasons for early marriage with 70%. Parental pressure come off as a close second with 50% and economic reasons comes third with 37%. Ignorance, lack of awareness and limited opportunity have 40%,20% and 20% respectively. This shows that early marriage is most times part of the culture of a people and this is the leading factor. Lack of money to train a child may also prompt the family marry off the child at a young age. Parental pressure should also not be overlooked in this case as pressure from parents may cause a child to succumb to the wills of their parents/family.

##### **To access the psychological health and emotional consequences of early marriages on young girls.**

According to the responses, the possible consequences of early marriage are mainly restricted access to education (41%) limited personal development (32%) and higher risk of domestic violence (40%). Childbirth complications and general health complications

have 32% and 25% while limited career opportunities is 40%. Early marriage also impacted their careers and as a result dreams and aspirations were not fulfilled and achieved. The health risks should also not be ignored as domestic abuse and other possible challenges such as child birth complications. Their self esteem was not left unaffected.

**To explore strategies to reduce prevalence of early marriages**

Government intervention such as enactment and enforcement of laws that kick against child marriage. The Child Rights Act is a major example of this. sensitization of the community members and economic empowerment will also help curb high rate of early marriage.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary of Findings

Arranged marriages are not quite uncommon situations where the elders of the respective families make marriage arrangements and decisions on behalf of the children. Culture and cultural beliefs have been recognized as the most common reasons for this practice followed closely by economic factors. Parental pressure also plays a role. 70% of early marriage cases were made possible either through coercion or force, thereby taking away the opportunity to choose. Child marriage has severe consequences on the girl child, including: interrupted education, health risks, domestic violence and economic consequences. Some even give up their dreams and aspirations for marriage. Their self esteem does not escape unaffected since most times, they may be excluded or feel isolated especially with peers. They may also be exploited. The overall well-being is affected as well.

The study reveals that the majority of respondents were married, Christian women with tertiary education, earning between 20,000-50,000. A significant percentage of these marriages were arranged or forced, negatively impacting the women's education and careers. Cultural norms, economic pressures, and parental influence were identified as primary reasons for early marriage, leading to restricted education, limited development, and increased risk of domestic violence. The research highlights the adverse effects of early marriage on overall well-being, relationships, and self-esteem, and it indicates that many women have experienced exploitation and

abuse. The findings strongly support stricter laws, penalties, and increased access to education and resources to prevent early marriage.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The findings reveal that early marriage has more harm than good on the girl child. Restriction to formal education and educational facilities, inability to pursue dreams and aspirations as well as health risks and complications are some of the prevailing problems associated with this practice. Domestic violence/abuse are also common occurrences.

## **5.3 Recommendations**

Families should be educated on the disadvantages and demerits of early marriage on the girl child. There should also be stricter laws against this and punishments for those who break the law. The government should make education affordable, available and compulsory, especially basic levels such as primary and secondary. Support systems and facilities should also be put in place to help individuals who have been affected to heal and move forward with their lives.

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**APPENDIX**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY**  
**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**  
**BENIN CITY**

**Dear Respondent,**

**REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE IN FILLING QUESTIONNAIRE**

I am an undergraduate student in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin. This project work is titled “**The Effect of Early Marriage on the Girl Child Using Effium Local Government Area as a Case Study**”.

Kindly note that any information provided shall remain confidential and will be treated with utmost care and respect. I anticipate your sincere and genuine responses to the questions. Thank you.

**EZE ABIGAIL CHIMAObi**

Researcher

**Section A:**

**Socio-demographic data. (Please tick the appropriate box)**

1. Sex: Male() Female()
2. Age: 12-20() 21-30() 31 and above()
3. Religion: Christianity () Islam() Other.....
4. Level of Education: Primary Education () Secondary Education () Tertiary Institution() None()
5. Marital status: Married() Divorced () Separated () Widow()
6. Occupation: Employed() Self-Employed() Home maker()
7. Socio-economic status;Range of amount earned monthly: 20-50() 50-100() 100 and above()

## Section B

Child marriage is a practice where children are given out well before attaining the age of puberty as in most cases or the age to get married as stipulated in the law. The United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF ) defines child marriage as any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child.

Please tick the appropriate box.

8. At what age did you get married? (    )
9. Was your marriage arranged or chosen by you? Yes( ) No( ) Other ( )
10. Were you forced or coerced? Yes( ) No( ) Other( )
11. Has early marriage impacted your career goals and opportunities? Yes( ) No( ) Other ( )
12. Do you believe early marriage affects a person's education? Yes( ) No( ) Other( )
13. Did early marriage affect your education? Yes ( ) No( )
14. What are the major reasons for early marriage in your community? (Please tick all that apply)
  - Ignorance( )
  - Lack of awareness ( )
  - Parental pressure( )
  - Cultural or religious reasons ( )
  - Economic reasons ( )
  - Limited opportunities( )
15. What are the possible consequences of early marriage? (please tick all that apply)
  - Higher risk of abuse/domestic violence ( )
  - Childbirth complications ( )
  - General health complications ( )
  - Restricted access to education ( )
  - Limited personal development ( )
  - Limited career opportunities ( )
16. Do you think early marriage affects the overall well-being of an individual? Yes( ) No( ) Other( )
17. Has early marriage affected your relationship with friends and family? Yes( ) No( ) Other( )
18. Have you experienced any social isolation or exclusion due to marriage? Yes( ) No ( ) Other( )
19. Has early marriage impacted your self -esteem? Yes( ) No( ) Other( )
20. Have you experienced any form of exploitation in your marriage? Yes( ) No( ) Other( )
21. Have you experienced any form of abuse/domestic violence in the course of your marriage? Yes( ) No( ). Other( )
22. Should there be stricter laws against early marriage? Yes( ) No( ) Other( )
23. Should there be penalties for families who force their children into early marriage? Yes( ) No( ) Other( )

24. Which of these factors do you think can help prevent early marriage?

- Access to quality education
- Legal intervention
- Public awareness
- Economic empowerment

25. Have you sought help or support for any marital challenges? Yes( ) No( )  
Other( )

26. Are there any resources or support systems you wish were available to you? Yes( )  
No( ) Other( )