

## EARLY MARRIAGE, CHILD SPOUSES: WHAT ROLES FOR COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

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### ABSTRACT

*Throughout the world marriage is, regarded as a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life. Sadly, as this study makes it clear, the practice of early marriage gives no such case for celebration. All too often, the imposition of marriage patten upon a child means that a girl or boy's childhood is cut short and their fundamental rights are compromised. The participants were two thousand and seventy two early-married young boys and girls randomly drawn from five clans in Uyo Local Government of Akwa-Ibom State. This study looks at the reasons for the perpetuation of early marriage and its possible increase in population under stress. A key factor is poverty with the marriage of children often seen as the strategy for economic survival. Besides, it is, perceived as a way to protect girls and to provide some stability in situation where societies are under extreme pressure; this study also examines the harmful impact of the practice. There are facts on complications and even death in pregnancy and childbirth of wives too young to, safely bear children. Education statistics reveals that the large members of children particularly girls who drop out of school because of early marriage and majority of them, that is, many young married women lament the fact that they cannot even read hence they have to leave school early for marriage. The study adopted a three stage stratified sampling analysis was used. The results show that early marriage at the end leads to domestic child servitude and divorce cum migration of young divorced married women, they consequently become sex workers. The result equally identifies the need for counseling intervention to be able to gain the already lost personality realization in early marriage. Based on the finding it was recommended that the federal government of Nigeria should revisit the extents to which counts are implementing the existing relevant marriage laws regularly, infact she should similarly modernize these laws to suit the modern civilization. Besides, her compulsory free education should be extended to all cities and border villages and her law enforcements should be much more vigilant than ever before so as to keep the young ones (especially girls) at school for a better future mission.*

**Keywords:** Early marriage, child spouses, role, counseling psychology

### INTRODUCTION

Birth, Marriage and Death are the standard trio of key events in most people's lives but only one, marriage is a matter of choice. The right to exercise that choice was, recognized as a principle of law even in ancient times and has long been, established in international human rights instruments. Yet many girls and a smaller number of boys enter marriage without any chance of exercising their right to choose. Some are forced into marriage at a very early age, others are simply too young to make an informed decision about their marriage partner or about the implications of marriage itself. They may have given what passes for "consent" in

the eyes of custom or the law, but in reality consent to their binding union has been, made by others on their behalf (Laidwell John C, 1982)

The assumption is that once a girl is married she has become a woman, even if she is only 12 years. Equally, where a boy is, made to marry, he is now a man and must put away childish behaviour and things. While the age of marriage is generally on the rise, early marriage, marriage of children and adolescents below the age of 18 years is still widely practiced. While early marriage takes many different forms and has various causes, one issue is paramount.

Whether it happens to a girl or a boy, early marriage is a violation of human right. The right to free and full consent to a marriage is recognized in the 1948 universal declaration of human rights and in many subsequent human rights instruments-consent that cannot be “free and full” when at least one partner is very immature. For both boys and girls, early marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts, cutting off educational opportunity and chances of personal growth. For girls, in addition it will almost certainly mean premature pregnancy and childbearing and is likely to lead to a lifetime of domestic and sexual subservience over which they have no control. Yet many societies primarily in Africa and south Asia continue to support the idea that girls should marry at or soon after puberty. Their spouses are likely to be a few years older than they are and heads of families make marital choices for daughters and sons with little regard for the personal implications. Rather they look upon marriage as a family-building strategy, an economic arrangement or a way to protect girls from unwelcome sexual advances, (Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, 2002) and Whitehead Judy, 1995).

### **Neglects of the Rights Perspective**

Social reformers in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were concerned about early marriage, especially in India and influenced the UDHR and other human rights conventions of the 1950s and 1960s. In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, interest centered, on the behavioural determinants fuelling rapid population growth for obvious reasons. Early marriage extends a woman reproduction span, thereby contributing to large family size, especially in the absence of contraception. More recently, advocates of safe motherhood have turned their attention to this issue. Pregnancies that occur too early, when a woman’s body is not fully mature, constitute a major risk to the survival and future health of both mother and child. Concern with special health needs of adolescents has also recently been growing in a world where young people are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, (Amhera Region Women’s affairs, 2003).

However, from a demographic and health perspective early marriage is seen primarily as a contributing factor to early childbearing and sometimes, even in this context its role is overlooked the phrase teenage pregnancy outside marriage. Yet far more adolescents or teenage pregnancies occur within marriage than outside it. During the past decade, the movement for education for all has stressed the need to enroll more girls in school and to keep them from dropping out before completion. In this context, the custom of early marriage is acknowledged as one of the reasons for girls exclusion from school especially in cultural settings where girls are raised for a lifetime confined to household occupations and are expected to marry very young (UN Centre for Human Rights, 1995).

Recently the situation of children in need of special protection notably girls vulnerable to sexual abuse and HIV/AIDS suggests that early marriage is being used as a strategy to protect girls from sexual exposure on to pass the economic burden for their care to others. Thus early marriage lingers on as a culturally and socially sanctioned practice according to some highly stressed populations it may even be on the rise. Despite the efforts of reformers in the early

part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, early marriage has received scant attention from the modern women's rights and children's rights movements. There has been virtually no attempt to examine the practice as human rights violation in itself. Children and teenagers married at ages well below the legal minimum become statistically invisible as "children". This in the eyes of the law an adult male who has sex with a girl of 12 or 13 outside marriage may, be regarded as a criminal while the same act marriage is condoned. To date, most studies on the effects of early marriage have focused on the premature sex, pregnancy, and school dropout. Much work remains to be done therefore to analyze the full impact of this practice, (Bankole, A., Singh, S., Wong, V., Wulf D, 2004) and (Ayres B. Drummond 2000).

### **Causes of Early Marriage**

Customs surrounding marriage including the desirable age and the way in which a spouse is, selected depend on a society's view of the family- its role, structure, pattern of life and the individual and collective responsibilities of its members. The idea and function of the families varies across the world and is in a state of constant evaluation.

### **Early Marriage as a Strategy for Economic Survival**

Poverty is one of the major factors underpinning early marriage. Where poverty is acute, a young girl may be, regarded as an economic burden and her marriage to a much older man is a common practice in some developing countries of the world. It is a family survival strategy and may even, be seen as in her interests. A daughter's marriage represents her success. There is an old traditional concern that a girl will represent a failure on the part of her parents. Of major importance is creating a bond with the bridegroom's family as well as ensuring the girl marries while she has her virginity, but it should be realized that enforcement of the legal age of marriage by authorities was inadequate, (Adimson Peter,2000).

### **Contemporary Pressures and Early Marriage**

The theory of demographic transition, which has governed population policies since the 1970's assumes that societies eventually abandon the strategy of high fertility when morality declines due to health improvements and under the pressures of urbanization and modernization. The extended family began option to break up into nuclear components and some couples leaves for the towns. Industrial wage labour replaces family based production and instead of being an economic necessity children become a cost. Women may join labour forces and receive an education, beyond that needed for household management. In these consequences, marriage and childbearing may be postponed, (Berhane-Selassie Tseha, 1993)

### **Early Marriage: The Legal Context**

In many countries, early marriage falls into what amounts to a sanctions limbo. It may be, prohibited in the existing civil or common law, but be widely condoned by customary and religious laws and practice. This is common, where the marriages typically take place according to customary rites and remain unregistered.

The situation is further complicated in countries where legislation was introduced by the colonizing power on the understanding that many customary practices would continue even if they were inconsistent with new laws. Some were, even codified to make them legal. In Benin republic, for example, Article 68 of the 1931 Contumier du Dahomey regulating customary marriage states that "A marriage is not settled by the interested parties, but by their fathers or in his absence, by his older brothers or failing him, by the head of the family". In surname, the legal marriage age of marriage is 15 according to the civil code, but under the

Asian Marriage Act, which codifies practice for a particular group, the minimum age for girls is 13. (Saxena Shobha, (1999), Taylor Debbie (1993))

## **CONSEQUENCES OF EARLY MARRIAGE**

### **Instability of Marriage**

The situation is characterized with high incidence of marriage instability (average of 27 percent in urban and 19 percent in rural were divorces) and the main reason is often attributed to early marriage. In 44 percent of cases, 'too young for marriage' was, cited as the reason for dissolution of the first marriage.

### **Sexual and Reproductive Health**

When women are able to control their sexuality and fertility they are better able to take advantage of opportunity, including education and income-generating activities that could mitigate gender based barriers that make them vulnerable poverty health including sexual and reproductive health ensures the capacity for personal development and economic security in the future. Health is the basis for productivity, the capacity to learn in the school and the capacity to grow intellectually, physically and emotionally.

However, premature and forced intercourse often results in harm to the body in general, sometimes leading to death, as well as short and long time problems related to early pregnancy and delivery. Prolonged and obstructed labour can result in obstetric

Fistula; which disproportionately affect young and first-time mothers due to their incomplete development. This condition leaves girls and women continually leaking urine and faeces, frequently leading to abandonment by partners and family. (Black Maggie, 2000)

### **The Denial of Education**

Girls who marry young tend to drop out of school and are more likely to bear children during adolescence, thus effectively ensuring that they will not return to school or develop other work skills. Married girls receive little or no schooling. Seventy-three percent of married women have received no education, compared to 45 percent of never-married women. (EDHS, 2005)

### **Counselling Psychology: Strategies in Combating Early Marriage**

1. Awareness creation among schools (teachers and student's club) community leaders, youth and women's associations and the office of women's affairs and the community members on the negative consequences of early marriage and the existing laws is very important to attain the general peace and to make the environment viable. When the schools are particularly, involved in the prevention of early marriage, for example, if the female students, are absent from school for some days and the teachers report their absence and the schools follow up and try to find out reasons for their absence and if their finding is due to marriage, they can try to convince the parents to cancel the marriage and if this falls on deaf ears they can report the event to the women's Affairs office, the police, youth and women's Associations officers. Through their concerted and coordinated efforts, these bodies will play important role-individually and collectively-in fighting early marriage (Kabir. P.1998)
2. Enforcement of the revised family law and criminal code on early marriage through active participation of the various stakeholders (including in-and out of school clubs, Women's associations, the judiciaries, teachers and the like) should be, done and enacted.

3. Besides women's Affairs, office would be encouraged to establish an information bulletin, which would always serve as documented efforts to fight early marriage as a part of implementing the recent family law. These efforts would save a large number of youth from illegal early marriage.
4. When community leaders, and women's association, hear about a wedding arrangement, they should, go to the family and check whether the girl is under age or not. If she is under age, they should cancel the arrangement for the betterment of the family and the viability of such community.
5. One of the most important factors in the decrease of the frequency of early marriage is the role the girls play themselves. They should be taught sufficient consciousness techniques about the phenomenon so, as to be able to fight their rights (and or those of their friends). knowing about friends or relatives proposals of early marriage, the police, women's associations, office of women's affairs or any other relevant bodies.
6. Religious leaders should be involved in educating the community and they should condemn early marriage and other harmful traditional practices. Many priests should not accept under-aged couples for marriage, they should request for medical proofs as evidences if they have done anything about the actual age of the bride. This would be an acceptable evidence for the young couple.

### **Inability to Plan Families**

Early marriage increases the span of a woman's reproductive period and those who marry earlier are more likely to have a greater number of children than others. Due to age differences, economic dependency, lack of education, and many other associated factors early-married women have and or exercise lower sexual and reproductive rights than those who marry at appropriate ages. They have less ability to make decisions on matters related to reproductive health, such as the use of contraceptives and rights over sexuality (ability to say "No" when asked for sex by the husband). Thus early marriage women have less chance of espousing and or avoiding unwanted pregnancy. It is believed that if the appropriate marrying age is spent out to the adolescents and the implications are, openly highlighted, by the counseling psychologists much caution would, be seriously exercised.

### **Too Many Children**

Women married before age 15 had an average of 8 to 10 children, those who married between 15 to 17 years had 5 or 6, and women who married after 18 had 2 to 4. The impact on the well-being of children of early marriage is detrimental to the children of the marriage particularly when the mother is neither psychologically or physiologically ready to care for the children. Modern ideology today emphasizes three or four children who are well, trained academically, morally and socially for a couple, the counseling psychologists should equally preach this ideal. (Kanmi, A.A.2009)

### **Gender, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS**

A combination of biological, socio-economic, cultural and political factors put young women at greater risk of HIV infection than males. A girl is physiologically more prone to contracting HIV/AIDS, as her virgin is not well, lined with protective cells and her cervix may be penetrated easily. A global analysis of the epidemic shows that the prevalence of HIV infection is highest in age 15-24 and peaks in men between five to ten years later. Marriage can increase married girls' inability to negotiate safe sex and other social pressures represent a critical channel of vulnerability. These girls are too young and lack the courage to persuade their partners to learn their own zero-status, at the end they (girls) runaway back to their

parents or to the cities in search of a better livelihood, getting exposed or employees as housemaids or sex workers. This increases their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and other STIs, (Agbaje, A.A. 2010). Hospital personnel and welfare officers should therefore, sensitize and educate the communities on the consequences of early marriage and other traditional practices which affect the reproductive health of women, men and adolescents, (Stone Lawrence, 1977, Caldwell, J.C. 1992, Young people in changing societies, 2002, World marriage Patterns, 2000 and Westof, C.F. 1992)

## HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant relationship between married women in uyo clans and other Uyo clans in their first marriage and place of residence.
2. There is no significant relationship between women who married before the age of 18 years in Uyo and other Uyo clans in the same local government.
3. There is no significant relationship between married women before the age of 18 years in the northern and southern parts of Uyo clans.

## PURPOSE

The principal purpose of this study was to generate both qualitative and quantitative information and to, critically examine causes and consequences of early marriage in Uyo clans. Presently this is lack of data on all aspect of early marriage. Earlier researches had examined the problem in terms of demographic trends, fertility and educational attainment. While there is ample information on early marriage and the child spouses of a general nature, there are few studies that have examined the practice from human rights or gender perspective, its impact on families or the wider society. Data needed on the psychological impact of early marriage and child spouse on children and the way, in which this determines wider social, political and economic consequences are the main concern of this study.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are to:

- I. Make programmatic recommendations that would help policy makers design intervention to mitigate the problem of early marriage and the child spouses.
- II. Estimate the current prevalence of early marriage in the region.
- III. Identify and study the demographic, cultural, psychological, physiological, socio-economic and demographic consequences of early marriage.
- IV. Estimate mean age at first marriage and assess age differences between spouses at first marriage and the child spouses.
- V. Assess the impact of early marriage, the child spouses on marriage stability.

## Instrumentation

Three types of instruments were, developed to collect qualitative and quantitative information on the early marriage. These included a structured individual questionnaire, key Informant, Interview Guidance and Forces Group Discussion Guide.

## The Structured Questionnaire

The individual questionnaire is the most important instrument as it was used to collect most of the quantifiable information on the causes and impact of early marriage from girls between ages 10- 18. This instrument was used to collective quantitative information on correspondents' socio-economic and demographic characteristics, issues relating to the

causes of early marriage and the status of women. The questionnaire was, administered to a representative sample of 2072 respondents in the specified age group.

### **Key Informant Interview Guide**

A semi- structured interview guide was, administered to knowledgeable persons, including the community leaders, women associations and police, structured according to the following main themes:

- a. Perception of the status of early marriage
- b. Perception of the problems associated with early marriage
- c. Existing programmes and interventions against early marriage
- d. Policies, laws and action plans on early marriage
- e. Physiological, psychological and socio-economic problems.

### **Focus Group Discussion Guide**

A FGD guide was, developed to elicit information on the issues. The guide was, used to administer FGD's with four with four groups of informants-: married men, married women, unmarried men and unmarried female adolescents. The parents provided information about their experience regarding early marriage and unmarried and unmarried adolescents shared their attitudes about the practice.

The main themes included in the focus group guide were the status of early marriage as perceived by each group, the Associated R.H., physiological, psychological and socio-economic problems policy, advocacy and supportive environments and livelihood skills. In addition to these, FGD guide attempted to address factors that impact, positively as well as negatively on early marriage, parental attitudes and suggestions for intervention strategies.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Design**

The main focus of the study was to generate information on the early marriage, child spouses in Uyo state capital and its environments (clans) of Akwa-Ibom. The Uyo local government is divided into five strata (clans) namely (1) Etoi (2) Ikono (3) Offort (4) Oku and (5) Uyo Central. Ten research assistants who were purely indigenes of Akwa-Ibom State were, randomly selected and distributed over the five clans using probability proportional to carry out the investigation.

### **Sample**

The sample selection for any study is to include representatives and adequate number of cases in order to perform a meaningful analysis. To ensure this a three stage stratified sampling design was used. The census enumeration areas (EAs) or clans constituted the secondary sampling units.

Finally, dropout students who described themselves as housemaids and sex workers were selected as the ultimate units in the third stage. At the end, two thousand and seventy two were, sampled; they were made up of one thousand one hundred forty female children and nine hundred and thirty two male children.

### **Procedure**

The instruments were administered on the participants by the researcher and his research assistants following the approval granted by the relevant authorities. Two thousand five

hundred questionnaires were distributed out of which two thousand and seventy two (2072) found useful. A response rate of 93.3 percent was recorded. Apart from all these data quality control mechanism, an office editing and coding activity was carried out to review for completeness and appropriateness in coding of responses.

### Data Analysis

The quantitative data was entered into the CSPTO programme. This recently developed data-processing package has options for entry “verification” by means of an interactive double entry for accuracy purposes. It also allows data entry in a format that can be analyzed using statistical packages. The qualitative data generated from FGDs and in debt interview did Linacre (1995) propose analyzed using the rascal analysis as. The method promotes the clear conceptualization and construction of one-dimensional variables and identifies useful rating scale categorizations. Moreover, it allows qualitative results to be reduced (summarized) into simple metric forms for plotting and further analysis. The Rascal map brings together clear and unambiguous essential findings based on a well-defined linear metric. The analysis describes the perception regarding early marriage from normative patterns of the various groups. The analyses showed also widely held views and explored the varying perspectives on early marriage (UNICEF, 2001)

### RESULT

As a marriage classification was made to depict the picture at various physiological and puberty stage. In certain societies many believed that women reach puberty at the age of 12 and others, think age 15 is ideal for marriage. In the following analysis, the age at first marriage was categorized by taking into account all these considerations and are believe that the distribution below table 1 provides a meaningful picture about the prevailing situation in the study clans. The proportion of women who entered marriage at an appropriate age is only 12percent at the other Uyo clans (rural areas) and 27 in the Uyo clans. It shows that 15 percent of ever-married women were first married before the age of 12, when those young girls neither were, physiologically nor psychologically ready for other the union, (CIA World Fast book, 2005)

**Table 1. Distribution of ever-married women in Uyo and other clans by first marriage and place of residence**

<i>Age at First Marriage</i>	<i>Uyo No</i>	<i>Clan%</i>	<i>Other No</i>	<i>Uyo No</i>	<i>Clan%</i>	<i>Total</i>
Less than	44	15.2	193	15.4	237	15.4
12-15	126	43.6	662	52.9	788	51.1
16-17	42	14.5	194	15.5	236	15.3
18years	77	26.6	203	16.2	280	18.2
Total	289	100.0	1252	100.0	1541	100.0

The rate of such child marriage as shown in table I is almost the same in the other clan and Uyo clan areas (15.4 percent respectively). Moreover, about 44 percent of the Uyo clan and 53 percent of other Uyo ever-married women were made between 12-15 years of age. The proportion marrying between ages of 16 and 17 years was 4.45 in Uyo clans and 15.5 in other clans. It is also important to note that the age at first marriage data in Uyo clan might have been affected by responses who had migrated to Uyo clan, since many women from other



clans marry young and their terminate their marriages, migrate to Uyo clan in search of a better life. In addition to the quantitative survey, effort was made to assess the situation of age at first marriage in the qualitative approach of the study. Information therein was obtained from the respondents and figures and documents provided by some of the key informants, particularly government officials. Review of the literature carried out as a part of the qualitative part of the study revealed a few more localized studies that confirmed the high prevalence of early marriage in Uyo and other Uyo clans. For instance, a study conducted in IKOHO, OKU and OFFORT revealed that the average age at the first marriage of women in these areas is 12years and in remote localities, girls get married and or begin shouldering household administration at the age of six to seven years (Bureau of Youth, 1996).

According to the report of the baseline survey on harmful traditional practices by NTCP (1998) the average marriage age for women in Uyo and other clans is 14.5 which is almost the same as the result of the quantitative survey though there is no statistical data that shows the trends of the practice of early marriage, key informants and members of FGDs report a significant positive change and decline in the practice. The y held that currently a considerable proportion of girls are entering into union of the age of 18years. Almost all informants expressed the belief that the practice of early marriage has decreased over the last three years, but most importantly in the last one year owing to the miracle detective of the counseling psychologists in the areas (Adeyemo, 2004, Cochival, W.G.1963 and 1979).

There were some differences of opinion on the scope of the decrease. A few were reluctant to admit that the practice of marrying young has decreased while others were particularly emphatic on its recent decline. Retrospective analysis showed that those most reluctant to admit that it has decreased are those who disapprove of the practice more strongly, (Agbaje, 2008) such persons were married and unmarried females and individuals, who are actually involved in the fight against the practice. Thus, according to a key informant, early marriage cannot be described as truly decreasing, especially compared to the efforts exerted to that end. She said, “People seem to have accepted the idea, but all of a sudden they return back to the old practice” (Wwagwu, 2007). The qualitative survey data on age at first marriage also shows a gradual increase in the age at first marriage among the younger cohort. The median age at first marriage has increased from slightly lower than 14 among women currently in the age group 45-49 to slightly over 15 among women in the age group 20-24 (Salami, 2006).

**DISCUSSION**

**Table 2 Perception of their life in marriage of before the age of 18 years by, reasons for their bad life and place of residence**

<i>Perception of Married Life</i>	<i>Uyo No</i>	<i>Clan%</i>	<i>Other No</i>	<i>Uyo No</i>	<i>Clan%</i>	<i>Total</i>
Very Good	48	23.0	230	22.0	278	22.2
Fair	93	44.5	553	53.0	646	51.6
Bad	61	29.2	218	29.9	279	22.3
Worse	1	3.3	42	4.1	50	4.0
Total	424	100.0	1648	100.0	2072	100.0

About 40 percent of early-married women in rural areas and nearly 37 percent of their counterparts in urban areas mentioned that they did not marry the person they wanted and are

not happily about it. Quite substantial members of women were unhappy because they totally opposed their marriages but could not be heard. 19% of women unhappy in their marriages cited violence (frequent quarrelling and beating) as the reason and mistreatment by the husband were most in the other Uyo clans.

**Table 3. Main Reasons for Unpleasant Married Life**

<i>Main Reasons for Unpleasant Married Life</i>	<i>Uyo No</i>	<i>Clan%</i>	<i>Other No</i>	<i>Uyo No</i>	<i>Clan%</i>	<i>Total</i>
The responsibility was Beyond my capacity	49	72.1	189	72.4	238	72.3
Workload	26	38.2	115	44.1	141	42.9
Did not marry the Person wanted	25	36.8	111	42.5	136	41.3
I was totally against The marriage	23	33.8	104	39.8	127	38.6
I was beaten and Frequently quarreled with	13	19.1	48	18.4	61	18.5
My husband mistreated me	9	13.2	51	10.5	60	18.2
Others	6	8.8	22	8.4	28	8.5

Loss of happiness and dissatisfaction with married life often lead women to try to get away by seeking divorce or running away to cities in search of other means of livelihood. These conditions seem to be the reasons for a higher level of marriage dissolution among early-married women. Of these reporting divorce, 63 percent had married before the age of 15. Moreover, the results also indicate that a significant proportion of those who married below the legal age were not in the stable unions even after the termination of their marriage. Survey respondents who married early were also asked about their perception of the appropriateness of their age at first marriage. As it can be seen from the table below, half believed that they married too early and half thought their union was at the right time, with Uyo clan women slightly more content with their timing than their other Uyo clan counterparts were. (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2006)

**Table 4. Percentage of women who married before age 18 by their perception of the timing of marriage and place of residence**

<i>Timing of First Marriage</i>	<i>Uyo No</i>	<i>Clan%</i>	<i>Other No</i>	<i>Uyo No</i>	<i>Clan%</i>	<i>Total</i>
Too early	132	45.7	646	51.6	778	50.5
About the Right time	150	51.9	585	46.8	735	47.7
Too late	7	2.4	20	1.6	27	1.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>424</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>1648</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>2072</i>	<i>100.0</i>

### Impacts of Early Marriage on the Health of the Women

One of the many sufferings early married women face is the physical pain associated with sexual intercourse one to the physiological immaturity of the sexual organs. Physical pain during sexual intercourse, obstetric fistula one to youthful delivery, when girls are not

physically matured and their complications due to pregnancy are among the marry health-related problems faced by young married women. As expected women who married earliest (age 12-14) encountered more health problems than those married between 15-17years. Those residing in urban areas are more likely to report such incidences than their rural counterparts are.

In fact, it is disheartening to see that the majority of the women encounter health problems. However, we believe that there were some who feared or restrained from reporting especially injury related to sexual intercourse, (Liaacre, J.M.1995). As indicated by FGDs girls who married very young are at the risk of health related complications such as fistula. They neither are physiologically nor anatomically ready to carry on a pregnancy or delivery and in some instance, too small for a normal virginal delivery.

**Table 5. Women reporting health problems as a result of early marriage and type of problems encountered by place of incidence and age at the first marriage**

<i>Age at first marriage</i>	<i>Uyo No</i>	<i>Clan%</i>	<i>Other No</i>	<i>Uyo No</i>	<i>Clan%</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Problem encountered-Types</i>						
<i>12-14 years</i>						
Encountered reproductive Health problem	9	11.3	33	7.7	42	8.4
Did not encounter Age at first marriage	67	88.2	292	92.3	460	91.6
<i>15-17 years</i>						
Encountered reproductive Health problem	3	3.6	27	6.5	30	6.0
Did not encounter	81	96.4	389	93.5	470	94.0
Total	89	100.0	426	100.0	515	100.0
<i>Type of health problem Sexual and sexual</i>						
Organ related	6	40.0	44	56.4	50	53.8
Pregnancy and Delivery related	5	33.3	37	47.7	42	45.2
Frustration/Tension	5	33.3	34	43.6	20	21.5
Injury as a result of assault	3	20.0	17	21.8	20	21.5
Excessive menstruation	2	13.3	14	17.9	16	17.2
Others	1	6.7	5	6.4	6	6.5

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Early marriage is recognized as a violation of human rights and social problem with multifaceted consequences. A barrier inhibits young girls from attaining education that would otherwise have a lasting positive impact on their life and well-being. In view of these facts and based on the findings of this study, the following programmatic recommendations are set to assist design interventions that may reduce and ultimately eliminate the practice of early marriage and child spouses.

1. The findings indicate that cultural and traditional values aim norms has been maintained through generations and are important determinants of early marriage. Even where parents and children understand the negative implications of early marriage, societal pressure to conform may be great. Thus, the youth should be empowered by providing them with information and knowledge they can use to convince families and community leaders the negative effects the early marriage has on them. Culture and traditions cum all other forces promoting early marriage must be challenged.
2. Community- based organizations and community-support organizations and the schools are the best channels for raising awareness about the negative impacts of early marriage. They have played a major role in recent time to reduce the practice, because people tend to listen more to something that comes through this channels. Community-based and community-support organizations should continue to serve as means to raise the awareness about the negative impact of the practice.
3. Keen attention should be paid on forming and strengthen anti-harmful traditional practice clubs in schools, as they have proven to be very effective and efficient inviting against the practice. Schools and churches are the basic shareholders in early marriage issues, since they are the first institutions to be affected by the practice of early marriage.
4. Additional training should be provided by health extension workers and community-based reproductive health agents to enhance their knowledge and teaching on consequences of early marriage and existing laws and policies so that they can raise the awareness of community members in the areas where early is prominent.
5. Check and monitor the extent to which courts are implementing the existing relevant laws regularly. Despite the laws, most parents do not feel threatened by government intervention if they married their daughters at a young age. However, in some areas, recent reductions in the practice of early marriage are attributed to strong measures taken by law enforcement, the police and court. It is important that the initiatives and commitment manifested in these areas are maintained and further enhanced.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the early marriage identified include curtailment of education, early pregnancy and child bearing, health related problems such as fistula, domestic violence, marriage breakdown, high fertility and threats to the wellbeing of children. The results of this survey confirm many assumptions and general beliefs about the causes and effects of early, marriage. The over arching issue is a woman's role in family, community, and society in general and long standing assumptions generally shared by both men and women owned a lesser place, merit less influence and deserve less recognition and respect.

1. Some women believe that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for a reason. When in the urban areas are likely to approve of wife beating (woman battery) compared to threatened counterpart. About a fifth of the urban and a thought of the rural women believe a woman deserve beating if she refuses sex with her husband.
2. Early marriage of boys and girls impairs the realization and enjoyment of virtually every one of their rights. The imposition of marriage partner on children or adolescents who due in no way ready for married life and whose marriage deprived them of freedom, opportunity for personal development and other rights including health and wellbeing education and participation in civic life nullified the meaning

of the CRC 's protection for those concerned. Unless measures are taken to address early marriage, it will continue to be a major obstacle to the achievement of human rights.

3. This study is merely as a starting point drawing attention to a practice that has been neglected by both women and children's rights campaigners in recent decades. It is hoped that it will provide an incentive for a campaign to prevent early marriage and end the silent misery of millions of girls in many countries around the world, to open up new horizons for them, programmes and advocacies to bring this about.

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