

PREMARITAL COUNSELLING STRATEGIES AGAINST EARLY MARRIAGE OF THE GIRL-CHILD IN AYAMELUM LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

By

DR. UJU EGENTI
Anambra State University,
Uli.

Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to find out the counselling strategies that would be used by counsellors for counselling against early marriage of the girl-child in Ayamelum Local Government Area of Anambra State. The population of the study consisted of parents selected from the five towns in Ayamelum L.G.A. and all the 10 counsellors practicing in the area. A sample of 150 parents were chosen using simple random sampling technique and all the 10 counsellors were chosen because the number was manageable. Three research questions guided the study. The instrument used for data collection was a researcher made questionnaire which was duly validated by experts. Reliability coefficient of .84 was obtained using test-retest. Statistical mean was used to answer the research questions. Results showed that all the listed causes but one and the listed consequence were all accepted. Also the respondents were in agreement with all the premarital "counselling strategies proffered. Based on the findings, the author made some recommendations including that premarital counselling strategies identified in the study be explored by premarital, marriage and family counsellors. Counsellors in conjunction with parents and others stakeholders should organize seminars, workshops on the need to shun early marriage, that law makers in Anambra State should pass a bill prohibiting early marriage.

All over the world, marriage is a formal union of a man and a woman typically

recognized by law by which they become husband and wife. Ogunsanmi (2005) sees marriage as a social union or legal contract between two different individuals who have agreed as husband and wife to plan and set up their own family together through sickness and in health, for better and for worse. To this end, marriage is very common yet it is very important in all human societies (Nweke and Odumodu, 2000). Among the Ibos in Nigeria, both men and women enjoy elevated status of marriage. Even though marriage is seen as a union of a man and a woman as husband and wife, it is not always perceived as such in most Ibo traditional societies. These societies are essentially group-oriented so there is collective responsibility of events including marriage. In these societies marriage is essentially perceived as a union of two extended families. Ike in Nweke and Odumodu (2000) noted that some Ibo societies do emphasize early marriage of girls based on some advantages which include decrease in promiscuity. This is true of the people of Ayamelum that still encourage early marriage of the girl-child, despite the devastating effect on the girl-child, the family and the community.

Early marriage is an act of getting marriage to an individual who is not fully matured, be it male or female. According to Ango in Mujeke (2013), early marriage is either marriage of adolescent girl/boy or marriage of an adolescent girl to a matured man or vice-versa and this happens at puberty when the individual is getting matured. The marital age according to Mujeke (2013) is above the age of 18 years, when the individual is physically, socially, academically and emotionally matured to cope with the challenges of marriage. The Nigerian review draft decree put the marriageable age of the girl-child at 18 years. The UNICEF (2001) on the right of the child, also recommended that children should not be separated from their parents before 18 years unless it is considered necessary. Despite the above recommendations, the girl-child marriage is prevalent in Ayamelum area. Reasons identified by Oyedepo (2001) on why girls engage in early marriage are poverty, unwanted pregnancy, parental pressure, peer pressure and developmental stage among others. Musaaazi (2002) also observed that these young girls have no values of their own; they are ignorant and sometimes forced into marriage by their parents.

This dangerous attitude is against the UNICEF recommendations on the rights of the child and demands the adoption of premarital counselling strategies to stop these early marriages. Moreso, the devastating effect is evident in emotional and mental distress, intolerance, school drop out, infidelity, etc. Based on the above, Anagbogu (2005) advocated the need to adopt counselling strategies that will appeal to the conscience of the girl-child in shunning this early marriage.

Counselling is a professional assistance and guidance given to an individual in resolving personal, social, educational, psychological problems and difficulties by a well trained counselor (Obikeze and Umezulike, 2013). Premarital counselling is one of the services provided by the counselling profession to help prepare the girl-child for marriage. It is

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the counsellor's role to help in counselling the girl-child to imbibe beliefs about getting matured before marriage. To achieve this, the girl needs a pool of counselling strategies to draw from. Hence the main purpose of this study is to determine the premarital counselling strategies needed in counselling against early marriage of the girl child.

Research Questions

The following research questions gave direction to the study:

1. What are the causes of early marriage of the girl-child?
2. What are the consequences of early marriage of the girl-child?
3. What are the premarital counselling strategies that could be used in counselling against early marriage of the girl-child?

Method

The present study is categorized as a descriptive research and therefore adopted a survey research design. This design is appropriate in collecting and describing data obtained from a sample of population (Nworgu, 2006). This study was carried out in Ayamelum Local Government Area of Anambra State. This local government comprises of eight towns namely, Anaku, Ifite-Ogwari, Omor, Umumbo, Igbakwu, Omasi, Umueje and Umuerum. The population of the study consisted mainly of parents selected from the eight towns in the local government area and 10 counsellors practicing in the government schools in the area. The estimated population of the whole Ayamelum Local Government is 134,680 (National Population Commission, Anaku 2006). Simple random sampling technique was used to select 140 parents (100 females and 40 males) and 10 counsellors in the local government area. The total sample for the study is 150 respondents. The researcher designed an instrument titled Premarital Counselling Strategies Questionnaire (PMCSQ) which was used for data collection in this study. It is a structured questionnaire which consists of two sections (A and B). Section A requires the bio-data information of the respondents while section B consists of 35 statements on causes, consequences and premarital counselling strategies. The responses to the questionnaire was designed on a 4-point scale of measurement of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The face validation of the instrument was established by three experts in the Department of Education Foundations, Measurement and Evaluation and Adult Education all from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. A pilot study was conducted using 18 respondents (10 females, 5 males and 3 counsellors) on whom the questionnaire was administered.

Results

The results of the study were presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3, according to the research questions as follows:

Research Question 1:

What are the causes of early marriage of the girl-child?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the ratings on causes of early marriage of the girl-child

| S/N | Items | SA | A | D | SD | \bar{X} | SD | Decision |
|-----|----------------------------|----|----|----|----|-----------|------|----------|
| 1. | Poverty | 70 | 38 | 20 | 22 | 3.04 | 0.20 | Agree |
| 2. | Broken homes | 65 | 39 | 20 | 26 | 2.95 | 0.20 | Agree |
| 3. | Family pressure | 40 | 62 | 30 | 18 | 2.83 | 0.19 | Agree |
| 4. | Unwanted pregnancy | 70 | 40 | 30 | 10 | 3.13 | 0.21 | Agree |
| 5. | Peer pressure | 50 | 80 | 10 | 10 | 3.13 | 0.21 | Agree |
| 6. | Culture – way of life of a | 50 | 40 | 20 | 40 | 2.67 | 0.19 | Agree |
| 7. | community | | | | | | | |
| | Cultural attachment to | 48 | 57 | 30 | 15 | 2.92 | 0.20 | Agree |
| 8. | virginity – girls marry | 30 | 63 | 20 | 37 | 2.57 | 0.18 | Agree |
| 9. | quickly to maintain it. | 56 | 58 | 18 | 18 | 3.01 | 0.20 | Agree |
| 10. | Unstable/troubled homes | | | | | | | |
| | Parental pressure | | | | | | | |
| | Misconception – erroneous | 36 | 19 | 62 | 33 | 2.39 | 0.18 | Disagree |
| | belief that early marriage | | | | | | | |
| | maintains a woman’s beauty | | | | | | | |

In table 1, only item obtain 10 obtained a mean rating below 2.50. The remaining items had mean ratings above 2.50 indicating that the respondents agreed that they are all causes of early marriage of the girl-child. The answer to research question 1, therefore is that the causes of early marriage of the girl-child are: Poverty, broken homes, family pressure, unwanted pregnancy, peer pressure, culture – way of life of a community, cultural attachment to virginity, unstable/troubled homes and parental pressure.

Research Question 2:

What are the consequences of early marriage of the girl-child?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of ratings on consequences of early marriage of the girl-child

| S/N | Items | SA | A | D | SD | X̄ | SD | Decision |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|----|----|------|------|----------|
| 11. | School drop out | 60 | 50 | 20 | 20 | 3.00 | 0.20 | Agree |
| 12. | Divorce due to immaturity | 70 | 50 | 18 | 12 | 3.19 | 0.22 | Agree |
| 13. | Intolerance due to | 60 | 70 | 10 | 10 | 3.20 | 0.22 | Agree |
| 14. | difference in age | 76 | 48 | 10 | 16 | 3.23 | 0.22 | Agree |
| 15. | Hatred sets in – the girl | 18 | 100 | 20 | 12 | 2.83 | 0.19 | Agree |
| 16. | hates the man | 60 | 70 | 14 | 6 | 3.23 | 0.22 | Agree |
| 17. | Frustration | 50 | 60 | 6 | 34 | 2.84 | 0.19 | Agree |
| 18. | Sexual promiscuity on the | 44 | 60 | 20 | 26 | 2.81 | 0.19 | Agree |
| 19. | part of the girl Vesico vaginal fistula diseases | 30 | 100 | 12 | 8 | 3.01 | 0.20 | Agree |
| 20. | Chances of fibroid due to | 30 | 29 | 80 | 11 | 2.52 | 0.18 | Agree |
| 21. | early child birth Girls offspring from the | 45 | 32 | 35 | 38 | 2.63 | 0.18 | Agree |
| 22. | marriage are at increased risk for premature birth and | 26 | 98 | 5 | 21 | 2.86 | 0.19 | Agree |
| 23. | death as neonates, infants or children Increased risk of cervical cancer Early widowhood – where the girl-child marries an old man Increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases Premature death during child birth | 57 | 40 | 43 | 10 | 2.96 | 0.20 | Agree |

In table 2 above, the respondents rated all the items above 2.50. this indicates that they agree that school dropout, divorce, intolerance, hatred for the man, frustration, sexual promiscuity, vesico vaginal fistula diseases, fibroid, early widowhood, premature birth and death of offspring of the marriage, increased risk of cervical cancer, increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases and premature death during child birth are all consequences of early marriage.

Research question 3:

What are the premarital counselling strategies that could be used in counselling against early marriage of the girl-child?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of the ratings on premarital counselling strategies.

| S/N | Items | SA | A | D | S D | \bar{X} | SD | Decision |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|-----|-----------|------|----------|
| 24. | Creating rapport with the girl-child to help her discuss her problems. | 65 | 30 | 30 | 25 | 2.90 | 0.19 | Agree |
| 25. | Counsellors should teach the girl-child to be assertive at all times and say no to sex before marriage to avoid unwanted pregnancy. | 72 | 52 | 21 | 5 | 3.27 | 0.22 | Agree |
| 26. | Counsellors should educate the girl-child on the appropriate time to get married. | 29 | 76 | 15 | 30 | 2.69 | 0.19 | Agree |
| 27. | Counselling the girl-child to be more interested in education in order to achieve success in life. | 73 | 57 | 14 | 6 | 3.31 | 0.23 | Agree |
| 28. | Counselling the parents to be interested and involved in the girl-child behaviour in school and at home. | 63 | 50 | 30 | 7 | 3.13 | 0.21 | Agree |
| 29. | Counsellors should encourage the girl-child with learning difficulties by teaching her effective study habit. | 39 | 82 | 18 | 11 | 2.99 | 0.20 | Agree |
| 30. | Counsellors should educate the girl-child on equal opportunity in life with the boy-child if early marriage is avoided. | 58 | 60 | 30 | 2 | 3.16 | 0.21 | Agree |
| 31. | Counsellors should educate the parents on the dangers of forcing the girl-child into early marriage. | 91 | 31 | 25 | 3 | 3.40 | 0.24 | Agree |
| 32. | Counsellors should use their own experience or experience of general and early marriage in | 67 | 50 | 30 | 3 | 3.21 | 0.22 | Agree |
| 33. | | 56 | 63 | 28 | 3 | 3.15 | 0.21 | Agree |
| 34. | | 33 | 91 | 13 | 13 | 2.96 | 0.20 | Agree |
| 35. | | 21 | 86 | 40 | 3 | 2.83 | 0.19 | Agree |

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| | <p>particular. Counsellors should organize enlightenment programmes for the public using village meetings, town union programme, PTA meetings, markets, motor parks, etc. Seminars, workshops and symposium should be organized to explain to the girl-child, parents and the general public the consequences of early marriage. Premarital counselling should be included in the school time-table.</p> | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|

From table 3 above, it can be observed that the respondents are in agreement with all the items listed as premarital counselling strategies. The answer to research question 3 therefore is that the premarital counselling strategies that could be used in counselling against early marriage of the girl-child include: creating rapport with the girl-child to help her discuss her problems, teaching the girl-child to be assertive at all times and to say no to sex before marriage to avoid unwanted pregnancy,. Educating the girl-child on the appropriate time to get married, counselling the girl-child to be more interested in education in order to achieve success in life among others as listed in table 3 above.

Discussion

One striking revelation of this study is that early marriage has devastating effect on the girl-child as well as community. The results of this study, as found in table 1, which answers research question one, showed that such causes as poverty, broken homes, family pressure, unwanted pregnancy, peer pressure, unstable homes, ignorance and cultural beliefs induce early marriage of the girl-child. This is in line with the finding of Musaaazi (2002) who noted that early marriage could be as a result of cultural training girls receive which pay more attention to household duties such as helping as house wife and a mother thus suppressing the vocational and educational ambitions of the girl-child.

Table 2 showed responses to Research Question 2 on consequences of early marriage. Based on the findings, the respondents agreed that school drop out, divorce, intolerance due to age difference, hatred for the man, frustration, sexual promiscuity, vesico vaginal fistula disease, fibroid, premature death, increased risk of cervical cancer are all consequences of early marriage of the girl-child. This finding is

consistent with Bala in Mujeke (2013) who highlighted the same consequences in his own study.

However, for table 3 which answered research question three on the premarital counselling strategies that could be used to empower the girl-child to shun early marriage, this is in consonance with the suggestion made by Anagbogu (2005) that there is need to adopt counselling strategies that will appeal to the conscience of the girl-child to shun the menace of early marriage.

Conclusion

Premarital counselling has not had its fair share in Ayamelum Local Government Area in particular and in Anambra State in general. Counselling is mainly done in the classroom and emphasis is educational and vocational counselling. There is need to lay emphasis on premarital and marital counselling in Anambra State and Ayamelum Local Government in particular to discourage this syndrome of early marriage.

Recommendations

This study recommends:

1. That counselling centres be mounted in strategic places of Anambra State and Ayamelum with emphasis on premarital counselling.
2. That the decision on when to marry by young girls should not be imposed on them by their parents. It should be left for the girl and her counsellor.
3. The law makers in Anambra State should pass a bill prohibiting early marriage.
4. Education planners should include sex education in the school curriculum to educate the girl-child properly.
5. The premarital counselling strategies identified in this study should be explored by premarital counsellors.

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