

The Impact Of Early Marriage On Girls' School Dropout In Somalia (Case Study).

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Abstract

This study in carried out in Somalia and it is aimed at discovering the reasons behind girls' school dropout across the country. Its scope consisted some selected primary and secondary schools across the country and the sample was 215 participants. The study used interview and observation checklist as data collection tools. This study concluded that early marriage significantly increases girls' risk of school dropout in Somalia. This significantly relates to cultural factors that value reproduction than education. The study indicated the strength of the association and the frequency of reporting of early marriage as the main reason for school dropout are remarkable enough to warrant the conclusion that early marriage is a main driver of girls' dropping out of school in Somalia. It is recommended that parental awareness should be increased to ensure that parents have value in education and as well inclusive education system should be developed by the government to increase gender equality in education sector which can lead socio-economic and political development across the country

1. Introduction

Somalia is among the highest gender unequal countries in the world but has the highest data gaps to reflect recent changes. Child marriage is among the extreme forms of violation of child rights affecting adolescent girls. The ongoing humanitarian crisis has exacerbated poverty, insecurity and access to education, factors which drive child marriage. Recent figures, however, show decline in the prevalence of child marriage. Percentage of girls aged 15-19 years who have ever been married in the country have declined from 25 in 2006 to around 10 in 2016. The south and central parts of the country still registers relatively higher prevalence of early marriage. Despite of this silent progress made, there is minimal documentation actual dynamics of this change. This article explores perception and practices of early marriage. Rescue, Care and Save the children, 2017 fact sheet No.7).

Marriage is a social institution that unites people in a special form of mutual dependence for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family. As a social practice entered into through a public act, religious or traditional ceremony, it reflects the purposes, character and customs of the society in which it is found. Many societies have norms that limit the age of young girls to enter into marriage, but in some cases the age limit does not take into consideration their physiological readiness for childbearing. Marriage often takes place at ages much earlier than the legally ratified minimum age. Early marriage is the marriage of children and adolescents below the age of 18 years. In several culture girls are forced to be married at a very early age due to various reasons such as getting dowry, the fear of some parents that their daughters would get pregnant while at home. It was considered shameful for a girl to

get pregnant outside wedlock. Other factors include unequal power relations and economic hardship. This also exposes girls to unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS and abortions as common problems among adolescents worldwide. This also account as to why adolescents suffer more from related complications, such as maternal and infant death.

Early marriage put teenagers at risk because they are not fully physically developed to care for pregnancy, early marriage results in early and frequent child birth and subsequently an increase in family size. Early marriage also denies girls the right to enjoy their childhood, the right to education and the right to a husband of her own choice and of her age. When young girls are forced to marry someone who is older than herself and if it happens that husband dies the chances of such girls to become a widow at an early age are high. But not only will that young mothers be left to take care the young children by themselves. Because of bad customs and traditions, it is not guaranteed that these young wives will inherit their husband properties. Basically early marriages not only pose greater health risks for the young mother and the baby, but it also violate the girls right to make her own choice such customs must therefore be fought in all fronts.

Different laws determine the ages, sexes, physical conditions, and relations to mention but a few for both parties contracting marriage. Early marriage is used to refer both formal marriage and informal unions in which a girl lives with a partner as if married before age of 18, Early marriage also known as child marriage is defined as “any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years before the girl is physically, physiologically ready to shoulder the

responsibilities of marriage and child bearing "Child on the other hand, involves other one or both spouses being children and may take place with or without formal registration and under civil religious or customary laws. We can trace the historical background to early by speculating the cultural context of the most of the people in the world. In most societies early marriage has been practiced from time immemorial. The children used to be married after attaining puberty that is at around the age of 12 to 16. This used to be the case for most of the girls who used to be given to men as old as their fathers. The reason behind this is explained to be economy. The girls engage in marriage soon after their attainment to puberty in order to avoid social scandals. If the girl becomes pregnant at her father's house, all blames go to father or relatives. It was taken to be a curse if a girl remains at home after her puberty. So the family has to ensure that their daughters are getting husbands soon after the attainment of the age. The families often take pride in their daughters' marriage.

The family prestige depended on how many children their daughters bore for her husband. The chance of bearing many children was secured as early as possible. Marriage of girls used to be a source of income to many families.

2. Methodology

The study used interview and observation as data collection tools where key individuals were effectively interviewed and educational institutions were regularly visited by the researcher and observation checklist was constructed by the researcher to observe the situation on the ground. A group of selected subjects from School principals, school committees and parents were interviewed and collective discussions and brainstorming

sessions regarding to this issue were implemented to gather with variety of educational stakeholders.

3. Literature review

Family structure in Somalia is still relatively traditional and thus resembles how family life is organized in other parts of the African and Arab (Muslim) world. In a Somali and African context, marriage (guur in Somali) and the founding of a family are not seen as an individual choice, but rather a social commitment. The social pressure to conclude marriage is also strong, especially in regards to the first marriage (Nuune 2011).

In the Somali tradition, marriage is concluded through negotiations and agreements between the families, but also upon the initiative of the young persons themselves. Most Somalis relate to extended family networks where the distribution of roles and work is gender-specific and where the man remains to be the head of the family. Marriage is also the only legitimate context for sexual activity in Somalia. There is also a clear expectation of reproduction after the marriage has been entered into. From this perspective, first-time marriage with a woman passed fertile age is not common. Of course, significant age differences in the woman's favour are not only unusual among Somalis, but also in most cultures – including our own. There are cases among Somalis where the woman is older than the man, but in these instances, it is likely that the circumstances are special – for example that the woman is very wealthy, or other factors that could compensate for the age difference in the woman's favour. Islamic principles of equality are given considerable weight, which means that there should be social and economic equality between the bride and groom. Most families will not accept their children marrying below their social rank, and

the capacity to support is a precondition for a husband to be able to get married. The bride can be raised to the bridegroom's social level by marriage, but a weaker social position of a groom will not readily be accepted (Dahl 1992, p. 65).

3.1 Family law of 1975: The 1975 Family Law (Emory University School of Law

2015) is still in force in Somalia. 5 It sets the marriage age for both parties at 18 years – 16 for girls with the consent of a guardian. The ordinary justice system was dissolved in 1991. Although the justice system is gradually being rebuilt, it appears that the legislation is still not effectively enforced. Somalis mostly defer to sharia – and Somali tradition – in matters concerning the family, as was also the case before 1991. According to sharia and Somali tradition, both parties are ready to get married once they have reached puberty. Not least in rural areas, it is not uncommon for girls to marry at fourteen, sometimes even younger, see also section

5.4.

3.2 Legislations: The draft new constitution for Somalia appears to set the marital age of women at 15 (Somali diaspora researcher, meeting in Mogadishu, 10 November 2013).⁶ In the Constitution, article 28 on Family Care deals, among other things, with marriage, and here it is referred to the age of maturity, without it being defined in further detail (Provisional Constitution 2012). However, in sharia and Somali tradition, both parties are able to get married once they have reached puberty. It has never been possible to conclude a civil marriage in Somalia.

3.3 Free Partner Selection: It is difficult to know how free Somali women and men are to choose

a spouse on their own. Probably, this varies between different regions, clans and economic classes, but the couple's parents arrange most marriages. Arranged marriages are especially prevalent when persons marry for the first time, and by this enter adulthood. In rural areas, young people meet in various contexts – at the well, in the market and at weddings – but meeting in private is not accepted. Of course, this does not rule out romance at a distance. If his family approves the husband's choice, the suitor's father, or the closest male relative, may contact the woman's family (Abdullahi 2001; Lewis 1994). Among the nomadic clans in the north, most people prefer the spouse to belong to a different clan than their own. Marriage among people in the north has traditionally been used to create an alliance between two previously unrelated families – i.e. potentially hostile groups. Among the agropastoralists in the south, however, the preferred partner is a close relative, such as the father's brother's son or daughter (see more about this in section 6.3). In the capital, however, it is not uncommon for the husband and wife to meet each other, fall in love and think of marriage without the parents being involved before the couple has decided on each other (Somali resource person, email 2014, Washuk 2016). A young couple who are both studying will usually wait to plan their marriage until they finish their studies, although this depends on the financial position of the future groom. The couple will get to know each other and not least discuss what kind of furniture the man will buy for his bride and their shared home. During this time it is common – and indeed important – to introduce the suitor to the family. Usually, the suitor is accepted, but should the family oppose the marriage, it can cause problems for the couple. The woman's family will examine the man's background, his clan affiliation, morals and habits (does he chew

khat or not?), education and work. Similarly, the husband's family will examine the woman's background to see if she and her family have a good and respectable reputation. The families discuss the bride price and determine the dowry the woman should have. In the capital, the dowry is preferably given either in either gold or cash.

3.4 Organized Marriages: Organized marriages are the norm in Somalia. In such marriages, the fathers of the couple, or the guardians, agree that the couple will marry (The Academy for Peace and Development 2002). The family has a major influence on the eligibility of marriage candidates, especially for the first marriage. The decision of marriage is only to a small extent left to the two people getting married. Both

“arranged marriages” and “forced marriages” are arranged. The transition between arranged and forced marriages may be gradual. However, in arranged marriages, there is in principle more or less explicit consent from both parties. Forced marriages, on the other hand, involves very little or no consent at all. At the same time, very few women go against their family, i.e. the father's or the guardian's choice (SWDC 2013; woman with a diaspora background; conversation in Mogadishu 2013; Abdullahi 2001). The difference between an arranged marriage and a forced marriage can thus be very subtle. Somali children are raised to respect their parents, to listen to their advice and to receive their blessing on important choices in life (Abdullahi 2001; Helander 2003). Lack of respect for parents and their advice, on the other hand, is cursed. A woman with a diaspora background

(conversation in Mogadishu 2013) described this as follows: Somali fathers will ask their children whether to bless them or curse them, and the choice is entirely “natural” for the vast majority.

Then, the father will say that he has chosen a spouse for them. In such a situation, it is almost unthinkable to object. Respect for the parents and their choices is also reflected among young Somalis in the diaspora (Washuk 2016). The choice of spouse is based on two factors: the bride price (yarad) offered to the bride's father, and the alliances that the marriage may create. The bride price is the payment for the woman's ability to work, the ability to give birth and the moral standard that will benefit the groom and his family.⁷ Among the nomadic groups, as mentioned earlier, marriages with members of neighbouring clans are important, since such alliances contribute to ensuring access to water and grazing areas. A longstanding tradition is also to seal peace agreements between clans by exchanging brides between the parties.

Nevertheless, traditions related to marriage and ways of choosing a spouse, like other traditions, have changed over the past few decades. Centre for Research and Dialogue (CRD) in Mogadishu conducted a project in Southern and Central Somalia in 2002- 2003 evaluating the effects of the civil war on the population. The report Somalia: Path to recovery building a sustainable peace (CRD 2004).

3.5 Forced Marriages: The central terms for marriage in Somali practice correspond to those found in Islamic law. In sharia, both spouses consent to marriage. However, as mentioned, few will refuse, and should they refuse, the refusal has little practical

4. Findings

relevance (Nuune 2011). The extent of forced marriages, that is, how often women, through physical or mental coercion, are forced into a marriage against their will is impossible to quantify.8 Somalis, according to a young female Somali resource person with a diaspora background (meeting in Mogadishu, November 2013), claim that forced marriages do not occur because coercion is defined as the use of physical force. However, a number of other local and international conversation partners that Landinfo has discussed this topic with pointed out that women who refuse to get married are at risk of being exposed to violence. (Land info report 2012).

5. Discussion

This study dealt with the dropout rate of girls in secondary education. The areas covered by literature review included:-Early marriage, Economic reasons, domestic work, inadequate school facilities and Parental attitudes on girls education, Domestic labor and dropout rate of girls in secondary schools, Role of society on dropout rate in secondary schools and lastly Impacts of poverty on the dropout rate of girls in secondary schools. The sample consisted of 215 respondents from some selected primary and secondary schools across Somalia. The

method of allocation was to ensure that the population size was reflected in the sample size. The findings revealed that:- There were several factors that influenced the dropout rate of female students in secondary schools in Somalia ranging from early marriage which affected the dropout of girl child, initiation rites which interfered with the normal school and class attendance, the attitudes of parents which at times were negative on the girl child and most of the parents preferred educating boys to girls, the roles in the society and domestic work were overwhelming for the girl child leaving the girls to be seriously exhausted and cannot concentrate in the class work and lastly poverty and as well as economic reasons including parental desire to receive pride and dowry for the exchange of their daughters were all seriously affected the education of girls as a result of the death of parents which are experiencing to the Somali society for the past 25 years of civil war leaving the girl child to lack school fees and depend on the guardians and well wishers.

The results observed on the high dropout rate of female students in secondary schools. According to these findings, the school Head teachers used various methods in handling female students' dropout in schools and these included guidance and counseling,

Reasons for school dropout among girls aged between(15-23)		
Reason	Percentage	Sample size
Got married	85%	215 respondents
Economic reasons	60%	215 respondents
Domestic work	35%	215 respondents
Inadequate school facilities	20%	215 respondents
Parental attitude	15%	215 respondents
Total:	215	

The above table shows that majority (85%) of the interviewee said that girls get dropout because of marriage followed by (60%) who said the reason for girls school dropout was economic reasons while (35%) of them reasoned domestic work and (20%) agreed the reason is inadequate school facilities whereas (15%) said the reason is parental attitude.

recommendations for bursary fund fees forms, punishments involving parents in matters of student disciplines and mobilization of the community members and well wishers to pay for the disadvantaged girls in secondary schools. However the administrators also agreed that more funding and support from the government and well wishers were needed to address the series girls 'dropout in secondary and primary schools.

6. Conclusion

This study revealed that early marriage significantly increases girls' risk of school dropout in Somalia. This significantly relates to cultural factors that value reproduction than education. In Somalia, as a result of culture girls are isolated from education services where most of the parents believe that educated girl would not contribute to the wellbeing of her family since she will be taken by a man and remain working for him and her children.

The study indicated the strength of the association and the frequency of reporting of early marriage as the main reason for school dropout are remarkable enough to warrant the conclusion that early marriage is a main driver of girls' dropping out of school in Somalia. This finding underlined the need to delay marriage in order to reduce gender disparity against females in school retention and the out-of-school population in many parts of the country.

Reducing the risk of dropout requires national strategies that encourage and retain girls in school and facilitate a smooth transition to secondary education. Schoolbased programs and projects aimed at preventing early marriage should target girls from the fifth grade because of their escalated risk, and they need to prioritize girls from disadvantaged groups and poor households including girls in rural areas.

A Financial motive of the parents was regarded to as another factor causing girl's school dropout. This is where parents concentrate more on acquiring dowry and ignores sending girls to schools and this compelled poor parents to encourage their daughters to marry earlier instead of spending much time in studying in order to sustain the family and maintain its prosperity. Early marriage had severely affected girls contribution towards social and economic development in the last twenty years since the number of enrolled girls were dramatically declining in the last ten years in Somalia in general and particularly in the remote areas.

7. Recommendations

The study recommended the followings:

1. Parental awareness for educational values should be undertaken by the government and educational organizations
2. Inclusive education system should be developed by the government to ensure that gender equality for education is ensured
3. School facilities should be improved to ensure that schools are conducive place for girls education
4. Cultural factors limiting girls to study should be controlled through new legislations and modified educational policy implementations
5. School ethics should be improved to avoid any harassment against girls in

school environment that can lead girls to stop studying at early age.

6. Parental financial subsidies should be undertaken by the government to ensure that parents are motivated to send their girls to school by gaining benefits from the government subsidies.

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