

## **Examination of the Extent of Early Marriage Practice on Students' Completion and Drop out In Nyamira North Sub-County, Nyamira County, Kenya**

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**Abstract:** Completion, access and participation in education are currently the most important ones in the implementation of education for all. This is particularly so when one considers the problems surrounding early marriages observed to lead to lower school completion rates and increased dropouts. It is with this in mind that the present study sought to examine the extent of early marriage practice on students' completion and drop out in Nyamira North sub-county, Nyamira County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population was 38 Principals and students and 1400 parents. The sample was 322 students, 38 G/C teachers and parents. The survey instruments were piloted in Kisii County using the test-re-test method. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.78 which was considered good enough for a scientific study. In addition, the research instruments were subjected to the scrutiny of two experts who established face as well as content validity. Data was collected from respondents using a specially designed questionnaire and interview schedule. The findings may enable students to obtain an education that is likely to lengthen their stay in school thus ending up in avoiding early marriages. The findings of the present study revealed that most of the principals, 52 percent responded that the extent of early marriage practice on students' completion and drop out is very high. Few of them saw it as normal and that was 10.3 percent while 3.9 reported that not applicable at all. It also found out those 23 G /C teachers which makes up 61 percent agreed that female students are more linked to dropout than boys. The study concluded that more effort by all stakeholders be encouraged to retain students in schools till completion. The study recommended that guidance and counseling in schools be activated, G/C teachers should be motivated and equally important, the chaplaincy programs be initiated in schools for spiritual edification. The study considered the ethical considerations and respondents were explained the purpose of the study, guarded against plagiarism and respondents consent was sought.

**Keywords:** Early Marriage Practice, school, dropouts.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Globally the two most important challenges that concern educationists currently are access and participation in quality education. Research done by UNESCO [1] postulated that Education is not merely a basic human right, but it is also a lethal weapon against poverty. In fact, education is a critical enabler that provides opportunity to individuals to improve their livelihoods and have their voice heard. In America, Mitra [2] hinted that other education benefits include: improvement of the Learner's health and productivity; fostering participation in civil society and, helping to slow down the spread of HIV/AIDS. Therefore, increasing the number of individuals who go through an education system is critical in leading to economic

growth; social and political stability; decline in criminal rate; and, improved social services [3].

Despite the many barriers hampering individuals to access education, one socially constructed barrier is child marriages also known as early marriage. Thus, its prevalence rate in countries or regions is an indicator of the level of educational access. Early marriage rates vary from one country to another and from one region to another. In a survey conducted by Parsons and McCleary-Sills [4], Raj and Boehmer [5] among 111 countries including Niger and Bangladesh were found with the highest rates of child marriages at 74% and 75% respectively; while Algeria and Libya had the lowest rates at 2% each. Moreover, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa regions were found

have the highest rates of early marriages while Latin America had the lowest. Furthermore, although, India's rate of child marriages is not the highest, just by the mere size of the country's population, it has highest incidence of child marriages in the world accounting for approximately one-third of the world's child marriages [6, 7].

By its very nature, Hindin and Fatusi [8] pointed out that early marriage deprives young people the opportunity to receive an education and has a range of negative repercussions; among them, leaving young men and women without the ability to make informed choices for the rest of their lives and risk intimate partner violence. Furthermore, it has been shown that early marriage limits women's decision-making in terms of their health, choice of job, and other preferences for exercising their agency, including matters of enrolling in and completing school [9] which go a long way in determining their future achievement and development.

In Kenya, the United Nations Population Fund UNFPA [10] found that the vice of early marriages still persists prevalent and lowest among communities with fairly learned percentage of the population while it is highest among those communities with low literacy level. Furthermore, Kenya is among countries where the child marriage incidences are high and on the increase despite being outlawed. The report warned that if the trend continues, the tally of such marriages worldwide are likely to grow to 14.2 million by 2020 and set to reach 15.1 million each year by 2030. Child marriages do not only violate children rights; but, they also have serious negative implications on all aspects of a girl's or a boy's life. Despite the varied physical, emotional and social effects of early marriages; one most common outcome is the discontinuation of a girl from formal education [4].

Early marriages are likely to occur among poor girls with low education level and live in rural areas [11], occasioning gender inequality starting with the secondary level of education. The reasons for the observed gender disparity are many and varied. The more important ones include economic reasons (poverty, lack of financial resources to pay school fees), social reasons (performing household chores – fetching water), and parental attitudes – a preference to favour boys whenever a choice is to be made, often negatively affecting girls to a greater extent [12].

Whereas education is set to turn around the plight of individuals, especially women; social norms that encourage early marriages seem to stand on the way forcing women and girls to drop out of school, thus limiting their opportunities. Increasing female education is a catalyst for bringing about change, resulting from increased decision-making power there by leading to better health and employment outcomes. However, early marriage remains by far the greatest obstacle

cutting short girls' education, thus helping explain persistent gender disparities in rates of secondary school dropout and completion. This phenomenon is prevalent especially in developing countries where up to 39,000 incidences of girls marrying daily are witnessed [13].

Therefore it is critical to gain insights into the early marriages problem and its effects on school completion and dropout rates in order to design programmes and formulate policies to assist in improving gender equality in education. In any event, education is necessary for mitigating the negative effects often associated with early marriage. It is for this reason that educated girls have higher chances of understanding their own rights, enjoying a sense of personal empowerment, being healthy, having healthy families and more economic potential and exercising greater skills. Putting it even more directly, child marriage is a rare occurrence among highly educated women [14]; given that marriage introduces a new set of responsibilities requiring married women to care for their families and, possibly, children, which are at variance with those demanded of educated women [15].

Therefore, the study on how early marriages among secondary school students influence school completion and dropout rates was conceived against the backdrop of a generally high and rising problem. Inevitably, the phenomenon of early marriages has negative consequences in terms of educational access and participation for involved students, especially girls. It is prevalent among low communities that are rural based with low literacy level and affect school completion and dropout rates. Nyamira County is a rural constituency which might demonstrate this phenomenon in the context of free education.

### **Statement of the problem**

Gender disparities in secondary education continue to be observed despite provision of both free primary and secondary education. There are several factors that seem to influence the phenomenon; among them early marriage and pregnancy leading to low completion rates as well as increased dropout rates. A search on accessible literature yielded limited studies conducted in Kenya addressing the subject. Even then, majority of those studies were national surveys which lack detailed information concerning any region. Considering that being deprived of an education for whatever reason has devastating consequences, such as likely to be left without the ability to make informed choices for the rest of life; limiting women's decision-making in terms of their health, job choices, and other preferences in matters of enrolling in and completing school. Fundamentally therefore, education is necessary for exercising their agency and is a determinant of their future achievement and development; making it imperative to provide insights on the severity of the problem. It is against this backdrop that the present

study sought to determine the how significant early marriages are practiced among secondary school students and their impact on school completion and dropout rates in Nyamira North sub-county, Nyamira County.

#### **Extent of early marriage practice on students' completion and drop out**

Moreover, the survey done by UNICEF [14] in a bid to determine the extent of early marriage practices had often defined early marriage as the one that refers to a union entered by partners in which at least one of them has not attained 18 years of age—the upper age limit for protection under the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child [16]. It has been established that marriage before the age of 18 is a reality for many young women. According to UNICEF [17] it was reported that in many parts of the world parents encourage the marriage of their daughters while they are still children in hopes that the marriage will benefit them both financially and socially, while also relieving financial burdens on the family. In actuality, child marriage is a violation of human rights, compromising the development of girls and often resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, with little education and poor vocational training reinforcing the gendered nature of poverty. Although such marriages get recognized in statutory or customary law, they constitute informal unions and from a legal point of view fail to qualify as marriages. This is because minors lack the capacity to provide informed consent and therefore cannot enter into any contractual relationships. Generally, the effects, extent and consequences of early marriage are many and varied. A research carried out by Santhya and Jejeebhoy [18] among 655 young people in Germany and Canada on adolescents' health and human rights postulated that early marriages led to girls getting pregnant before maturity and thus, increasing the risk of complications during both pregnancy term and childbirth. The chances of increased risk of death or serious lasting complications such as obstetric fistula has been greater for girls in early and middle adolescence.

A survey done by Xu *et al.* [19] revealed that child brides are also less likely to receive proper medical care during pregnancy and delivery than those who give birth later. Lack of motherly experience in combination with girls being physically immature and the lack of proper medical care during pregnancy and child birth puts adolescent mothers at higher risk for complications during gestation and delivery, including prolonged or obstructed labor, fistula and death to this extent, early pregnancy has predisposed many young girls to death. Consequently, World Health Organization, WHO [20] pointed out that complications of pregnancy and childbirth are the second leading causes of death among adolescent girls ages 15–19 globally, with nearly 70,000 dying each year [21]. This evidence estimated that the risk of dying as a result of

pregnancy-related causes is four times higher for adolescents under 16 years of age compared to women in their early twenties [14].

Ordinarily, extent and consequences of early marriage sometimes pose threat to lives. According to Raj and Boehmer [5] infants born to under eighteen mothers face up to 60% risk of dying in their first year of life compared to infants born to mothers aged over 19 years old. They asserted that these infants are more likely to be under weight and premature at birth and may experience serious health problems. Mortality rates among such children are reportedly high – sometimes twice those of old peers [22]. The extent of early marriage risk are far reaching, the work of Clark [23] and UNICEF [24] prescribed that marrying early has also been shown to precipitate chances of being infected with HIV/AIDS and escalation of domestic violence including the fact that girls who marry at a tender age are at greater risk of being battered, abused and exploited.

In other parts of Africa like Rwanda, the studies by Basiyenge [25] assert that early marriage inevitably denies school age children their right to education. Those who get married inevitably get excluded practically from formal education leading to dropout from school. Apart from influencing school completion, early marriage also influences the standard of education offered in school. It has been established that in regions where early marriages are rampant, education providers are influenced in a negative way to provide poor quality education. This is due to negative perception that soon female students were likely to marry and the education they would have received rendered un-important beyond marriage. For example, in a study, Plan UK [26], demonstrated that girls receive less quality education than boys. They are denied science and technical skills because their role would be home making.

Kenya as a developing country in Africa, the work of Ombuya, Yambo and Omolo [27] opined that one of the serious obstacles to female education has been premature departures or dropping out from schools by female students is notable in Sub-Saharan Africa and some regions in Kenya. Early departures of girls from schooling certainly result in wastage and drop out. Wastage here means the inefficient utilization of both human and economic resources by the education system [28]. The interruption of schooling by female students is also costly in terms of the quality of life of those who drop out as well as to the society at large. According to Adhanja, Nyakan and Yambo [29] they reiterated that it is challenging to provide education for all citizens and to observe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that entitles everyone to the right to basic education. The drop out of female learners from schools denies them the opportunity for employment as well as the means to increase their social and political participation.

In addition, then on-completion of schooling by females contributes to their low social status in society as well as to their reduced decision-making power in the household and over their lives. Given the economic and social benefits of female education, the drop out of female students from schooling represents a significant regression in the development of nations [27].

**METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a descriptive survey design in which a questionnaire was used as the tool to collect data. Haslam and McGarty [30] asserted that

surveys are excellent designs for studying people's stable long- term conditions such as attitudes, opinions, habits or any other variety of educational or social issues. It is for this reason that a survey design was considered appropriate for the present study on the problem of early marriages and their impact on school completion and dropout rates. The target population was 38 Guidance and counseling teachers; 1520 form four students and 1400 parents for the involved students. From the population the sample was done as per table 1.

**Table-1: Sample size of respondents**

Respondent	Population	Sample	Percentage	Sampling Technique
G/C Teachers	38	38	100	Purposive sampling
Parents	1400	278	Saunders <i>et al.</i> [31] Table	
Students	1520	322	Saunders <i>et al.</i> [31] Table	
Principal	38	38	100	Purposive sampling
Total	2996	676		

Where respondents were many then the researcher considered using Saunders, Philip and Thornbill [31] table to sample the form four students and their parents.

The study used a questionnaire and interview schedule to collect data. To validate the instruments the researcher sought the assistance of two experts from the department of education in Kisii University, Kenya. In order to get reliability, Pearson product moment formula for the test-retest was employed to compute the correlation coefficient so as to establish the extent to which the questionnaire yields consistent results for every repeated use. A correlation coefficient,  $r = 0.7$  should be considered enough to judge the instrument as reliable for the study (McLeord, 2003). For the present study, the designed questionnaire yielded a coefficient of correlation,  $r = 0.78$ . This was considered suitable for use in a scientific study.

Ethical considerations were adhered to in this study which included citing all the sources to avoid plagiarism, obtaining the requisite authorization by the Kisii University academic board as well as NACOSTI; requiring informed consent from participant indicating their willingness to participate in the study; and assuring participants that the information they provide would be kept not only confidential, but would be reported anonymously to protect their identity.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Extent of early marriage practice on students' completion and drop out**

This study was set to answer the research question: What is the extent of early marriage practice on students' completion and drop out in Nyamira North sub-county, Nyamira County, Kenya? When principals were asked about the extent of early marriage practice on students' completion and drop out they responded as follows:

**Table-2: Extent of early marriage practice on students' completion and drop out**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Normal Extent	4	10.3
Low Extent	7	18.2
High Extent	20	52.0
Very High Extent	6	15.6
Not Applicable	1	3.9
Total	38	100.0

Most of the principals, 52 percent responded that the extent of early marriage practice on students' completion and drop out is very high. Few of them saw it as normal and that was 10.3 percent while 3.9 reported that not applicable at all.

factors that influence early marriages among secondary school students. These factors include poverty, cultural factors [11, 33], unintended pregnancy, peer pressure and Lack of Legal safeguards [33].

Research evidence on high extent postulated by Chandra-Mouli[32] has shown that there are many

When parents and students were asked to comment on the factors which are likely to increase the

extent early marriage among students, they responded

as in table 3.

**Table-3: Factors for high Extent of early marriage practice on students' completion**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Customary Law	24	8.9
Early Pregnancy	57	21.1
Poverty	123	45.6
Low Literacy	66	24.4
Total	270	100.0

The study found that poverty was a leading factor in escalating the high extent of early marriage practice on students' completion and drop out. It contributed to 45.6 percent and has been a real problem. These findings are in line with the sentiments of Brooks [16] who also concurred that poverty contributes to early marriage in many parts of the world. Early pregnancy and low literacy are influencing extent of early marriage as supported by Xu *et al.* [19] who revealed that child brides are on the increase and are also less likely to receive proper medical care during pregnancy and delivery than those who give birth later when of age.

### CONCLUSION

On their own, early marriage and unwanted pregnancies cannot explain completely school dropout despite the problem being significant but declining over time. The determinants of early marriage among secondary school students are various; but the significant ones responsible for school fallout include good academic performance, unwanted pregnancies, poverty, peer influence, and poor academic performance. This makes the early marriage problem complex.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Factors influencing early marriages are many and valid. Some factors have both a positive influence while others have a negative influence. This study therefore recommends that the unproductive existing policies be reviewed to curb school dropout. Guidance and counseling in schools be activated, G/C teachers should be motivated and equally important, the chaplaincy programs be initiated in schools for spiritual edification.

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