Early Marriage and its impacts on Girls' Secondary School Dropout in Mufindi District, Tanzania

ABSTRACT

The study aimed to assess the influence of early marriage on girls' school dropout in Mufindi District, Tanzania. The research employed a qualitative research approachwhereby qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis. However, the literature reveals gaps in the empirical evidence on the link between early marriage and the dropout of girls from secondary schools. The findings revealed that most girls were dropping out ofschool due to early marriages, and most of the students who are affected by this cultural practice are the ones in the lowest level of secondary school, Form I –II level. The researcher recommends that Community-Based Organizations and the government should form schedules of providing facilitations to the community members on the negative impacts of cultural activities by starting with early marriage so that they should be eliminated and never be obstacles to girls' education anymore. The right to education for both genders should be further elaborated followed by its importance to overall development.

Keywords: Early Marriage,childmarriage,dropout, Girls' schools drop out.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Girls' Secondary School dropout and child marriage are interconnected effects that have a massive impact on school girls. Early marriage, also referred to as child marriage, is demarcated as any marriage passed out below the age of 18 years before the girl is physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 article 26 spelled out that education is the right of every human being"[1].The declaration further stipulates that education facilitates the securing of other human rights such as good health, liberty, security, and economic well-being (United Nations, 2004). Even though education is important for the overall development of an individual and a nation at large, there are social, cultural, and economic obstacles to education for women (Adhikari, 2013). "Early marriage is illegal in most places where it occurs, it is a violation of the rights of girls, and it has detrimental health, and social consequences on adolescent girls, their families, and communities" (Svanemyret al., 2012).

"Millions of girls around the world are being deprived of education right because they are exploited, discriminated and ignored. These millions of girls are not at school today. They are shut out of education because of early marriages" (Theirworld, 2017). UNICEF (2016) showed that "globally about 32 million

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girls of primary school age and 29 million of lower secondary school age were not getting education because they had dropped out of school due to early marriages. There are child marriages in every part of the world, including Europe and North America. From a very young age, girls in some regions are raised to perform traditional gender roles as mothers, wives, and caregivers".

According to Human Resources Watch HRW (2017), "millions of married girls across African countries were being denied their education because of discriminatory policies and practices. Human Rights Watch stipulated that more than 49 million girls were out of primary and secondary school in sub-Saharan Africa countries, with 31 milliongirls'studentsout of secondary education, this was the act of undermining their rights and limiting their opportunities to education comparing to boys who are not likely to be faced with gender problems like earlymarriages. According to HRW Viewing Africa as whole the highest rates of girls under 18 getting married are in Niger (76%) and Central African Republic and Chad (both 68%)".

"Tanzania has one of the highest child marriage prevalence rates in the world.On average, within the country, about two out of five girls will be married before reaching the age of 18. About 37% of the women aged 20-24 in Tanzania were married before the age of 18. Data shows a 4% decline since 2004 (41%)"(TDHS,2012). "Child marriage in Tanzania mainly affects girls since it leads to drop from their studies and start performing duties as wives in their families, Tanzanian girls on average get married more than five years earlier than Tanzanian men, so mainly these school girls are being married to the elder men. The minimum age of marriage is not provided in the constitution thus due to this situation a lot of communities especially in rural areas marry their daughters before completion of school.In Tanzania, the data on Child Marriage among other types of violence is worrying. Child marriage in Tanzania stands at 39%" (TDHS, 2010). "Related data indicate that overall, 27% of adolescent women aged 15-19 have already been mothers or have been pregnant with their first child" (TDHS, 2015-16).While child marriage is common in Tanzania, Iringaholds about 8% of early marriages across the whole country, where in Iringa wards, one in ten girls is married before the age of 18. Child marriage occurs more often in rural areas where poverty is more widespread, access to secondary education is limited, and there is less knowledge of sexual reproductive health and rights, such as right to education for both genders.While there are many drivers of child marriage in Iringa, poverty is by far the biggest factor. Poor families who are unable to pay for school fees or take care of their children often have an option of marriage by believing they will gain from the bride price being paid for their daughters.

Various studies such asMlamaet al. (2005), Kirk; Sommer (2006),Ananga (2011); and Shahidul (2013) have been done on how to stop the situation of girls dropping out of schools and the answers have been implemented and some of the policies and other methods to help girls' students to achieve their careers have been under implementation. However, the most disappointing is the fact that Mufindi District is not excluded from the situation of girls' school dropouts in schools despite the campaigns to defend girls' rights to education. In Mufindi District most of the girls' students especially the ones enrolled in the government schools drop out of school at a certain percentage and this is due to various gender issues

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that still exist in the communities.Thus,this study focused on exploring how early marriages contribute to the high percentage of girlsdropping out ofsecondaryschools to address the problem.

2. REVIEWED LITERATURE

According to HakiElimu (2010), “many social and educational challenges that force girls to leave school voluntarily or involuntarily, at the early age of 18 have been undermining girls’ development. Available information shows that dropouts are more common in rural districts and villages as opposed to urban areas.The study by HakiElimu further indicates that there are efforts introduced by the stakeholders to help girls reach their goals by getting an education, but it is unfortunate efforts by stakeholders do not carry legal power or implications, and that situations relating to early marriage were mushrooming and many events have been reported but little action has been taken against those who impregnate girls. UIS and UNICEF (2012),further explain about 4-5% of school dropouts among girls students in secondary schools in Tanzania was due to early marriage”.

According to Holcamp (2010), “early marriage for girls is a big challenge in rural areas as parents consider girls' schooling as of no benefit”. Along with a similar finding Mansory (2007) found that “when girls reach puberty, parents consider it is time for them to be married and tend to arrange the marriage instead of continuing schooling.The research revealed about 20% of the respondents stated that female students drop out of school to get married”. Kirk (2006), remarks that “early marriage and pregnancy contribute to female dropout in emergency contexts where some parents push their daughters to get married due to economic pressures”. “Marriage before the age of 18–affects both male and female children, but is a key factor in female dropout in many developing countries. Across the developing world, one in three girls is married before the age of 18” (Sills et al, 2015).

“For the case of early marriages, girls from poorer households are more expected to have been subject to child marriage than girls from wealthier households, while girls from rural households are expected to marry before the age of 18 than girls from urban households (UIS and UNICEF, 2015).Across the developing world, one in three girls is married before the age of 18” (Sills et al,2015). “Early marriage as a gender stereotypic behavior contributes to the reduction of girls’ probability of completing secondary school.In Tanzania, 76% of girls are missing out on secondary school, and often due to early marriage” (Yustina, 2016).Too often marriage is seen as a higher priority than education within the communities and lead to girls’ school dropout. The low value attached to girls’ schooling means few other options are available to them.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in the Mufindi District in the Iringa Region, specifically in Mninga, Sadani, Ifwagi, and Kasanga wards. Mufindi District is one of the four districts of the Iringa Region of Tanzania. Mufindi District is bordered to the north by Kilolo District and Iringa Urban District, to the south by

the Njombe Region, to the east by the Morogoro Region, and to the west by the Singida Region.

The study used the Descriptive design to help others better understand the need for the research. It further seeks to describe existing phenomena by asking the respondents about their knowledge and understanding of the content of the study (Robinson, 2002).For this study, 12 girls who dropped out from their secondary studies were used as a target population.Moreover, 4 heads of schools in Mufindi District secondary schools and some parents were also involved as key informants.Snowball sampling was used in this study to select girls who dropped out of their schools. In this study information was collected from selected few respondents, then they were asked to identify other members of the group who also dropped out of school due to early marriage.The trustworthiness of the research process can be determined by the extent to which the researcher provides information and the process by which the end product has been reached.InData Analysis Qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis (Kothari, 2004).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show early marriage contributes to girls' students dropout. Early marriage in Mufindi District is one of the reasons for girls dropping out of secondary school. It is done without the girl's approval to be married off. The parents give daughters out to those who pay the bride price to marry her. The bride price signifies that parent reasonably raises their girls and that the marriage will stabilize. It creates gender disparity. Parents do not give girls the opportunity to complete their studies, because most of the parents refer to their girl child as a source of income through bride price.An interview was conducted and the information acquired was as follows;

Findings through in-depth interviews further support the results when one of the respondents claimed that:

My parents desired for me to be married when I finished standard seven my father started telling me, you are grown up and so u have to own your own family, when I started to form 'I' he began telling me that there is no point of continuing with education we found the right man for you and so you have to be married as our traditions so that we can benefit from your dowry while still alive, I was then married to a carpenter and dropped out from school and began my duties as a married woman"(Dropped student).

Another dropped student said;

I dropped out of school because of early marriage, my parents decided to marry me to hisfriend's son without hesitation because of his greediness, my father!didn't want to lose the money they offered as dowry for me so he arranged the weddingveryquickly and told me to drop out of school because that is what my destiny is, to be a wife and a mother and nothing else(Dropped student).

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Information was added from anotherGirlchild who dropped out of school, she said that;

> When I joined secondary school my parents said I would help them nothing after graduating so it is better for me to get married and they can benefit bride price and leave my brother to continue with his studies because even if I study I will get married, I will no longer stay with them, I will get married and stay with my family away and not with them, that in the futures I will have my own family it is better for them to educate the boys because they will stay with him and he will help them in the future(Dropped student).

Furthermore, the information was also obtained from the key informants through interviews, in addition, a key informant said:

> The educationallevel of parents affectstheeducation of children particularly daughters,uneducated parents are less likely to provide education to their daughters because they are not well informed abouttheimportance of girls' education. In addition, uneducated parents are much influenced by their culture which supports early marriages to their daughters, many are being taken by the men working in the timber industries, since the parents in this ward believe this is all about having a daughter, to marry them and not to educate them (Head of school A).

This finding further corresponds with what Sikazwe (1993) found in his evaluation of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program in Sumbawanga. He pointed out that, many children were dropping out of school because both the parents and their children had lost interest in education. The parents do not care about whether their children attend school or have the required facilities. Parents also appeared to be silent when their daughters dropped out of school after they had become pregnant. In support of this argument, one head teacher of the sampled school had this to say:

> Nowadays both parents and their female children do not recognize the significance of girl education. Neither was it true that girls students were getting married of their own volition (without encouragement or support from their parents). If it were without pressure from their parents, their parents would have taken legal action against those who impregnate or marry their daughters while still at school. I saw this in one family, until now she is a mother of two children (Head of school C).

What this Head of the school was trying to say is that the parents support their daughters' decisions to leave school for marriage. Otherwise, the parents would have taken legal measures against these impediments to their daughters' education.

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In support of the above findings, UNICEF, (2016) andManacorda, (2020) argued that, in many situations, the access of the girl child to education is denied by more than a shortage of educational facilities. The girl`s gender is an overriding constraint. In contexts where girls are “born to marry” parents see little economic value in educating a girl. The fact that female skills command lesser pay than the comparable skills of the male is recognized by parents and shapes their decision not to invest in the education of the girl child. In explaining more about this point during a focus group discussion one parent had this to say:

> “... It was a waste of my money to send female children to secondary school. I’ve never experienced any success with female students in this village unlike their male counterparts, very few female students managed to complete their schooling. I don’t think of spending the little money I have for my daughters’ education. It is better to do it for her brothers or keep it for other business. (ParentB).

With these comments, one would argue that some parents have negative attitudes towards girls’ education, believing that they pay for nothing and that paying for female children is not a reliable investment than that of sons. The parents’ negative attitudes have adversely affected the schooling of their daughters by neglecting their requirements. This is why, when families face critical economic problems, girls’ education is almost neglected.

This implies that in Mufindi District, most of girls who dropped out from their studies were due to various gender stereotypic relating to cultural practices which exists in their communities such as early marriages, it is because culturally in this communities the girl child after birth is seen as the future wife/mother and nothing more to that to that. So the girls are being married to men at younger age before completion of school, this situation force them to stop schooling because they cannot continue with their education, so they have to drop from school in order to begin their duties as wives. The parents in these wards sees no importance of educating girls because they believe they will only be married and walk away but the boys will study and help raise the family so the only respect they will gain from them is by marring their daughters. Once girls reach form one and in form two and have mastered to do the house chores a lot of parents see them grown up and so they are ready to be with their own families so they become ready to marry them, so these cultural beliefs affects negatively girls and hinder them from reaching their dreams as educated women in societies. Thus these gender stereotype views leads to girls’ drop out in Mufindi District secondary schools.

The results are supported by studies byHolcamp (2010) who found that early marriage of girls is a big challenge in rural areas as parents consider girls' schooling as of no benefit. Along with a similar finding Mansory (2007) found that when girls reach puberty, parents consider it is time for them to be married and tend to arrange the marriage instead of continuing schooling,the research stated that female students drop out of school to get married.Kirk (2006) remarks that early marriage and pregnancy contribute to female dropout in emergency contexts where some parents push their daughters to get married due to

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economic pressures. Marriage before the age of 18–affects both male and female children, but is a key factor in female dropout in many developing countries.

The findings in this study also revealed that early marriage is a result of parental cultural norms, and social pressure within the community and it can be the failure of parents to take care of the girl's basic needs like education. From what the study revealed it seems that parental cultural beliefs toward a girl who reaches puberty age, it is to prepare the girl for another stage of a girl's life which is marriage, these informal educations should not be ignored but there should be regulations on the kind of teaching according to the age of a girl. This means that most puberty girls are still in school they need a kind of knowledge and skill that help to give them awareness that they are grown up but biologically not ready for marriage until they are over eighteen years old.

Therefore, early marriages have been the major influenceon girls' students to drop outof their secondary education in Mufindi District. If effective remedies and other possible actions could not take into consideration as soon as possible, the future of young energetic girls could be destroyed because in Tanzania by one in every six girls and young women aged 15 to 19 years is married.

5.CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

It is, therefore, the study concluded that early marriage plays a great role in the situation of dropouts among girl students within Mufindi District this is because most of the parents neither value nor put into consideration girl child education. They still have negative attitudes towards girl education and still hold old beliefstowards a girl child, they view their daughters as a wife,source of income and a housekeeper as soon as they are born, and so they are not to get formal education it is a wastage of money and time but they have the right to domestic education so they can be well experienced after being married. These activities affect the schooling of these girl children in Mufindi District, so these girl children are being married off at a younger age and thus drop out of school to start their duties as a wife.

5.2 Recommendation

Early marriage is identified as the source of girls dropping out ofschool, this factor should be eliminated. The view towards girls as a source of pleasure to men, home laborers, and wives hinders the girls from reaching their goals as educated people in societies, so the Community-Based Organizations and government should form the schedules of providing facilitations to the community members on the negative impacts of cultural activities by starting with early marriage so that they should be eliminated and never be obstacles to girls education anymore. The right to education for both genders should be further elaborated followed by its importance to overall development.

6. ETHICAL APPROVAL AND CONSENT

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Respondents were fully informed that the study was solely for academic purpose and that all information obtained were treated with confidentiality, a researcher observes protocols which included clearance letter from Mufindi District Authorities and University of Iringa.

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