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Associated factors and solutions towards early Marriage in south Gonder zone the case of Fogera woreda

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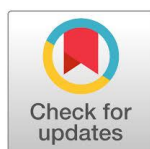
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Abstract: Although concern has been given to the issue of early marriage taking time in developing nations the practice it appeared still increasing. The researcher stands to investigate the associated factors and Solutions toward early marriage practices in the Amhara region, particularly in Fogera Woreda which is one of the regions early marriages has been practiced. The purpose of this study was to identify what factors drive parents and indicate the mitigating strategies used to reduce early marriage practices in their localities. The researcher employed a qualitative methodology and phenomenological study design. Purposive sampling was used to gather available data on people who live in rural and urban areas in Woreda and around it. Fifteen participants (parents, religious leaders, and gender office experts) were involved in this study by using semi-structured in-depth interviews, focused group discussions, and document review as an instrument. The finding of the study shows that parents feel threats psychologically to their children's well-being, this might leads them to decide irrationally about the children's future marriages. Parents feel shame when they are not able to prepare marriage ceremonies in return for their neighbor's former ceremony. Community views for early marriage may challenge parents; the presence of illiterate families, gifts like bride prices and farming lands highly contribute to early marriage practices, especially to the rural people. In general, factors of early marriage in the study area are parental low level of understanding in relation to early marriage consequences on the life of married ones, parental low economic status, and the presence of local perspectives that helps to motivate parents to apply this practice. To reduce early marriage practices, parents, religious leaders, and gender office experts have great roles.

Keywords: Early marriage, Religious compulsions, Gender inequality

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1. Introduction

Child marriage is associated with lower levels of schooling for girls in every region of the world and is a barrier to international development goals. A lost opportunity for education is not only harmful for girls, but has wide-reaching repercussions for their children and communities. Educating girls creates many positive outcomes for economic development and poverty reduction by improving a girl's income-earning potential and socio-economic status (International Center for Research on Women, 2006).

To realize these factors, the Population Council report, (2004) states that, married girls tend to be less mobile, have more limited social networks, have less say in decision making, have less exposure to the media, and have less education than unmarried girls and married young women. Regardless of the underlying determinants, however, the consistent social disadvantage married girls experience is an issue of deep concern, and there are a large number of girls 'exist' in this circumstance.

Comparative studies conducted in 2004 identified, the Amhara region as having the highest prevalence, with 48% of rural married women and 28% of urban married women having married before the age of 15 (Zelalem, 2018). Moreover, study findings in Gojjam and South Wollo zones of Amhara region indicated that early marriage is highly prevalent. The prevalence is higher for women than men. About 49% of women were married before age 15 and about 83% were married before age 18 years. By 2015, the prevalence of female early marriage was 76.7% in Amhara region, North Ethiopia (Tekile AK et al. 2020)

This study was intended to investigate the associated factors and solution to early marriage practices particularly Fogera Wereda in South Gonder, one of the administrative zones in Amhara region.

Research gap encompass, here in Ethiopian context, particularly in Amhara region study findings revealed that with increasing age comes physical, social and emotional maturity and delaying marriage improved married women's empowerment in household decision-making processes '**but marriage under age is lacks decision making skill**'. This implies that girls married an increasing age helps them to manage and hold responsibilities, while they get married at early ages leads them to challenges in household responsibilities and equally unsatisfied in their marriages. In this case, child marriage effects touches and determines the longer social, personal and economical well beings of the people.

While other research findings illustrate how lack of choice on when and whom to marry, non-readiness for sex in the early years of marriage, and general diminished agency, which often characterize the marriage of child brides, lead to dissatisfaction and compromised intimacy in marriage, ultimately discouraging spousal communication, increasing conflict (Iman&et.al,2018). In general, husbands are much older than their young wives. Zuzanna (2009) study findings revealed that, in Amhara culture, tradition requires that boy's parents find him a wife. Before they start negotiations concerning the marriage, parents precisely check whether they are not related with the girl's family.

Current trends in the study area starting from 2012 attempt to form early marriage were 75 females annually recorded. There was a marriage breakdown before its occurrence reached 40 children which are totally controlled. Among those 15 children had got married in secret and others remain in the process as the data obtained from the staff of the gender office in

Fogera Wereda. The number of early marriage practices in 2013 is greater than that was before in 2012 and it reached 117 children. The marriage breakdown also shows 39 children and 37 of them have got married in a secret way. In 2014 the number of females forced to get married covers 85 and 35 of them have broken the marriage process. There were 25 Children who get married outside the Wereda control. The number 75, 117, and 85 respectively indicates the number of students enrolled in school and also covers more than two sections in each year married early.

So far, several studies have been pointed out the factors of early marriage but the problem is still covered in different nations and specifically in the contexts of the Amhara region. Even though studies were conducted in the region on the factors of early marriage assessed in wollo, Gojam, Libokemkem, and Metema the practice continued today. Again, in my first observation, I ensured that data profiles in the Woreda gender office, still the problem needs critical investigations for girls to get married early in this area today. This and the above factors concerning early marriage practices inspired the researcher to explore why the problem is continued and what factors drive parents involved towards early marriage practices in their localities. As far as the knowledge of the researcher, 'no research on this base has been conducted' specifically in my study area, Fogera Wereda.

The researcher applied three basic questions.

1. What are the parental experiences in early marriage?
2. What are the factors that increases early marriage practices?
3. What strategies are used to reduce these factors at Woreda level?

1.2. Methodology

Research paradigm - Research starts with the 'research paradigm is advisable' and show the researcher's stand in the research process. A paradigm is a worldview or philosophy toward reality, research methodology, and the approaches used in the research process. The researcher's paradigm is to construct the views and experiences found in the people or construct views from 'insider to the outsider' This is because of 'total immersion' of the researcher requires time, resource and it needs more research experiences to the problem rather than interview was used to 'explore people's individual and collective understandings. The researcher also explains his insights, not only 'imposing' others views.

The researcher uses qualitative research methods and this is because of qualitative research is humanistic and it focuses on the personal, subjective, and experiential basis of knowledge and practice. Qualitative researchers are constantly trying to make sense of what they see and hear in a specific context; their approach to understanding what is going on is interpretive, in other words, their aim is more often to explain rather than to merely describe (Janet & et.al. 2012).

The research design employed in this study was the phenomenological research design. Scholars also states the purpose of doing phenomenology is basically looking very closely at the phenomena under study to explore the complex world of lived experiences from the actors (those who live it) point of view. In doing so, it not only helps us to understand a phenomena or an event at a deeper level of conscious, but at the same time it helps us to explore our own nature, bringing a transformation at personal level. In this way a

researcher can reflect critically and become more thoughtful and attentive in understanding social practices as well (Fochtman, 2008; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007 as cited Sadruddin, 2018).

1.2.1. Sample size and Sampling techniques

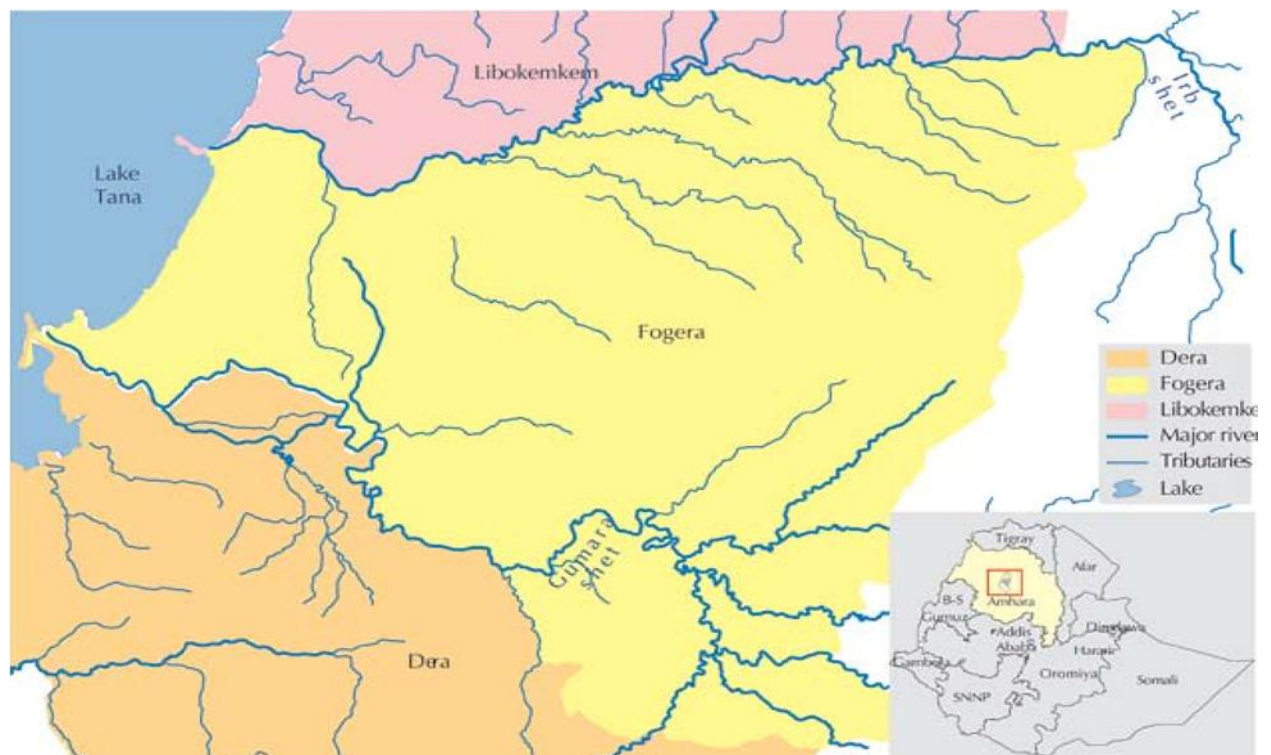
The total number of the samples would be selected in this study area are 15 participants including key informants in qualitative bases. Moreover, the sample size selection mainly bases Creswell (1998) recommended interviews with up to 10 people in phenomenological research. Purposive sampling is employed in this study. Participants in this study area were parents both rural and urban areas, religious leaders and gender office expert as a key informant in Fogera Woreda. The researcher applied semi structured interview, document analysis and focus group discussion as a data gathering instrument.

1.2.2. Ethical Considerations

The researcher tried to show informed consent, ask about their willingness, and agreed with participants that they feel free for the information to be shared with others. Indeed, the participant's name changed to other tentative names. Moreover, the confidentiality of the information supplied by research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected. Research participants must participate willingly, free from any coercion. Harm to research participants must be avoided.

1.2.3. Study Site

Fogera (Amharic: ፍገራ) is one of the Woredas in the Amhara Region of northwest Ethiopia. Fogera is part of the Debub Gondar Zone. The district is bordered on the south by Dera, on the west by Lake Tana, on the north by the Reb which separates it from Kemekem, on the northeast by Ebenat, and on the east by Farta. The administrative center for this Woreda is Wereta City. Other cities in Fogera include Alem Ber city.



The altitude of this woreda ranges from 1774 to 2415 meters above sea level. Rivers in Fogera include the Gumara and the Reb, both of which drain into Lake Tana. With an area of 1,111.43 square kilometers, Fogera has a population density of 205.55, which is greater than the Zone average of 145.56 persons per square kilometer. A total of 52,905 households were counted in this woreda, resulting in an average of 4.32 persons to a household. The largest ethnic group reported in Fogera was the Amhara (99.83%). Amharic was spoken as a first language by 99.89% of the reported population. The majority of the inhabitants practice Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, with 95–96% of the population reporting that belief. Another 4–5% report as Muslim. Fogera is known as the birthplace of the well-known Ethiopian dabtara and wit, Aleqa Gebre Hanna.

1.3. Result and Discussion

1.3.1. Lack of Access to Parental Literacy

This study finding realizes that parental feelings regarding education may also influence them to marry their children early. They assume education brings their children to expose sexually transmitted diseases. Other study results also validate that, one of the most urgent development challenges of the 21st century is, therefore, the inadequacy of better information and education. Information and education empower people to make changes for the betterment and improvement of their social, cultural, economic, and environmental conditions. And the ability to read and write allows people to acquire new knowledge, raise their level of awareness about their surroundings and understand their rights. It enables them to claim their individual and collective rights to participate in society, and participation is an important factor in development (Mammo, 2005).

So, parents are required to have literacy environments closer to their homes. This is due to expanding adult education programs via awe-red facilitators to reduce developmental problems and by establishing community learning centers. Although the findings show that, parents who are aware of early marriage could involve and apply early marriage practices. This is due to a fear of premarital sex, disease, being pregnant without a husband, making parents feel shame and when their children become victims of rape, etc. indeed, other research works realize that early marriage occurs because of the condition of the family..., educational factors due to the low level of education and knowledge of parents, children, and society causing a tendency, family factor because usually parents even families tell their children to marry as soon as possible without considering their age (African. & et.al.2020). In contrast, this study realizes that children are reluctant to accept the marriage arranged by their parents.

In settings such as the rural Amhara region, traditional beliefs about the appropriate age for girls' marriage conflict with girls' continuing education. Moreover, public health officials generally believe that girls in early adolescence are developmentally and physiologically too young to make marital, and sexual views for early marriage may challenge parents. This is due to lack of modeling for their Youngers and reproductive transitions (Eunice & et.al. 2009). Results show that, if problems are sustained at this level, the mitigating strategies are delayed and a lack of adult experts' commitment may result in the rural people returning to former experiences of applying early marriage practices due to **illiteracy** gaps and economically not empowered.

1.3.2. Factors that Increases Early marriage Practices

Marriage is a step towards independence that introduces loads of responsibilities, decision-making, and serious commitments but early married girls fail to cope with it as marriage requires a satisfactory level of maturity and a considerable sense of responsibility. Various factors are responsible for early marriages include male dominance, parents' ignorance, lack of awareness, pressures from relatives and the community, girls are regarded as a burden so parents get rid of them by marrying them, and parents believe that it offers protection to their daughters and to enhance family socio-economic status (Bayisenge, 2011 as cited Sadaf and et.al 2013).

Contrary to the above finding, this research finding revealed that rural, people economically higher status a high tendency to implement early marriage. Bekele and et.al (2014) studied early marriage in Ethiopia and gender social norms in shaping adolescent girls' futures and they ensured that ironically, girls from relatively better-off families who stand to inherit land are more likely to marry at an early age, whereas girls from poorer families with fewer land assets are likely to struggle to find a marriage partner. However, I found that parents at low-income levels feel that marrying early is better for their children's well-being. And when the children in school are not supported by their families they might feel forced to marry early by themselves when they reached 14 up to 15 years.

The researcher illustrates, that when members in the community groups might face high disputes or fights and that leads, one member in the group to die, then this time, to resolve the conflict early marriage will be applied. Following early marriage, there is also an incidence of hostility between boys' and girls' families. This is one of the families not willing to give their children when they grow up. These great disputes may result in them losing their life. Other research findings illustrate how lack of choice on when and whom to marry, non-readiness for sex in the early years of marriage, and general diminished agency, which often characterize the marriage of child brides, lead to dissatisfaction and compromised intimacy in marriage, ultimately discouraging spousal communication, increasing conflict (Iman and et.al, 2019).

To sum it up, the presence of illiterate families, gifts like bride prices and farming lands increase early marriage in the study area. There are also situations in that parents feel shame when they are not able to prepare marriage ceremonies in return for their neighbor's former ceremony. At the same time, parents faced high extravagant rates following early marriage ceremonies.

1.3.3. Major Strategies Used to Reduce Early Marriage

Participants realize that various strategies are used to reduce early marriage practices at the Woreda level. In the first phase, changing the knowledge gaps into action needs to be required. Fill the gaps by using different sources of information like on home to home bases, farmer training centers are used as learning centers more than agricultural transformational inputs. Currently used as a strategy to reduce early marriage practices in this local area as the role player, i.e. Woreda administrators, kebele leaders, religious leaders, community elders, school supervisors, health extension agents and police play as a member plays a leading role to reduce the problem in their localities.

Other study results realize that the findings underscore that helping girls attain agency and improve their capabilities, especially through staying in school and avoiding early marriage, requires a combination of tactics. These include building on effective and evidence-based interventions used locally and internationally such as strengthening awareness about girls' rights at the community level and the capacities of local officials to translate these rights into reality on the ground; and tailoring policies that are specific to the varied realities that girls in Amhara (Bekele and et.al, 2014).

Gender office has the role to raise the awareness of the community when early marriage, rape, child labor abuse, and child migrants occurred in their localities. If government bodies avoid strategies that are way top-down approach and have effective preventive methods they might be open to dialogue and collaboratively work among community members since the problem is there. If the government is not committed to the problem another challenge may occur. One interviewee argues that the government's role is vital and it should be a repeated exposure, in terms of doing research and raising awareness at the same time. He added that the problem he observe was that 'lack of continuity of government trend may result in the parents back to their former experiences.'

1.3.4. Conclusion

Parental illiteracy gaps refers to a low level of understanding or conscious rising of parents on how early marriage has negative outcomes on the life of married ones. Mostly, once they are married their educational achievements and their contribution to personal as well as national growth become forgiven. One responds that a parent worried to get married to their children early differs among individuals. They might be worried, about their economic status, their children's wellbeing, and community views towards early marriage may challenge their family, as well as the children, staying alone without getting married, and unfortunately, they might be raped or sexually victims.

Teachers and parents have contributed their efforts to educate the children. Again the children strongly challenge the practices and refuse anyone to accept early marriage requests. Ultimately parents have the role to motivate the children and share other experiences on how to solve problems in the future. Moreover, parents have the role to think of their children's future, bring attitudinal changes, and develop experience-sharing habits among family members.

Parents themselves change their understandings in relation to child marriage and leave out the prior experiences that they consider early marriage practices as one of their cultures. Finally, local beliefs need to be examined that support early marriage practices and the way that people are able to do and their understanding of getting married early. Alemu argues that government efforts should be on the mindsets rather than the intention used to reduce the practice by forcing them to stay in prison, and considering punishment as a solution may not be effective to reduce the practice and motivate the people.

1.3.5. Implications

Coming to policy implications in the national context, there are problems with the expansion of literacy and post-literacy programs with the real identified illiteracy gaps, mostly in rural people. The presence of illiterate families, gifts like bride prices, farming lands, etc. have contributed to the formation of early marriage. In this regard, Woreda gender office experts should provide training programs to raise awareness of the rural

people regarding early marriage that enable them to become literate or create conducive environments for them to learn and change their attitudes. The practice that the children are reluctant to accept the marriage arranged by their parents should be encouraged. I agree that the more parents become literate the more they are likely to become refuse to apply for early marriages.

When children in a school do not support by their families they might feel forced to marry early by themselves when they reached 14 up to 15 years. In this case, school directors should responsible to identify students who do not have support and families at a low economic level. In addition, staying students in the classroom require the government's commitment to reducing unemployment rates. As participants recommend, the absence of role models following unemployment leads parents to become hesitant about the education system and that their children will be ineffective after graduation. So, trainers make opportunities better for their trainees and encourage market-based outcomes and small entry prizes.

To reduce early marriage practices, provide training programs that support the economic opportunities of the rural people, and the type of incentives especially for those who have low economic status can be considered. It brings not only helps the attendees to participate but also to solve their problems. So, participation of the rural people enables them to build a sense of ownership and they feel like the actors to minimize child marriage. So, policymakers consider the solution with the identified gaps.

The rural people should escape from the culture which bound them (leave them out from sentiment marriage and ceremony, examine their beliefs, ask about their culture, etc. Parents consider gaining a high amount of bride prices may not be a guarantee for their children's marriage lifetime but rather encourages them to learn. Parents in rural parts may assume that they need to build a strong relationship with other groups of communities through marriage. So, here marriage interaction with other communities may not be the recognition among parents but it should consider the consent, age, and maturity of the new couples.

Arranged marriages by parents should be replaced with mutual consent and recognition among the new couples. Parents devote much time to teaching their children about the consequences of early marriage rather than staying under anxiety conditions to expect the children's well-being. Parents regularly monitor their children whom they spent in school and advise them to have partners who have dreams. Tell the children, that abstaining from any pre-marital sex is the right way to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, not expect other health extension agents. To conclude, policy recognition is not enough but participation and aware the local people have positive impacts to reduce early marriage practices.

1.2. Declaration

I clearly state that this thesis is my work and started to conduct since at the beginning of 2014 to the end of this year. The paper was approved in Bahir Dar University College of Education and Behavioral Sciences within the department of Adult Education and Community development. I also announce that this paper 'is a record of original work carried out by me and has never been submitted to this or any other institution to get any other degree or certificates'.

. 1.5. Limitation of the Study and Further Research

Since the factor of early marriage varies across regions and specifically in our nation Ethiopia, assessing these factors requires time and resources; further ethnographic research is needed to look at our insights and trends in early marriage practices. As a novice researcher in the qualitative paradigm, the researcher used a phenomenological study design which is applicable to the knowledge of the researcher, but other qualitative study designs bring other insights. I recommend that more qualitative research is needed to raise awareness as well as to find solutions to this problem. Again, to remind you, the numbers of participants used were small and one who committed to a quantitative study will also bring new findings by incorporating a large sample size and area of study.

1.6.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank, first of all, my almighty God who preserve me in each movement and still today. Next to this my special gratitude I will give him is to my advisor, Mr.Mulugeta Awayehu who guides and encourages me with his constructive support throughout the process the of study. I would like to give my great respect to the participants (Woreta town gender office experts, parents, and religious leaders) that their contribution is high to the success of this study. My special thank goes to my family those who encourage and support me in my life and through this study. I would like to extend my gratitude to my sister Zemenay Chekole (MA in Special needs and inclusive Education at Bahir Dar University) for her support, love, and generosity

No funding source or agencies

1.6.

Informed consent

NB. Dear participants first of all I would like to express my gratitude for your genuine consent and response. Now I 'm attending master's program in Bahir Dar University, department of Adult education and community development. The purpose of the study is striving for the associated factors and solutions towards early marriage practices and the impacts following early marriage on physical, psychological and other consequences on the life of the people then after try to indicate possible mechanisms to minimize it. I remind you that your role is great in the overall process of the research and then the result is vital to minimize problems that rose following early marriages. Hopefully, I will also inform that all the information collected will kept anonymous, and that the names and contact details of participants will not be recorded unless you are volunteer.

Participant agreement

I fully understood the issue raised above and have the right to start and withdraw the interview at any time, following this I 'm volunteer to support on behalf of me. And then I don't expect any financial benefits from the investigator.

Participant name -----

Date ----- Signature-----

Investigator -----

Date ----- Signature-----

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