

## **Attitude towards Early marriage Practice in East Wollega Zone of Oromia Regional state, Ethiopia**

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### **Abstract**

Early Marriage is one of the global problems that undermine the personal development and the rights of women very seriously. It is very delicate among the developing countries such as Ethiopia. Early marriages in Ethiopia are susceptible for child marriage since a long time ago. Early marriage contributes to a series of negative consequences both for young girls and the societies in which they live. It is a violation of human rights in general and of girl's rights in particular. The main objective of the study is to describe and analyze the attitude towards early marriage practice in East Wollega zone of Oromia regional state. A cross sectional study design was adopted with both quantitative and qualitative data collection research approach. The study participants were selected by simple systematic random sampling technique. 372 households were included in the study. For the quantitative data, structured, pre tested interviewer, administered questionnaire was used to collect the data. For the qualitative data, discussion guide questions were used while semi-structured questionnaires were used for key informant interview and in depth interviews. The Result of study show early marriage was being practiced in some areas of the study; especially in rural areas among Islam religion followers and some place near to Amhara region boundary. Those who are practicing early marriage were less knowledgeable about the consequences of early marriage and took this traditional culture from other nation. Majorities of respondent consider early marriage as harmful traditional practice which has negative impacts on human being and can give economic crises on individual and the country. To conclude strong campaign to enhance awareness about the consequences of early marriage and to enact existing legal frameworks related to early marriage discourage early marriage practices among the study population is better measurement to save communities from the problems come with it.

**Keywords:** Marriage; Early marriage; harmful; traditional practice.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Early marriage is one of the global problems that undermine the personal development and the rights of women very seriously. It is very delicate among the developing countries such as Ethiopia. Early marriages in Ethiopia are susceptible for child marriage since a long time ago. Globally, more than one in four young women (29 %) were married before the age of 18. Of the world's 1.1 billion girls, 22 million are already married and the number will grow as populations increase. The practice of child marriage in Ethiopia has shown significant decline in recent years. According to the most recent Demographic and Health Survey data from 2011, the median age at which Ethiopian women marry is 16.5 years and 40% of all women in their early 20's were married before they turned 18. However, only 8% of the youngest group of women (those aged 15-19) was married before their 15<sup>th</sup> birthdays. Recognizing the array of consequences that stem from child marriage and childbearing, ranging from interrupted schooling to maternal death to intergenerational poverty, the Ethiopian government has undertaken a range of legal, institutional and strategic measures.

Early marriage contributes to a series of negative consequences both for young girls and the societies in which they live. It is a violation of human rights in general and of girl's rights in particular. For both girls and boys, early marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts; cutting off educational and employment opportunities and chances of personal growth. Besides having a negative impact on girls themselves, the practice of early marriage also has negative consequences on their children, families, and society as a whole. UNICEF (2000) argues that it is not only girls that pay for early marriage but also the society as a whole.

## II. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study was attempts to analyze attitude of communities towards early marriage practice in East Wollega Zone of western Ethiopia. In order to examine research question and practical reality in the study area, researcher used cross sectional research design; because it examines varieties of a social phenomenon at a single point in time .Cross-sectional studies are usually relatively inexpensive and allow researchers to collect a great deal of information quite quickly. The researcher adopted simple random sampling technique to conduct and setup study objectives. From the list of 17 districts in the East Wollega zone, five districts were selected purposively based on geographical structure for sample size of study area. By using Yamane (1967) formula, from total of 5422 households, 372 were selected as sample size to represent total population of study area. For this Confidence interval of 5% and confidencelevel of 95% was used for accuracy and unbiased of study population.

Taro Yamane, (1967) has suggested the following mathematical formula for determining sample size.

$$n = \frac{N}{(1+N(e)^2)}$$

n = total sample size,

N is the total population size,

e is sampling error or level of precision.

$$n = \frac{5422}{1+5422(0.05)^2}$$

n=372 total sample size of the five districts

Descriptive survey research design would be selected because it help researchers to get currently available and detailed information as possible on the issue under consideration and it helps to deal with relatively large number of respondents at a particular time. Further, it gives a better and deeper understanding of a phenomenon, which helps as a fact-finding method with adequate and accurate interpretation of the findings (Jose & Gonzales, 2007).The study adopted the design to provide an analysis and explanation of views and comments about attitude towards early marriage in study area. Cross-sectional design was used to collect data from 372 randomly selected participants. After well and constructive idea on the issues was made, a well-designed questionnaire was used to collect the data of the recruited households at risk of early marriage practices in study area. The questionnaire included socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, nationality, educational background, and question related to cause and consequence, perception towards early marriage and social and cultural factors motivate early marriage were prepared and distributed for respondents.

To identify causes of early marriage and consequence, attitude towards early marriage practice as well as to understand its impacts on marriage stability, researcher conducted three focus group discussions with have eight up ten members. The discussion was focused on child hood experience and life after marriage to identify the consequence of early marriage practice in general.Key informants interview was carried out at district level with experts of sectoral offices to grasp ideas as to what the magnitude of the problem is. A total of eight interviews with government officials and four elders of the communities were held at districts level.

### Methods Data of Analysis

To ensure validity, the study applied the triangulation technique by using questionnaire, interview and secondary data sources concurrently. Based on the pretest, the content, logical flow, clarity, layout and the time needed on average to fill out a single questionnaire was amended. Depending on the results of the pilot survey, the data collection instruments was finalized after making the necessary corrections and reorganizations. Most questions have pre coded and assigned for each question. The quantitative data collected through close-ended questionnaires were analyzed through descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage and mean so as to describe the data collected in research studies andStatistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 24) was applied for analysis of data collected.

## III. RESULT

The result revealed that, 95.5% of respondents consider early marriage as traditional harmful practice which can affect human right and life 4.5% of respondents consider early marriage as advantageous social culture that strengths social relationship. As the result of study this traditional harmful practice was not common culture among Wollega communities and most of the respondents do not support it because of its impacts on health, economy and psychology.From total household's61.8% were married between age group of 18 -20 years, whereas only 4.3%were married below 18 years. More specifically, those who married below 18 years were female and the majority who married between 21-25 years was males.

**Table 1:**Trends of early marriage practice in East Wollega Zone

| Age at marriage | Male      |         | Female    |         | Total     |         |
|-----------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
|                 | Frequency | Percent | Frequency | Percent | Frequency | Percent |
| <i>Below 18</i> | 2         | 0.5%    | 14        | 3.8%    | 16        | 4.3%    |
| 18-20           | 164       | 44.1%   | 66        | 17.7%   | 230       | 61.8%   |
| 21-25           | 27        | 7.3%    | 99        | 26.6%   | 129       | 33.9%   |
| <i>Above 25</i> | 0.0       | 0.0%    | 0.0       | 0.0%    | 0.0       | 0.0%    |
| <i>Total</i>    | 193       | 51.9%   | 179       | 48.1%   | 372       | 100%    |

Source: Own survey, 2019

The result of the study revealed that 95.5% of respondents consider early marriage as traditional harmful practice which can affect human right and life and only 4.5% of respondents consider early marriage as advantageous social culture. This is common character for Muslim religious follower and less knowledgeable on the impacts of early marriage. The study predicts, this traditional harmful practice was not common culture among Wollega communities and most of the respondents do not support early marriage because of its impacts on health, economy, psychology, and marriage instability.

**Table 2:** Age of marriage and lashing factors to early marriage

| Variables   | Answer              | Frequency | percent |
|---|---------------------|-----------|---------|
| Do you have child that was/were married under 18?   | Yes                 | 12        | 4.3%    |
|   | No                  | 360       | 95.7%   |
| What was the main reason that made you decide to wed her than sending to school while she was below 18? | Economic problem    | 32        | 8.6%    |
|   | Lack of information | 310       | 83%     |
|   | Cultural influence  | 30        | 8.4%    |
|   | Total               | 372       | 100%    |

Source: Own Survey, March, 2019

95.7% of the respondents answered “No”, they don’t have underage married below 18 years. This means they have girls under 18, but did not get married; the focus of the question was whether their girls were married or unmarried under 18. To the contrary, 12 (4.3%), replied “Yes”, these group of respondents indicated that lack of information was their main reason. Identifying their responses whether they have married or unmarried girls under 18 were useful to ask what was the reason behind marring their underage girls. Several definitions along with possible driving factors had been forwarded by different scholars.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Today there is a general consensus that child marriage is identified as one of the harmful traditional practices that adversely affect young girls’ life and their parents. When we came across the various reasons behind the practice of child marriage, parents could have their own specific reasons for doing so. Others said, parents want to maintain their social value among the community they live in, so, it is considered as a sign of respect. Economic motive was also mentioned, it is also known as a sign of gender inequality, a girl is meant for marriage only. To grasp the exact driving factors of parents of the study area, question was raised why parents let their underage girls for marriage rather than sending to school. Hence, parents who have underage married girls were asked what was their main reason for wedding their girls and of all, 310 (93%) indicated lack of information as a reason. At the FGD, parents reflected that they regret why they were on this harmful traditional practice for so long. All of the discussants in both groups (men and women) underlined the lack of adequate information that marring their daughters affects their life.

##### 4.1 Attitude of Parents toward child marriage

To measure the current attitude of parents toward child marriage and identify how well informed they were, the researcher raised question. According to, the results found, 28 (7.5%) still “agree” to the traditional practice of child marriage in their community. This response indicated the existing information gap among these respondents.92.5% of the respondents were not agree to early marriage because they have seen the advantage of sending their girls to schools than marriage , now they have been informed the negative effect of child marriage on their community’s socio-economic development.

**Table 3: Parents’ perception on early marriage**

| Variables                            | Category      | Frequency | Percent % |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|
| Do you agree with marriage under 18? | I agree       | 28        | 7.5%      |
|                                      | I don’t agree | 344       | 92.5%     |
|                                      | Total         | 372       | 100%      |

Source: Own Survey, March, 2018

#### 4.2 Knowledge of parents on early marriage

Discussions at the FGDs strengthened the better flow of information helped them to behave against the practice of child marriage. They were all agreed that they are against it. Parents asked whether child marriage is useful or harmful according to their perspective. And accordingly, 340 (92.5%) indicated that they are aware of the harmfulness of child marriage practice. On the contrary 32 (4.5%) of them said, it is a useful cultural practice, the reason for such responses would be directly or indirectly presented in the previous sub-parts.

#### 4.3 The Root Cause of Early Marriage

##### 4.3.1 Economic Motives

Explaining the then situation Guday (2005:139) stated that among the socio-economic reasons the need to forge economic, social and even political alliances with families or individuals...with specific reference to the need for forging an economic alliance through early marriage practice is primarily based on “equal-matching” between the inter marrying families. Thus, marriage between the preferred or known clans in economy has been rooted in early marriage. Most of the time, preferred clan runs for the tribe/clan of equal resources or status.

##### 4.3.2 To Reduce Family Burden

Parents who have many children get their children married at an early age. This is due to the scarcity of food to feed the family. Such kinds of parents aim to reduce the members of the family through giving their daughters for marriage. According to the interview carried out with Orthodox religious leaders in Arjo Gudatu, parents in this community produce and reproduce children than food grain. Most of them have many children and when they grow up they give or hire them for shepherd, when they get back and if any one proposes for marriage, it is a blessing and they accept the request for they get economic benefit out of marriage.

##### 4.3.3 Parents’ desire to secure their child’s future before they pass away

Parents prefer to give their child for marriage before they die, get old or incapacitated. They just want to secure the future of their child while they are alive as the future is uncertain. Parent’s desire to see their child’s marriage is one of the major concerns. Thus, the enthusiastic feelings to get their child married as early as possible provide them relief in their life.

##### 4.3.4 Societal and peer influence

The social factors for the perpetuation of early marriage that were cited during in depth interview and focus group discussions were the need of parent’s to establish or strengthen kinship relationship, to avoid the stigma of ‘haftuu’, and to avoid the risk of loss of virginity. The causes raised in this category are more or less related to one another. Marriage has its own norms to be practiced and it is the affair of parents, relatives, clans and communities at large.

##### 4.3.5 To Establish Kinship Relationship

The clan /tribe/ that are preferred or known would like to create relationship with the same status. The boy’s parents after investigating the root of the girl’s parents send elders for marriage proposal. Primarily what is considered is the kind of tribe or clan the family of the child girl belongs to.

To increase the members of relative, parents gave their children to other clan and become kinship with non-relative. If they want to make relation with the person they want, they will give their girl to him and be relative with person they want.

##### 4.3.6 To avoid loss of Virginity

The girl child is expected to be virgin during her marriage. If a bride is not virgin, the social and psychological consequences on the female child and her parents are demoralizing. Regarding the importance given to virginity, (Stewart, Sithole, Gwaunza, 2001:22) described that women’s sexuality and their reproductive capacities are perceived as being owned and controlled by their natal families and thus their virginity and sexual purity are closely monitored and enforced so that they can be transferred intact to their marital families’ Therefore, if there is a proposal for marriage, they just accept the proposal; parents just would accept the deal. There is a saying that a girl, who does not get married early, may loss virginity. So, a saying

‘Dubartiin hin Kooran’ which literally means ‘there is no dignity /proud for having a girl child’ is common. “Except in a few ethnic groups in the South, premarital sex is strictly prohibited. Virginity is a sign of purity and honor among the Oromo of East Wollega Zone of Oromia regional state but in recent time they didn’t think of it. The girls who lost virgin before marriage were not respected in the communities and her husband were not have good attitude for her. Thus, parents were enforced to marry their girl for the fear of the attitude in the communities and free their child for insults.

#### **4.3.7 To get betrothal gifts from the bridegroom’s family**

As depth interview and focus group discussion conducted, the urge of the parents of the bride to get bride wealth /betrothal gifts is one of the major factors for early marriage. Parents look forward for the day on which they would get bride wealth as their neighbors or immediate relatives did/ do. The bride wealth in the form of betrothal gifts of traditional clothes is not restricted to parents alone. Immediate relatives also share the bride wealth depending on their relationship to the family.

#### **4.3.8 To Avoid the Stigma of “Haftuu”**

If the girl child’s parents cannot pass the aforementioned causes and her age for marriage passes she is labeled as ‘haftuu’. There are different proverbs that stimulate early marriage of the girl child. For example there is a saying that “Dubartiin gabaanirraa darbinaan haftuu taatii” It means that ‘if the girl loses her chance of marriage while she is young, she live out of marriage without husband. It implies that one has to give his daughter whenever there is marriage proposal in spite of severe physical and psychological impacts on the part of the child. “In our village parent as well as peers enforce their children to be married without the interest of child because they fear the cultural stigma ‘dubartiinumuriinirra darbinaan haaftuu taati’”. This implies that those who do not married at their age of marriage were not respected to life with the communities. The age of marriage for children is important characteristic to determine whether they are marring early or not because fears related to the cultural and social impacts enforce parents to encourage their children to marriage.

### **4.4 Consequence of Early Marriage**

#### **4.4.1 Instability of marriage**

One of the major consequences of early marriage discussed during interview and discussion was instability of marriage. When marriage is arranged by parents, the issue of consent of the couple particularly that of female child is out of question. In most of the cases the couples do not know each other and the girl who is at her childhood age enters into marital union without having sufficient information about it.

As a result she lacks interest and develops detest besides failing to carry her responsibility of managing the house hold. Inability to act as a wife due to physical and psychological immaturity leads to constant disagreement between the couple that often ends in dissolution of marriage through migration to urban centers.

*...I am 20 years old. I was a fourth grade student when I was given for marriage at the age of 16. My husband was a little but bigger than me. I was neither happy nor sad on the day of the wedding for I considered it as just getting married as others do. I became nervous due to the sexual intercourse on my wedding day. I could not agree with my husband and hated him strongly. We could not understand each other for we have difference in level of thinking. I was psychologically disturbed and flew away to my parents. My parents got me back to the in-laws the next day. Since I could not run the household and I detested my husband; I repeatedly flew away to my parents. However, they kept on taking me back to my husband for the community believes that women shall be ‘tolerant’ even if their marriage is ‘horrible’. After three years, my first marriage was dissolved.*

Her life history is not the only case among the communities of East Wollega Zone where early marriage is not practiced widely. Marriage instability and remarriage are the major features of early marriage. Such practices are very common among members of the communities in the study area. From above idea simply researcher can predict that those who married early have no the chance of living together and their life is distorted.

#### **4.4.2 Sexual, Reproductive Health and Child Delivery Problem**

According to some of the respondents when the first sexual experience is not pleasant, the woman hates her husband strongly due to the severe pains during sexual intercourse as a result of physiological immaturity. According to Parker and Gagnon (1995:119) qualitative study of sexual initiation among adolescent girls in the United States entitled as ‘putting a big thing in to a Little Hole’ many girls recall their first intercourse negatively. Most of them mention pain, fear, disappointment, and a sense of not being in control of the situation. When the female child is not physically matured to engage in sexual activity, complications related to pregnancy are among the many of the health hazards faced by young married girls. Early pregnancy and delivery due to early marriage often leads to fistula problem, which is mentioned by a number of women interviewed during the field work. In one of the group discussion in Diga Woreda, the cases of two women who could not control their

urine and stool has been raised and discussed extensively. The following narration could also explain the situation very briefly.

*...I am 24 years old. I was a seven grade student when I was given for marriage at the age of 17. My husband was 18 years old. I got married just for it is the tradition of our society. I became pregnant at the age of 17. During my child delivery at the age of 18 traditional birth attendants in the village tried their best to let me have a baby. They were massaging my abdomen and expecting me to give birth soon. However, all were in vain that the next day I was taken to the woreda nearby health post for I could not deliver and get tired. Being transferred to a zonal hospital and operated, I delivered a child that had died in my womb. Because of the damage of my organ, I was not satisfied in my life and began to run to my parents though I was not accepted by them. Due to social expectation of having as many children as possible, I could not control my fertility; I gave birth to four children. My health is severely affected. I am most of the time in bed for I am suffering from fistula problem. I do not want to talk about it to any one as it is taboo to discuss it with others. Adding up to that is the fact that the couple does not have enough resources to feed the children and educate them. (28 years Women from Gida Ayana district).*

From the above story one can easily understand how the socialization process denied the female child any opportunity and how early marriage can be the most violent act against women from birth to death. Girls that are denied of education take for granted early marriage as an alternative. Thus, getting married at early age without any education, shouldering house hold responsibility, suffering due to early pregnancy and delivery are some of the health and psychological problems faced by those children.

#### **4.4.3 Issues Related To Poverty**

Poverty is both the cause and consequence of early marriage. As it has been mentioned earlier, poor parents prefer giving their daughter at early age for marriage to improve their level of poverty by reducing family size. Besides, poverty is manifested as the consequences of early marriage for the girl child is denied of education and any other opportunities related to personal and social development. At early age she gives birth many children that expose her to abject poverty. Moreover, a woman who gets married at early age does not have any resource. Parents arrange marriage for their children without a means of leading their life. Consequently, the girl child becomes subordinate to the boy's parents. As most of the early married women run away to get rid of the unhappy marriage, they are dispossessed of their shared property. Most of the time victims of early marriage migrate to town or cities in search of job opportunities. As they often become house maid or commercial sex worker, this severely affects their life to the extent of being exposed to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted disease.

*...I am 45 years old. My father died when I was a child. I had grown up among six children with great suffering. Each child was given to be a shepherd. I was also hired as shepherd while the marriage proposal has been received. I came from the village upon arrangement of my marriage by my close relatives. I was given for marriage at the age of 15. I gave birth to my first child at the age of 16. Because I have never used any contraceptive methods to regulate my fertility, I have now eight children. There is nothing to feed the children and we lead impoverished life. My health is deteriorating from time to time. We, women do not have alternatives except to get married and give birth until we get to our age of menopause. I confirmed that the major consequence of early marriage is to give many children that expose them to series of acute health and economic problems. I stressed that early marriage leads to early pregnancy that exposes a woman to different complications.*

Most of the victims of early marriage share this kind of experience. Victims of early marriage are exposed not only scarcity of food, due to large family size, but also dispossession of property upon divorce. When the woman gets back to her parent's home, she is supposed to leave her marriage without getting any of her shares of resources.

In the first place, those women who are not get modern education do not have the legal knowledge or do not know how to deal with the situation to get their share. Besides, if the female child is below 18 years old, she cannot even charge anybody legally.

#### **4.4.4 Lack of Educational Opportunity**

Respondents of key informants and focus group discussion participants often raised dropping out of school as one of the consequences of early marriage. The issue is particularly raised by focus group discussion participants who are at risk of early marriage. They said that girls usually drop out of school when they are given to marriage. Most of the women never had the chance to go to school. Even if they joined school, they often interrupt due to arranged marriage.

*...I am 15 years old. I am a first grade student. My elder sister married when she was 10 years old. She could not stay with the husband and got back home. Meanwhile, a second marriage was arranged for*

*her and she got married to another person, still she was separated and was made to marry a third. I feel that getting married at early age has no value at all. Even our parents, particularly my father, regretted having given my elder sister for marriage at early age. Though my father was not willing to give me for marriage, for he has observed its consequences, he was forced to do so due to the influence of the immediate relatives and neighbors who forced him to accept the proposal.*

In general, the consequences of early marriage are many, complex and complicated. First and foremost, as the girl child gets married at early age she is severely affected during intercourse. She was exposed to physical pain and psychological shock. She detests her husband and may flee away up on losing interest in her marriage. Even if the couple agrees to live together, there is a problem during child delivery. Under worst condition, early marriage victims run away to near or large cities to dissolve the marriage. Most of them do not visit their parents for they enforce them to stay in the marriage rather than resolving their immediate problems. The same evidence in the report on causes and consequences of early marriage in Amhara region has confirmed that victims of early marriage are vulnerable to gender based violence, high fertility, marital instabilities, and to reproductive health related complications (Path finder International Ethiopia, 2006).

## V. CONCLUSION

Results of the survey clearly revealed that early marriage is violating women's right in some area of study area. The society maintains the system at the expense of the women since the patriarchal system greatly plays in maintaining the status quo. In any case early marriage is in a position to expose the child to different types of violence's: sexual, psychological, physical and verbal abuse. According to the findings of the study, the consequences of early marriage affect the overall personality of the female and male child. It is a 'tradition based violence' that severely affect the personal and social development of the female child. Being a common form of violence practiced in most societies it has deep-rooted base that is often encouraged by the overwhelming majority of the members: men and women together.

Victims of early marriage are vulnerable to gender based violence, high fertility, marital instability, and to reproductive health complications. The violation of women right due to the impact of early marriage begins when she is given for marriage at early age, even before reaching puberty. Empowering women particularly providing them with educational opportunity is a key factor in combating the causes and consequences of early marriage. Inequality as it limits not only educational opportunities but also reduces employment opportunities that mitigate women's economic independence. In general, the report further marked that the imposition of marriage on children or adolescents deprives them of freedom, opportunities for personal development, health and well-being, education and Sexual and reproductive health in turn makes them develop their skills, participate in different development activities that lead them to be more self-reliant.

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