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The Journal of Positive Psychology and Counselling

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WELCOME MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dear authors, reviewers, and readers of Positive Psychology and counselling,
This is the Eleventh Edition of the Journal of Positive Psychology and Counselling.



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The Journal of Positive Psychology and Counselling is a peer-reviewed journal that attracts well-researched empirical and theoretical articles on areas of positive and counselling psychology such as psychotherapies, emotions, motivation, holistic wellness, marriage and life satisfaction, subjective well-being, leisure, interpersonal relationship, mindfulness and optimal performance, love and infatuation, excellence, aesthetics, creativity, and giftedness. The focus also includes optimism, resiliency, wellness across the life span, religions, spirituality and well-being, human strengths, virtues, metacognition, and happiness.

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Parents' Perception of Child Marriage In Kwara Central, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research investigated parents' view of child marriage as regards economic, education, health, socio-cultural and legal concerns in Kwara Central, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey design. The population consisted of all parents in Kwara Central, Nigeria. A simple random sampling technique was adopted to select the sample of 400 parents for the study. A twenty-item instrument tagged 'Parents Perception of Child Marriage Questionnaire' was used to generate data for the research. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. The results showed that parents perceived that child marriage have a negative influence on a child's economic power, education and health and should not be encouraged. Also, parents perceived that religion and culture should not permit child marriage, and that laws against child marriage should be upheld while the perpetrators of child marriage be punished severely. The findings of this study have implications for counsellors to intensify their efforts in creating more community awareness and organizing more enlightenment programmes on child marriage. Additionally, if parents do not distance themselves from this detrimental habit, their opinions on child marriage might not matter. Therefore, the counsellors shouldn't base their advice solely on the parents' belief that child marriage has a negative impact on the child; instead, they should work to encourage its cessation in society by monitoring compliance with policies against it, developing and implementing child protection measures that strengthen systems and mechanisms to address girls' protection needs at the family, school, and community levels, and encouraging other people to do the same.

Keywords: Parents' perception, Child marriage, Economic, Education, Health, Socio-cultural Legal concerns

Introduction

Throughout the whole world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration that brings happiness to the bride and groom. It is a milestone event in adulthood experience. It is one of the prestigious institutions in African society and it is held in high esteem. Child marriage gives no such cause for joy but a total denial of the right of a child to choose whom and when to marry (United Nations Population Fund, UNPF, 2001). As reported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Child marriage in West and Central Africa is one of the biggest challenges in the region with 59 million child marriages, Nigeria, the most populous country in the region, has the highest number of child brides which accounts for 40 percent of all child brides in the region. The report put Nigeria's current number of child brides at 22 million, and further predicted that seven million more child brides will be added by 2050.

The perpetrators have always provided a variety of justifications for child marriage. According to Braimah (2014), child marriage is perceived and used as a way to prevent premarital sex in Northern Nigeria in order to protect the virtue of girls and family honour and prevent their girl

children from falling pregnant out of wedlock. However, the terrible consequences for young marriage victims surpass. Early marriage is not only a violation of the child's right to education, it also deprives him or her right of childhood. Child marriage affects the child's social, physical, and financial well-being, it is a significant barrier to sustainable development. The lives and health of girls particularly are put at risk, and child marriage restricts their options for the future (UNPF, 2010).

The United Nations and other nations including Nigeria have declared 18 years as the minimum legal age for marriage. Any marriage below the stipulated year (18 years) is seen to be a child marriage. As defined by UNICEF, early marriage or child marriage is a formal marriage or informal union before the age of 18 when the child has not yet become physically, physiologically and psychologically mature to handle the responsibilities of marriage and childbirth. Also, the UNICEF (2001) on the Rights of the Child recommends that children should not be separated from their parent before 18 years unless it is considered necessary. Despite this recommendation, the girl-child marriage is still prevalent in some parts of North Central, Nigeria (Ango, 2003).

While child marriage takes many different forms and has various causes, one issue is paramount, whether it happens to a girl or a boy, it is a violation of human rights as declared by United Nations Convention of the Rights of a Child. Most times, child marriage puts the lives of the young child in danger. Particularly, young girls are exposed to sexual experiences in which they have not been physically and psychologically developed to explore. The victims of child marriage are robbed of the youthful age when the parents forced them to take up a partner without their consent. The majority of the girls are coerced into marriage and many have no choice about the partner and the timing of marriage. Choosing one's spouse is a decision that should come from careful thoughts and not from parents, and it should be void of parental coercion

Kamal, et.al (2014) investigated trends and determinants of child marriage in Bangladesh with a survey conducted between in 2011 and found that more than 75% of marriages can be categorized as child marriages. The authors confirmed that despite some improvements in education and other socioeconomic indicators, Bangladeshi society still faces the relentless practice of early marriage. Also, Pamela (2018) carried out a study to assess the factors contributing to early marriage among female teenagers in Ubungo Municipal, Dares Salaam. The study revealed that girls are more affected by early marriage because they are considered as investments by their parents and guardians who receive the bride price from them. Ahonsi, et.al (2019) carried out a study on child marriage in Ghana. The study revealed that two in ten (20.68%) girls in the quantitative sample married as children. likewise, in Nigeria, Envuladu, et.al (2016) studied the determinants and effect of girl child marriage in Plateau State and Braimah (2014) examined child marriage in Northern Nigeria. The studies confirmed high incidences of child marriage in Nigeria.

Kibret, Mengestie and Degu (2014) carried out a study to assess the prevalence of early marriage practice among female child from 2009 to 2013 in Sinane District Northwest Ethiopia. About 615 (76.7%) respondents out of 802 married their daughters before 18. Dzimiri et.al (2017) investigated causes of child marriages in Zimbabwe. The study examined the reasons why child marriage is on the rise in this province and what the law, parents, teachers and the children themselves say about it. The result revealed that the major causes of child marriage in this province in particular are religious beliefs and practices. Dzimiri et. al (2017) identified parental expectations as one of the factors that contribute to child marriage and also lack of adequate knowledge on the children's rights and other legal systems that support them.

There are numerous detrimental consequences associated with child marriage ranging from physical, developmental, psychological and social. As regards the physical consequences of child marriage, when a child bride is married, she is likely to be forced into sexual activity with her husband, and at an age the bride is not physically and sexually mature. Agege, et.al (2017) investigated the legalities of child marriage in Nigeria and its implications on health. This has a severe health consequence on the child. Child brides are likely to become pregnant at an age early and there is a strong correlation between the age of a mother and maternal mortality. Girls age 10-14 are five times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than woman age 20-24 and girls age 15-17 are twice likely to die (Chopra, 2012). Young mothers face higher risks during pregnancies including complications such as heavy bleeding. According to Ijaya et al. (2010), the Northern region has a high prevalence of fistula infections and vesico vaginal fistula. Such situations may not be shocking given that young girls' bodies may not be fully matured and may be stressed during childbirth (Women's International Network, 2000). Child bride may also suffer vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Being young and female in Africa is a major risk factor for infection to sexual transmitted infection. The disparity in age between a child bride and her spouse further increases a girl's vulnerability to this virus. It exacerbates the abilities of girls and women to make and negotiate sexual decisions, including whether or not to engage in sexual activity, issues relating to the use of contraception and condoms for protecting against HIV infection, and also their ability to demand fidelity from their spouses (Kabar 2005 & Umashanker 2006).

Child marriage also has developmental consequences. It has considerable implication for social development of child brides, in terms of low levels of education, poor health and lack of agency and personal autonomy. They suffer in their socialization and their development is limited only to reproductive roles (Otoo-Oyortey & Robi 2003). Knowing that education is key to development, particularly in poor households, non-education of the girl child is a problem compounded by child marriage. The level of education women acquired can be measured by when she got married. Large numbers of the girls who drop out of school do so because of child marriage, leaving many women who married early illiterate. Thereby, undermine the potential for personal development (Wole, 2012). The cyclical nature of child marriage results in a likely low level of education and life skills, increased vulnerability to abuse and poor health, and therefore acute poverty. Child marriage contributes series of negative consequences that flow across, the parents, the society child brides and the products of child marriage. Bagahl, et.al (2016) carried out a study on the empirical analytical study on the socio-economic factor of early marriages and the study revealed that an early marriage not only had an effect on their childhood rights but also had a direct adverse effect on their health conditions, economic pressure, most husbands committed violence on the young child-wife.

Child marriage also has psychological and social consequences. It is a huge responsibility for a young girl to become a wife and mother and because girls are not adequately prepared for these roles this heavy burden has a serious impact on their psychological welfare, their perceptions of themselves and also their relationship (Forum on marriage and the rights of women and girls, 2001). Women who marry are more likely to suffer abuse and violence, with inevitable psychological as well as physical consequences. Child marriage has also been linked to abandonment and increased divorce levels (UNICEF, 2004). Society is badly affected as well in various ways, like population pressure, health care cost and lost opportunities of human development are just a few of the growing burdens that society shoulder because of teenage marriage (UNICEF, 2000). This had made major families to remain in the circle of poverty.

A number of human rights instruments have laid down some criteria to be followed when it comes to marriage over time. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) standard of the 1948, stated some norms that should be adhered to for marriage. This covers issues of age, consent, equality within marriage and the personnel and property rights of women (UNICEF, 2001). Rasak (2013) reported that parents in Northern Nigeria and some heads of families make marital choices for girl- child with little regards for the personal implications on the child. They look upon marriage as a medium to family ties between themselves, an economic arrangement or a way to protect girls from unwelcome sexual advances (The attitude of some parents may genuinely be that their girl will be better off and safer with a rich and powerful male guardian. For example, the marriage of Senator Yerima to an Egyptian of 13 years old. In some parts of the Northern Nigeria, which is currently facing economic difficulties and insecurities, parents give out their girls into marriage as a means of protecting them from being forcefully married by the militants and some saw it as a means of reducing the financial burden on them (UNICEF, 2015).

Despite national laws and international agreements forbidding child marriage, this phenomenon is still widespread in many towns and villages in Nigeria with a high prevalence in the northern part of Nigeria. Child marriage is truly a global problem as child brides are found in every region in the world and cuts across countries, culture, religion and ethnicities (Girls Nor Bride, 2017). According to girls not brides' websites, Nigeria is the third country with the highest cases of child marriage with recorded cases of 3,306,000. This figure gives a clear indication that child marriage cuts across every ethnic in the country but more prevalent in some ethnic than another. With an estimated 250 ethnic group in Nigerian (ICRW, 2007). Child marriage is prevalent in the North, especially in the Northeast and Northwest geo-political zones with over 45 percent of teenage marriages and the highest level of female illiteracy in the ethnic regions. In these regions, girls enter into marriage and begin their sexual experience when they are young, sometimes as young as 10 years old (Adebusoye, 2006). According to UNICEF (2008) 40 to 49 percent of girls under 18 in northern Nigeria married off respectively compared to 12 per cent in East/Southern Africa. Young girls are robbed of their youth and required to take on roles of which they are not emotionally, mentally, and physically prepared for. Many have no choice about the timing of marriage or their partner and some parents coerced their girls into early marriage.

Previous researches have investigated the socioeconomic effects of child marriage in the northwest of Nigeria, the reasons why it occurs in the north, and the risks it brings to the health of young mothers in Gombe, Adamawa State. There is still a dearth of literature on child marriage in Kwara State, particularly material which investigates the views of parents. In an attempt to get rid of this unworthy situation against children, it becomes imperative to measure the perception of parents toward child marriage. Do parents have knowledge of the consequence of child marriage? What are their views on child marriage? This study, therefore, investigated parents' views of child marriage in North Central, Nigeria

Research Questions

The study provided answers to the following research questions:

- (1) What is parents' perception of child marriage as regards economic/educational view?
- (2) What is the parents' perception of child marriage as regards health view?
- (3) What is parents' perception of child marriage as regards socio-cultural/religious view?
- (4) What is parents' perception of child marriage as regards legal view?

Methodology

The survey research design was adopted in this study. The design is a process of carrying out a study by collecting and analyzing data gathered from a sample consider to be representative of the population and generalizing the findings to the population. It also helps the researcher to systematically document current opinions and information on research work. The population of the study comprised all parents across Kwara Central.

The sample consisted of 400 parents randomly selected from the four Local Governments in Kwara Central. The instrument for data collection was the researcher's designed instrument tagged "Parents' Perception of Child Marriage Questionnaire" and was divided into two Sections. Section A Comprised: Bio-data eliciting information about the respondents' age at marriage, religion and education while Section B considered twenty items that was divided into four categories seeking information on parents' perception of child marriage based on: economic/educational value, health value, socio-cultural/religious value and legal standing structured in four Likert style of Strongly Agree (SA)-4 points, Agree (A)-3 points, Disagree (D)-2 points and Strongly Disagree-1 point and reversed based on either positively or negatively expressed.

The instrument was validated by specialists in the fields of counselling, childhood education, and evaluation. The instrument's face and content validity were examined, and all of their modifications and suggestions were integrated into the final form of the instrument. The instrument was subjected to trial testing by administering it to 20 parents who were not participants in the study. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to establish the reliability of the instrument and the reliability coefficient of the items was established at 0.84. The data collection spanned eight weeks. The researcher and her team personally visited each residence to gather the data. There was an attempt to translate the instrument's items for the responders who couldn't read or write. The questionnaire's items were completed by the respondents who were literate on their own. The mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data.

Results

Research Question 1: What is parents' perception of child marriage in regards to economic/educational view?

Table 1: Parents' Perception of Child Marriage in Regards to Economic/Educational View

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Giving out a child in marriage does not necessarily relieve parents of burden of spending on the child.	3.04	1.02
2	Giving a child in marriage will not make the child get rich early in life	3.34	.93
3	Child marriage disrupts the education of the child	2.87	1.01
4	Early marriage increases school drop outs	2.95	.98
Weighted Average		3.05	

Positive: 1.00 – 2.49

Negative: 2.50 – 4.00

Table 1 shows parents' perception of child marriage in regards to economic/educational view. The respondents agreed with the following statements: Giving out a child in marriage does not necessarily relieve parents of the burden of spending on the child ($\bar{x} = 3.04$), Giving a child in marriage will not make the child get rich early in life ($\bar{x} = 3.34$), Child marriage disrupts the education of the child ($\bar{x} = 2.87$), Early marriage increases school dropouts ($\bar{x} = 2.95$). The

weighted mean is 3.05 which is a numeric indicator that parents had a negative perception of child marriage in regards to economic/educational view.

Research Question 2: What is parents' perception of child marriage in regards to health value?

Table 2: Parents' Perception of Child Marriage in Regards to Health Value

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Child marriage will increase the risk of my child contracting Sexually transmitted Diseases (STDs)	2.75	.96
2. Child marriage can affect the health of a child	2.67	2.00
3. Child marriage does not necessarily assure fidelity	2.74	.94
4. Child marriage does not necessarily reduce problems of menstrual pain among girls.	2.74	1.01
Weighted Average	2.73	
Positive: 1.00 – 2.49 Negative: 2.50 – 4.00		

Table 2 shows the parents' perception of child marriage in regards to health value. The respondents agreed with the following statements: Child marriage will increase the risk of my child contracting Sexually transmitted Diseases (2.75), Child marriage can affect the health of a child (2.67), Child marriage does not necessarily assure fidelity (2.74), Child marriage does not necessarily reduce problems of menstrual pain among girls (2.74). The weighted mean is 2.73 which is a numeric indicator that parents had a negative perception of child marriage in regards to health value.

Research Question 3: What is parents' perception of child marriage in regards to socio-cultural/religious view?

Table 3: Parents' Perception of Child Marriage in Regards to Socio-cultural/Religious View

S/N	Items	Mean	SD
1	Religion should support child marriage	1.40	0.55
2	Child marriage will prevent future barrenness	1.45	0.61
3	Child marriage should be encouraged to prevent a child from being promiscuous	1.49	0.63
4	Some ethnic groups that support child marriage should not be condemned	1.41	0.55
5	Child marriage can strengthen the existing bond between families	1.41	0.57
6	Giving children out early in marriage increases the status of the parents	1.49	0.61
	Weighted Average	1.44	
Negative: 1.00 – 2.49 Positive: 2.50 – 4.00			

Table 3 shows parents' perception of child marriage in regards to socio-cultural/religious view. The respondents strongly disagreed with the following: Religion should support child marriage (1.40), Child marriage will prevent future barrenness (1.45), Child marriage should be encouraged to prevent a child from being promiscuous (1.49), Some ethnic groups that support child marriage should not be condemned (1.41), Child marriage can strengthen existing bond between families (1.41), Giving children out early in marriage increases the status of the parents (1.49). The weighted mean is 1.44 which is a numeric indicator that parents had a negative perception of child marriage in regards to socio-cultural/religious view.

Research Question 4: What is parents' perception of child marriage in regards to legal standing?**Table 4**

Parents' Perception of Child Marriage in Regards to Legal Standing

S/N	Items	Mean	SD
1	Child marriage is a violation of fundamental human rights	2.96	.98
2	The age stated by law for marriage should determine when a child gets married	2.29	1.03
3	Arranging a spouse for a child without her consent is bad	2.98	1.14
4	Child marriage is an abuse of a child	3.01	1.02
5	The perpetrators of child marriage should be severely punished under law	2.70	.97
6	Law should ban child marriage	2.82	1.04
Weighted Average		2.79	
Positive: 1.00 – 2.49		Negative: 2.50 – 4.00	

Table 4 shows the parents' perception of child marriage in regards to legal standing. The respondents agreed with the following: Child marriage is a violation of fundamental human rights (2.96), Arranging a spouse for a child without her consent is bad (2.98), Child marriage is an abuse of a child (3.01), The perpetrators of child marriage should be severely punished under law (2.70), Law should ban child marriage (2.82). However, the respondents disagreed with the following: The age stated by law for marriage should determine when a child gets married (2.29). The weighted mean is 2.79 which is a numeric indicator that parents had a negative perception of child marriage in regards to legal standing.

Discussion of Findings

The result showed that parents in Kwara Central perceived that child marriage has negative influence on economic and education prowess. The result is in agreement with Nwokolo (2010) who found that child marriage has negative effect on girls' education and the longer or further a girl child attends school prolongs the time of getting marry. The result also corroborates Mathur (2003) who submitted that high level of education can protect children from early marriage. The result also confirmed the assertion of UNICEF (202) that a better alternative to child marriage is education. Girls' education is a strong tool in the fight against child marriage. Child marriage can have enormous adverse effects on education of a child.

Another finding of the study revealed that parents perceived child marriage to have negative influence on the child's health. The respondents (parents) agreed that child marriage increases the risk of child contracting Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD). The result is in support of Aluko and Simibine (2015) who carried out a study in Northern Nigerian on implication of child marriage on girls' health, and found that child marriage makes girls more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections. Further, the finding was in line with Agege et. al (2017) who investigated legalities of child marriage in Nigeria and its implications on health. They reported that child marriage does have a severe health consequence on the child. There is a high association between a mother's age and maternal mortality, and child brides are reportedly more likely to become pregnant at a young age. Girls age 10 to 14 are five times more likely than women ages 20 to 24 to die during pregnancy or childbirth, and girls ages 15 to 17 are twice as likely. Women's International Network (2000) also confirmed that young mothers face higher risks during pregnancies including complications such as heavy bleeding because young girls are yet to be fully developed and their body may be

strained under the effort of childbirth. UNICEF also lend credence to this in her report that child bride may also suffer Fistula infections and vesico vaginal Fistulaco and are also vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

The result demonstrated that parents' underage marriage should not be permitted due to culture or religion. This was in line with Eke (2008) argument that negative traditions shouldn't be kept up and that neither culture nor religion should teach parents wrong injunctions and that harmful traditions should not be continued. The outcome is also consistent with Otoo-Oyortey and Robi's findings (2003) which revealed that the child bride experiences have numerous negative developmental effects. According to the authors, child marriage has significant effects on the social development of child brides, including low self-esteem and a lack of personal autonomy and confidence. They struggle with socializing, and they can only develop in reproductive capacities. The result also indicated that parents in Kwara Central unanimously agreed that the law should not support child marriage and that perpetrators of child marriage should be punished. Agreeing to this fact, Fayokun (2015) stressed that the loopholes in Nigeria's legal system should fill up with relevant laws and efforts be intensified towards domestication of Child Right Acts 2003. The result also supported the UNFPA-UNICEF submission that advocated for national laws, policy frameworks, and mechanisms to protect and promote adolescent girls' rights to address child marriage and high rates of adolescent pregnancy. It was stated further that we should ensure those laws are in line with international standards, and ensure that adequate resources are available.

Conclusion

The study investigated parents' perception of child marriage in Kwara Central as regards the consequence of child marriage on economic, educational, health, socio-cultural and legal concerns. It can be concluded that the parents did not agree with child marriage as they indicated that it does have negative consequences on the child. They were of the opinion that child marriage should not be encouraged. Parents agreed that child marriage is an abuse and a violation of fundamental human rights and that the perpetrators of child marriage should be severely punished under law while child marriage should be banned.

Implications for Counselling

Counsellors should not rest their anchor on the parents' view that child marriage does have a negative influence on the child but they should also endeavour to encourage its stoppage in society through follow-up to ensure adherence to the policies put up against child marriage and developing and implementing child protection measures that strengthen systems and mechanisms to respond to the protection needs of girls at the family, school and community levels. They should also make effort to influence the government to design and implement programmes that will empower girls and women, as well as families, economically since girls' vulnerability to child marriage is as result of economic opportunities for them and their families. Also, a little more enlightenment on the negative consequences of child marriage should be given to the parents and the society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. Parents need to be encouraged to take all reasonable precautions to avoid and abstain from participating in it.
2. Laws prohibiting child marriage should be amended to conform to other relevant laws and conventions pertaining to children's rights and welfare.

3. There should be greater public knowledge of the risks associated with child marriage, including discussions about these risks with local communities, religious, and traditional authorities.
4. A ministry that will be charged with advancing gender sensitivity, girls' education, and social welfare has to be established.
5. Counsellors should press local and national leaders to make a commitment to keeping girls in school through the secondary level and ensuring that they arrive at school on time. For girls, attending school during adolescence provides significant health and developmental advantages.
6. The government should firmly establish that 18 is the minimum age for marriage for both partners, and that a marriage must have the complete and free agreement of both parties.

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