

**The Impact of Teenage Pregnancy and Forced Marriage on Girl Child Education in
Yumbe District - Uganda**

By

Kiira Jamal

Email Address: ondokj@gmail.com

Department of Public Administration

Faculty of Management Studies,

Islamic University in Uganda

Phone numbers: (+256)775307458/750478525

Abstract

This study focused on Teenage Pregnancy and forced marriage and Girl-Child Education. The study specifically sought to find out the impacts of Teenage Pregnancy and Forced Marriage on Girl Child Education. This was typically qualitative research to address the research questions. A combination of semi structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KII) were administered to the research participants. The data analysis was spiral and narrative, it started when the researcher was still in the field. As data was collected, the researcher continued to sort the data by coding them and developing concepts. The purpose was to reduce the backlog of data findings of the study which revealed that teenage pregnancy and forced marriages limits young females to reach their fullest potential in education, it has increased the rate of dropout among girls, it affects retention of girls at school, thus, low completion rate, it equally affects performance of girls at all levels of education, sicknesses related to pregnancy and as well as domestic responsibilities at marriages negatively affect the education of girls, it leads to high rate of unemployment among teenage mothers because of low education, high illiteracy rate among girls in Yumbe as a result of teenage pregnancy and forced marriages.

Key words: *Education, Forced Marriages, Girlchild, Impact, Teenage Pregnancy,*

Introduction

Teenage pregnancy and forced marriage have the most devastating reproductive health challenges and have consequences on the education of girls in Yumbe District. The issue of teenage pregnancies and forced marriages have been a menace to Uganda's efforts in increasing girls' agency and enabling young females to reach their fullest potential in education. Teenage pregnancy is pregnancy in girls below the age of 20 years whereas forced marriage is the marriage conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties and is a marriage in which duress

whether physical or emotional is a factor. The term early marriage is used to refer to both formal marriages and informal unions in which a girl lives with a partner as if married before age of 18.

In Yumbe District, the cases of teenage pregnancy and early marriages is exacerbated by rigid religious and cultural practices, the COVID 19 pandemic, irresponsible parenting and peer influence among others. This has affected the enrollment, retention and performance of girls at all levels of education, hence low education of girls(Stephen & Planner, 2018)..

Teenage pregnancy and forced marriages are against the right to education as a fundamental human right, where every individual irrespective of race, gender, nationality, ethnic or social origin, religion or political preference, age or disability, is entitled to equitable and successful completion of education (Ngum Chi Watts et al., 2015).

As stipulated in a number of human rights documents including the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Josephine & Aramanzan, 2011) (MacPherson, 1989), (MacPherson, 1989), (Rodi, 2009) and (Human Rights Law in Africa, 2012) which Uganda is committed to and the national level, Uganda domesticated these international provisions to education in (Josephine & Aramanzan, 2011)the Constitution (1995) and the Education Act, 2008. But all these have not warranted the right to education for girls in Yumbe District. thus, affecting the performance of girls at all levels.

Despite Government effort to regulate forced marriages and reduce teenage pregnancy, the situation is worsening day by day. This is because of various reasons among which are the effects of COVID-19 pandemic, peer influence, negative cultural norms on the education of girls, irresponsible parenting, drug abuse, rampant disco operations, individual-behaviour, traditional, and socio-cultural to religious in nature. Inarguably, low socio-economic status, war especially among the refugee community, sexual exploitation, differing laws on marriage age, effects of pornographic videos, men's desire for young girls, limited education, and early sexual activity.

Thus, the purpose of the paper is to explore the impact of Teenage Pregnancy and Forced Marriage on Girl Child Education in Yumbe District

Literature Review

Forced marriage is the marriage conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties and is a marriage in which duress-whether physical or emotional- is a factor. Any child marriage constitutes a forced marriage, in recognition that even if a child appears to give their consent, any one below the age of 18 is not able to make a fully informed choice whether or not to marry, (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2020)(*Child, Early and Forced Marriage survey in Turkey, 2018*).

Child marriage can have devastating consequences for individual girls and their future children. Typically, it cuts short or ends a girl's education, compromises her reproductive rights, sexual health, future employment and earnings and perpetuates personal and community poverty. Globally, more than one in four girls are married as children – before the age of 18. In East and Southern Africa, the share is 36 per cent, and 10 per cent of girls in the region are married by age 15 (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2017)(*UNFPA, 1st September 2017*).

Teenage pregnancy is when a girl under 20 gets pregnant. It usually refers to teens between the ages of 15-19. But it can include girls as young as 10. It is also called teen pregnancy or adolescent pregnancy, (Barry, 2013)(*the District Health Survey (DHS) in Sierra Leone in 2008, (Barry, 2010)*).

A victim of unplanned pregnancy is likely to suffer or experience depression, frustration, fear and other emotional problems. Hence, the heightened risk for educational issues and injuries with children of adolescent parents is associated not with the influence of young age but the confounding influences of associated socio-demographic factors. Most teenagers become pregnant after they have hooked-up with their partners because of aggressiveness and curiosity of having sex.

The right to education is a fundamental human right. Every individual irrespective of race, gender, nationality, ethnic or social origin, religion or political preference, age or disability, is entitled to equitable and successful completion of education.

Uganda is one of the countries with the highest early and forced marriage. Many girls are married off before the age of 15 and 18th birth day (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2017)(*UNICEF 2011*), (*A report submitted by a journalist Mutegeki Goffrey in March 2012, in Kabarole district*), 20 primary pupils

have been married off in a period of three months. These include three pupils from Kiby Primary School, five from Mahyoro Primary School in Karangura Sub County, five from Kibaata Primary School Bunyangabu Sub County and seven from Kateebwa SDA primary school in Kateebw Sub County. The research indicates that, their parents aided the process in exchange of goats and some other material items.

In most cultural settings, pre-marital pregnancy among girls is stigmatized both in school and in communities mainly on moralistic grounds, without addressing factors that lead to pregnancy among school girls. A girl who gets pregnant while still in school is victimised, seen as a waste, a curse, a bad omen and a gone case. Most times school careers of many girls are cut short because of pregnancy either by the girls withdrawing themselves from school or through expulsion with little or no chance of re-entry after delivery. The situation is worsened by an absence of a coherent national policy on pregnancy in school and on re-entry after delivery. This in many schools, almost all schools expel pregnant girls and as child mothers, they often fail to return and complete their education (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2017)(Ahikire, et al. 2011). *(Revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School settings in Uganda, 2020).*

Teenage pregnancy and forced marriage infringe rights of women and girls globally, undermining initiatives to raise involvement in education, reduce maternal mortality, increase employment and enterprise levels. Parental and Communal involvement in Early and Forced Child Marriage negatively influence Girls' Education, which hinders their participation in social, economic and politics in adulthood (Human Rights Law in Africa, 2012).

A survey conducted by (Josephine & Aramanzan, 2011) *in November in Uganda on Pregnant Girls on Re-Entry of Pregnant Girls in Primary and Secondary Schools* concluded that although Uganda has made deliberate efforts to promote gender equality at national and school level, there are significant gaps in addressing issues of pregnancies in schools. Challenges of high dropouts and teenage pregnancies have continued to disrupt and affect girls' education thereby blocking the celebrated achievement of increasing female enrolment in school. Findings also indicate that in most districts in Uganda like Yumbe, Kotido, Arua, Kasese to mention districts have no established mechanisms to deal with pregnancies in schools under their supervision. Some districts have information on the number of schools, their registered students and on dropouts, but they do not have information on students who drop out due to pregnancy, and how these are followed up.

Early motherhood responsibilities expose girls to suffering in the hands of cruel and abusive partners which denies them opportunity to pursue and complete education like boy counterparts. Motherhood, however, also brought some mixed feelings and experiences. Pregnancy at any age can be physically exhausting, and for young women who are often 'alone' or with little support, and physiologically and emotionally still developing, pregnancy can be challenging. Having someone to lean on irrespective of their age can bring feelings of joy to these young women (Ngum Chi Watts et al., 2015).

Forced marriage practices encompass the troublesome view that marriage marks a girl's transition into adulthood, making the investment into their education no longer necessary. Instead, girls are expected to adopt their new role of wife or mother, solely taking care of the home, their 'husband' and their children. Those who live far or have children to look after will then find themselves unable to resume their education, forced by their abusers to remain hidden within their homes, (Ngum Chi Watts et al., 2015).

Married young girls are frequently taken out of school and are at high risk of early pregnancy. If she survives childbirth, her children are less likely to grow up healthy and go to school, continuing the cycle of poverty for generations to come.

Specific Objectives Of The Study

1. To explore the relationship between child marriage, teenage pregnancy and the low level of education of girls.
2. To find out the effects of early and child marriages on the completion of secondary education.
3. To establish the barriers married girls face from school that affect their education.

Research Questions Of The Study

1. What is the relationship between child marriage, teenage pregnancy and the low level of education of girls?

2. What effects does early and child marriages have on the completion of secondary education of girls?
3. What barriers do married girls face from school that affect their education?

Methodology

This was an exploratory study that sought to gather information on the impact of teenage pregnancy and forced marriage on the education of girls. A Qualitative research methodology were utilized to address the research questions (What is the relationship between child marriage, teen pregnancy and the low level of education of girls? What effects does early and child marriages have on the completion of secondary education of girls? And What barriers do married girls face from school that affect their education?). A combination of semi structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews were administered to the research participants.

Participants were drawn from the 26 sub counties; these communities were grouped into five clusters. The study targeted representatives from the community, the cultural and religious leaders, sexually active teenage girls and pregnant young mothers (Aged 13 – 19 years), education providers and parents and caregivers. The study was narrative.

The design of the study was narrative that focused on interpreting the core narratives from the study group's personal stories. Using first person narrative, data was acquired and organised to understand how respondents understood effects of teenage pregnancy and forced marriages on the education of girls.

- a) The data collection instruments were validated by choosing well trained and skilled moderators. The moderators checked personal biases and expectations and also learnt as much candid information from research participants as possible. The moderator then disclosed his perspectives and biases in the data instruments of full disclosure.
- b) The researcher also used triangulation by using several moderators in different locations with different individuals by analysing the same data that informed results from different angles.
- c) The researcher also checked the validity of data collection instruments by using respondent validation. The researcher involved participants in the initial testing of results to check authenticity of results which refined the researchers understanding.

d) The researcher also sought alternative explanations to valid research instruments to strengthen the validity of the findings

Excel spreadsheets were used to analyze demographic indicators of the participants. Themes were then recognized and coded in line with the research question and FGD and interview topics and sorted using a copy and paste method under the research questions and instruments. Concepts were ranked according to occurrence.

Findings

The findings show close relationships exist between child marriage, teen pregnancy, and the low level of education reached by large numbers of girls. It shows that child marriage is likely to be the cause of more than half of babies born to under 18s in Uganda, so that ending it could reduce early childbearing by the same amount.

The report's analysis suggests that, depending how early a girl marries, child marriage reduces the likelihood of completing secondary school by 12 to 23 percentage points. Once a girl *is* married, it is very difficult for her to stay at school, whatever her age. In contrast, keeping girls in secondary school substantially reduces the likelihood they will marry or have children early.

It also shows that both child marriage and early childbearing force girls to drop out of school. According to parents and principals interviewed in surveys, early pregnancy and marriage are major reasons for this because girls are overburdened with domestic chores, pregnancy related sicknesses, baby nurturing, and household responsibilities. All these force girls to drop out of school, thus, no achievement of education objectives.

A girl is more likely to drop out of school during the preparatory time before her marriage or shortly after. A 15-year-old pregnant girl interviewed shared her experience that:

“With pregnancy, you feel weak, vomiting any time, spitting frequently and you are lazy which therefore affects concentration, performance and retention at school. And after delivery, who is going to take care of my child, I better drop out of school”.

As a wife or mother, she is often expected to take care of the home, children and extended family. the teenage mothers are overburdened with a lot of domestic work. This does not give them ample time to think of going back to school, thus, high dropout rate. This therefore affects the continuity, retention and completion of education levels by girls. Hence, high illiteracy rate among girls in Yumbe district.

Returning to school can be almost impossible for a married girl. The possibility for a teenage mother to return to school is not possible. This is as a result of regarding them as a waste of resources by their parents and or guardians.

“a parent of a teenage mother noted that what he needs is his dowery not the education of the daughter. Afterall school was denying for them dowery”.

Married girls face many practical barriers to education, including stigma, forced exclusion from school and gender norms that keep them at home. The stigma and exclusion force the girls to lose hope and motivation in education, thus, making them to dropout. A pregnant adolescent girl may drop out or be excluded from school because of national laws, a lack of support for re-enrolment and stigma.

The younger the age at marriage, the greater the impact. Once married, a girl is very unlikely to remain in or return to school. This is because marriage and pregnancy are associated with responsibilities that warrant women to commit to fulfill the domestic responsibilities. This therefore forces teenage mothers to drop out of school.

Majority of the respondents have a common view that teenage pregnancy and forced marriages limits young females to reach their fullest potential in education. They dropout early and possibilities of second chance education is never thought of, thus, high illiteracy rate among girls in Yumbe in particular and Uganda in general.

Teenage pregnancy and forced marriages affect retention of girls at school, thus, low completion rate. Most of the girls affected feel sigh to return to school and their parents give up supporting their education simply because they are disgrace to them and the family. this, therefore, affects the retention of girls at school.

Above all, teenage pregnancy and forced marriages affect performance of girls at all levels of education. This is in line to sicknesses related to pregnancy and as well as domestic responsibilities at marriages negatively affect the education of girls. Marriage is associated with responsibilities which does not enable the married girls to have ample time to concentrate in studies, thus, poor performance.

The high rate of unemployment among teenage mothers is as a result of low education. The high illiteracy rate among girls as a result of teenage pregnancy and early marriages in makes girls to depend on their husbands and relatives for care. This, therefore, makes these girls to be vulnerable subject to Gender Based Violence.

Conclusion

Child marriage and girls' lack of access to quality education are both rooted in gender inequality and the belief that girls and women are worth less than boys and men. There are two-way links between child marriage and girls' education. Decisions around them are complex and influenced by a variety of factors. Keeping girls in school is one of the best ways of delaying marriage. On average, the likelihood of a girl marrying as a child is six percentage points less for every additional year she stays in secondary education. Access to education affects marriage timing more than marriage affects access to education. Most girls drop out of school and then get married. Education is a powerful path to gender equality, strengthening girls' skills, knowledge and power to challenge discriminatory gender norms. School closures during the COVID – 19 pandemics threaten progress towards gender equality. They have exposed girls to more gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, adolescent pregnancy and forced marriage.

Recommendations And Conclusion

1. Support community sensitization to ensure that parents, leaders and other community members are aware of the importance of girls' education and of delaying marriage.
2. Implement re-entry policies to support young mothers to return to school, and fund national strategies that support the re-engagement of young women in education after pregnancy.
3. Provide support such as scholastic materials to girls at risk of child marriage and married girls to have continued and safe access to quality education.

4. Education sector should plan and budget anticipate risks and respond to the needs of adolescent girls in crisis situations, including girls at risk of marriage and married girls.
5. Provide medical and psychosocial assistance to survivors of attacks on education, taking into account the specific needs and experiences of adolescent girls.
6. Protect pregnant girls and teenage mothers at schools from violence by introducing measures of building confidence in the girls, training teachers to recognize and report abuse, and providing safe spaces for girls and adolescent girls – especially those at risk of child marriage and married girls.

Reference

- Barry, N. (2013). Teenage Pregnancy Pilot Project Research Freetown Sierra Leone Research Date : August 2010 Final Report : September 2010 Niamh Barry Monitoring & Evaluation Advisor GOAL Sierra Leone September 2010. *Goal, September*, 1–84.
- Human Rights Law in Africa, E. (2012). African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. *Human Rights Law in Africa Online*, 1(1), 143–153. <https://doi.org/10.1163/221160604x00170>
- Josephine, A., & Aramanzan, M. (2011). *A Survey on Re-entry of Pregnant girls in Primary and Secondary schools in Uganda*. www.faweuganda.org
- MacPherson, S. (1989). The Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Social Policy & Administration*, 23(1), 99–101. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.1989.tb00500.x>
- Ngum Chi Watts, M. C., Liamputtong, P., & McMichael, C. (2015). Early motherhood: A qualitative study exploring the experiences of African Australian teenage mothers in greater Melbourne, Australia. *BMC Public Health*, 15(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-015-2215-2>
- Rodi, K. (2009). Cedaw. *DjbZ*, 12(2), 68–69. <https://doi.org/10.5771/1866-377x-2009-2-68>
- Stephen, O., & Planner, D. (2018). *Overview of development planning in local government (policy & reforms) 14*.
- UNFPA, & UNICEF. (2017). *Child marriage: A mapping of programmes and partners in twelve countries in East and Southern Africa*. 1–88. <https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/publications/child-marriage-mapping-programmes-and-partners-twelve-countries-east-and-southern>
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). (2020). *Child, early and forced marriage in humanitarian settings*. 6. https://turkiye.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/ingilizce_web_son_pdf.pdf