

EXPLORING THE SOCIO-CULTURAL RISK FACTORS OF EARLY MARRIAGE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria, the most densely populated country in Sub-Saharan Africa, is home to a population of approximately 162.8 million people, with women comprising about 49% of the population, equating to roughly 80.2 million individuals. This significant demographic highlights the crucial role women play in the nation's social, economic, and political landscape. Despite traditional societal expectations that often confine women to the roles of wife and mother, Nigerian women continue to make remarkable progress in various sectors. This is evident in the increasing political representation of women, including high-profile appointments such as the Minister of Labor and Productivity, Minister of Tourism, and the first female Minister of Police.

In the private sector, women have also made notable strides, with influential figures such as Mrs. Titilope Oguntuga, Mrs. Osai Aliru, and others leading successful careers in major corporations and organizations. Additionally, a recent report by PWC Nigeria reveals that 41% of micro-entrepreneurs in the country are women, with an impressive 23 million women actively engaged in entrepreneurship. Despite these achievements, women-owned businesses face numerous challenges that threaten their sustainability and growth, such as limited access to funding, gender-based biases, and market competition.

This paper examines the socio-economic importance of women in Nigeria, highlighting their entrepreneurial activities, achievements, and the barriers they face in the business world. By addressing these issues, the study aims to underscore the need for policy reforms and support mechanisms to foster the growth of women-led businesses, ultimately contributing to the economic development of the country.

Keywords: Women, Entrepreneurship, Nigeria, Socio-economic development, Gender equality

1.1 Introduction

Nigeria is a nation gifted with rich humans and natural resources and the most densely populated nation in Sub-Saharan Africa region, with a population of about 162.8 million of the people (Azuka & Brambaifa, 2018). Of

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these, Azuka & Brambaifa(2018) further opined that 49% of the population are approximately women, which corresponds to 80.2 million of the total population. So, this population indicates the economic and social importance of women in this nation. However, African societies expect women to marry, submit to their husbands, and in some cases give up personal interests and ambitions. But women across the country continue to make strides in a variety of fields. This is reflected in the political appointments of women as Minister of Labor and Productivity (Nkeirika Onyejocha), Minister of Tourism (Lola Adejohn), and the first female Minister of Police (Imaan). Sulaiman-Ibrahim), to name just a few from the political world (Afolabi, 2023). In the Private Sector, we have women like Mrs. Titilope Oguntuga (Head of Sustainable Development and Corporate Brand, Lafarge Africa), Mrs. Osai Aliru, CEO of Aspire Coronation Trust, Mr. Funke Amobi, Standard Bank Group Nigeria; and Regional Head of People and Culture, Mrs. Nkiru, and Mrs. Olumido Ojo, Africa Head of Standard Bank Group, Marketing, Corporate Communications and CSI, West Africa, to name a few. According to a recent report by PWC Nigeria, 41% of micro-entrepreneurs in Nigeria are women, with 23 million women entrepreneurs active in the sector. This shows that even though women are a key driver of economic development in Nigeria, many women-owned businesses struggle to survive (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Women are seen as currency for building political and economic alliances. They carry out 50-60 percent of the activities related to food processing and animal husbandry in the country (Mohammed & Abdulquadri, 2012). Women are the backbone of many communities and have a significant impact on children, whether they are employed or not (Eze, 2011). Therefore, its population plays an important role in the progress of society and the nation. However, this group faces social prejudice due to gender-based discrimination and prejudice due to not conforming to social standards and customs. One of these prejudices is the expectation within society that women must be married to be accepted in society. In developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that 20 to 50 percent or more of women are married before the age of 18. This highlights the phenomenon now known as 'child marriage.' Child marriage is a global problem and is very common in developing countries. According to WHO (2018) report, about 16 million adolescent girls aged of 15-19 give birth each year. These numbers show how widespread the problem of child marriage is around the world. Furthermore, 2.5 million girls under the age of 16 give birth in developing regions each year (WHO, 2013). According to Adekola, Akanbi, and Olawole-Isaac (2016), marriage is a divinely ordained institution that is universally accepted by all people regardless of race, color, or creed. It can be described as a communal and legal meeting between men and women (Coontz, 2005). However, few cultures recognize same-sex unions (Nwonu & Oyakhiromen, 2014). It argues that marriage is a contractual relationship that exists between a man and a woman (Omoniyi-Oyafunke, Falola, and Salau, 2014). It is an intimate and lasting bond between a man and his wife as long as they both live. It is a state of union with a

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person of the opposite sex as a husband or wife for the purpose of companionship, procreation, and family support (Olson, David, & DeFrain, 2000). Statements and discourses on girls' education and marriage, as an individual and interactive phenomenon, are not new in Nigeria. There are many studies on early marriage, gender, society, and education, some of which precede awareness of the threat itself (Nnaemeka, 1998; Salo, 2001; Odejide, 2005; Ezeilo, 2006), as well as its emergence from it (Adichie, 2014; Mama, 2014; Pereira, 2016). (Pereira, 2018). Personal experiences in northern Nigeria and the growing international importance of Nigerian women's writings on gender and education, some of which have drawn our attention to the depth and breadth of original studies relating to the social and cultural factors associated with marriage.

Early marriage is prevalent in the northern part of Nigeria, with the North-West and North-East geopolitical zones accounting for over 45% of child marriages, as well as the highest levels of illiteracy among women in the country. These cases continue even though the Nigerian Constitution does not approve of early marriage. This has generated further interest in whether and how this Nigerian scholarship has or can inform, contemporary understandings of girls' education and marriage in/about Nigeria. However, none of these studies investigated the sociocultural risk factors associated with early marriage in northern Nigeria. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the sociocultural risk factors associated with early marriage in Nigeria and its impact on various aspects of an individual's life. By exploring the impact of early marriage, this study aims to highlight the urgent need for interventions and policy changes to address this problem.

Statement of the Problem

Sociocultural risk factors associated with early marriage in Nigeria is an issue that continues to generate debate among different researchers and schools of thought. However, sociocultural risk factors associated with early marriage can have devastating effects on children who marry outside their families and societies. The children that are victims of these sociocultural risk factors associated with early marriages are denied education and employment opportunities are exposed to Vesicovaginal fistula (VVF), risk death at birth, and are exposed to sexually transmitted diseases, to name a few. Meanwhile, societies face demographic pressures due to rising health costs, the spread of HIV/AIDS, increased mortality, and morbidity, and weakening efforts by governments and non-governmental organizations to alleviate poverty. Therefore, there is need to identify some of the factors of gender inequalities, poverty, economic factors, cultural norms and practices associated with early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria to recommend some measures aimed at mitigating the impact of early marriage in Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to determine the Impact of Socio-Cultural Risk Factors Associated with Early Marriage in Nigeria, specifically to;

1. Identify the gender inequalities factors associated with early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria.
2. Determine poverty and economic factors associated with early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria.
3. Determine Cultural Norms and Practices associated with early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria.
4. Recommend measures aimed at mitigating the impact of early marriage in the Northern Part of Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the Gender inequalities associated with early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria?
2. What are the Poverty and Economic Factors Associated with Early Marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria?
3. What are the Cultural Norms and Practices Associated with Early Marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria?
4. What are recommended measures aimed at mitigating the impact of early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between gender inequalities and early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between poverty and economic factors and early marriage in selected states in the Northern part of Nigeria.
3. There is no significant relationship between cultural norms and practices and early marriage in selected states in the Northern part of Nigeria.

2.0 Literature Review

Conceptual framework

Economic Insecurity: One of the reasons girls marry early is economic insecurity. Economic insecurity is an important factor in the early marriage of girls. In the sense that young daughters may be seen as expensive and a burden if the child's parents are facing severe financial insecurity. Therefore, her parents may marry her to an older man at an early age. In traditional African societies, the bride's family may receive livestock from the groom's family (Kyari, 2014). Additionally, poor families tend to marry their daughters at the same time to reduce wedding costs.

Cultural Expectations: As a result of cultural expectations, young girls are tempted into early marriage to meet community expectations. Mohammed and Abdulquadri (2012) believe that societal expectations

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encourage parents to enroll their girls under the age of 18 for reasons of honor. Because failure to meet these expectations can lead to ridicule and disapproval.

Religious Beliefs: Religious beliefs are important in girl-child marriages, as some religious beliefs do not condemn the marriage of underage girls, thereby encouraging the continuation of such behavior. (Mulongo, McAndrew & Hollins Martin, 2014). Furthermore, parents force their daughters to marry pregnant women due to religious expectations.

Family Alliance: Marriage is a bond between two families, and some parents invite their daughters into marriage to strengthen the family alliance. According to a UNIFPA report, marriage in parts of Africa and Asia is seen to strengthen relationships between families and resolve conflicts. (Alhassan, 2013). According to an ICRW report (2018), children may become engaged before they are born.

Kidnapping: The deteriorating security situation in Africa, particularly Nigeria, has led to an increase in kidnapping and other criminal activities. Incidents have occurred in which young girls are abducted on their way to school or on school grounds and forced into marriage by their captors. A case in point is the abduction of Chibok girls in northern Nigeria, who were eventually forced into marriage and impregnated (Maiangwa & Amao, 2015).

Traditional practices: Several traditional practices contribute to early girl marriage. Examples include practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), which involves removing part of the entire female reproductive organ for cultural reasons (Maiangwa & Amao, 2015).

This process is believed to improve girls' health, hygiene, marriage potential, and fertility (Maiangwa & Amao, 2015). It is estimated that approximately 140 million women have undergone the FGM process (Adekola, Akanbi, & Olawole-Isaac, 2016). Ignorance is another major cause of early marriage of girls and children, ignorance on the part of parents. Ignorance in the sense that some parents believe it is safer to marry their daughters early to prevent sexual assault and violence (Mooyaart & Liefbroer, 2017)

Community pressure: The pressures girls face because of their status in society, contribute to early marriage. A study conducted by the United Nations in 2004 concluded that women in African and Asian societies are considered inferior. Mooyaart & Liefbroer (2017) suggest that girls are seen as a burden because they prefer to raise boys and marry girls young because they will eventually marry into another family. Furthermore, most societies in Africa and Asia frown upon the management of unwanted pregnancies when they occur before marriage. Therefore, most families try to get their daughters married before they become pregnant if they are unmarried. According to the UNICEF report, unmarried girls are believed to have a duty to respect their families and to marry early to avoid dishonoring the family to ensure the bride's chastity and purity.

Limited Parental Education: Because Africa is a developing continent, most countries have a significant population with no education or training. This exposes them to many social superstitions and misconceptions

regarding marriage. This makes them susceptible to superstitions and misconceptions that have been passed down from generation to generation regarding early marriage. According to Mooyaart & Liefbroer (2016), parental education has a significant impact on the timing and type of marriage. Limited or no access to health information services is a significant factor contributing to the continued occurrence of early female child marriage. This is because parents who practice this practice are not fully aware of the impact that early marriage of girls has on their daughters. These include housework restrictions, sexual abuse, neglect of education, risk of maternal mortality, vesicovaginal fistula (VVF), and sexually transmitted infections (Mooyaart & Liefbroer, 2016).

Research and intervention programs on early marriage are increasing in Africa. In some parts of Africa and northern Nigeria, women marry much earlier than in other parts of the world and, as a result, become pregnant earlier. However, sociocultural factors associated with early marriage have not been adequately investigated. The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of early marriage on girls' education in Nigeria, the impact of early marriage on girls in Nigeria, and potential ways to address the challenges of early marriage among girls in Nigeria. The researcher used the primary data of the survey conducted. Chi-square statistical techniques were used in the analysis, and the results clearly show that there is evidence that early marriage has a negative impact on girls' education. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to reduce the rate of early marriage among girls, as it has a negative impact on educational development and consequently means a setback in the growth and development of the Nigerian economy. Promoting girls' education seems to be an ideal solution to curb early marriage among girls. Governments and NGOs should provide the necessary support for girls' education, such as free books, uniforms, and scholarships. The essence is to get rid of unhealthy habits and traditional practices that are harmful to the development of the girl.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the Health Belief Model (HBM), which was developed in 1988 by Rosenstock et al (Adeyemi, 2022) and revised to include two additional health-related measures. According to Adeyemi (2022), the health belief model states: "A person's health-related behavior depends on his or her perception of four key areas: (i) the perceived threat and net benefit of preventive measures; and (ii) the perceived susceptibility to infectious disease." This theory is relevant to this study in area of awareness of the illness, (iii) the severity of the underlying illness, and (iv) the barriers to acting (Adeyemi, 2022). These concepts have been proposed to explain people's "willingness to act." Cues to action will activate this willingness and encourage open action. For example, a person may engage in health-related behavior (e.g., preventing early marriage) if they believe that the behavior can prevent negative health conditions such as sexually transmitted infections, infant/infant mortality, or pregnancy complications

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(Adeyemi,2022). It is also relevant to the study regarding preventive measures against evidence of the influence of sociocultural risk factors.

Empirical Review

Azuka & Brambaifa (2018) investigated girl child marriage, its causes, effects, and remedial strategies in Nigerian society. Although child marriage is a fundamental human rights violation, it is accepted and practiced in many societies. Therefore, this study is because this practice seeks to analyze the causes and effects on Nigerian society and determine whether the available solutions are acceptable or not. To do this, an opinion survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire rated on a 4-point Likert scale and based on 3 research questions and her 4 null hypotheses. The findings showed that the continued occurrence of early girl marriage is due to many factors, including poverty, parental ignorance, traditional practices, peer pressure, and family alliances, to name a few. This suggests that it is due to the social consequences of early marriage for girls include social unrest, strain on the health sector, high levels of illiteracy, increased mortality, and high divorce rates. The study found that some of the remedial strategies include empowering girls, introducing policies to improve gender equality, and launching awareness campaigns on the effects of early girl marriage. Education was recommended for both men and women in this study because it strengthens and improves participants' lifestyles and decision-making.

Ahmed,Mohammed & Adel (2023) investigated the association between early marriage and women's socio-economic and socio-cultural factors in Sudan: A predictive model. This study aimed to assess the prevalence and determinants of socio-economic and socio-cultural factors associated with early marriage among women in Gezira State, Sudan. This study is based on primary data from Gezira province (2021).and employed the use of questionnaires as the data collection tool. This questionnaire was designed to collect data on variables associated with early marriage. Descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and logistic regression models were used to analyze the collected data. The results showed that the early marriage rate among women in Gezira region was 54.9%, and the early marriage rate in rural areas was 57.3%, and there was a significant relationship between early marriage and unemployment. The results of the logistic regression model showed that there was a significant relationship between early marriage and factors such as area, wealth index quantile, unemployment, and media exposure. The model found no significant association between early marriage and factors such as poor economic conditions that lead to early marriage, although early marriage is one of the symptoms of urbanization. Immigrant culture supports early marriage, which establishes a good maternal relationship between child and mother. Early marriage is common in Gezira region and is related to socio-economic and socio-cultural factors.

Pourtaheri1, Seyedeh, Monavvar, Hamideh & Nooshin(2023), studied Prevalence and factors associated with child marriage, a systematic review. The objectives of the present study were: 1) to systematically review the

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prevalence of child marriage in different parts of the world 2) to represent trends in child marriage over time 3) to recognize the factors that affect child marriage. A comprehensive search was conducted for all English-language studies that measured the prevalence of child marriage and its correlates from 2000 to March 2022, indexed in PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Poplin, and Google Scholar databases. Child marriage is defined as marriage under the age of 18. In the present study, Joanna Briggs' quality assessment checklist was used for data collection. Two independent reviewers reviewed all the articles³⁴ eligible prevalence articles, and 14 trend articles were included in the study with data from 127,945 participants. The prevalence of child marriage ranged between 1.8% to 90.85%. In most studies, the trend of child marriage was decreasing. The most important individual factors include the respondent's education and occupation, interpersonal factors such as the education and occupation of parents and husband, family size and type. Community factors include socioeconomic status, region, residence, ethnicity, and religion at the social level. This study concluded that despite a central focus of research and policies on interventions that decrease child marriage, this phenomenon is still prevalent in many places. Therefore, further specific interventions are required to improve education, and reduce poverty and inequality. This may help achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. A review of previous studies appears to have focused on other factors without considering the contribution of sociocultural risk to early marriage among girls in different countries, including Nigeria. The consequences of such measures have a significant impact on the failure to achieve gender equality, poverty, economic and cultural norms, and practices, etc. in Africa and other third world countries.

3.0 Methodology

The study was a survey design that sought the opinions of different categories of respondents in northern Nigeria on the topics investigated. The study population consisted of married young girls, male and female health workers, and male and female NGO workers. Because the exact population size could not be determined, a convenience sampling method was used to compile the study sample. Although the study sample was selected for practical reasons, as the population is innumerable, a conscious effort was made to ensure diversity and comprehensive coverage of the study area. Therefore, for the purpose of the study, a sample of 1059 respondents were created consisting of 347 early married girls, 379 NGO workers (women and men), and 333 health workers (women and men). These respondents were drawn from Yobe, Adamawa, and Taraba respectively. The main instrument of this study is based on a four-point rating scale model, and it was structured into two clusters for section B is made up of 20 items on Very High Extent VHE (4), High Extent, HE (3) Low Extent LE (2) and Very Low Extent VLE (1). Thus, the decision on each of the items was guided by the following rules: 1-1.49 =very low extent, 1.50-2.49= low extent, 2.50-3.49 =high extent, 3.50-4.00= very high extent. The instrument was validated using facial and content parameters for data

collection. Validity is the process of determining how well a researcher tests what they are trying to measure (Atim, 2017). Therefore, to ensure validity, a Cronbach alpha scale coefficient of 0.87 was adopted for this instrument. The data collected and compiled for the study was analyzed with descriptive statistics of Mean and standard deviation, while the null hypotheses were tested using ANOVA.

4.0 Results and Discussion of Findings

4.1: Data Presentation and Analysis of the Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the Gender inequalities associated with early marriage in Northern part of Nigeria?

Table 4.1: Mean Response on the Extent to which Gender inequalities associated with early marriage in Northern part of Nigeria.

S/ N	Statement Items	Early Married Girls (N= 320)			NGO workers (N= 342)			Health Workers (N=305)		
		$\bar{X}_1$	SD ₁	RK	$\bar{X}_2$	SD ₂	RK	$\bar{X}_3$	SD ₃	RK
1.	Early marriage is often seen as ensuring women's economic security, as many girls are victims of female genital mutilation (FGM).	2.22	0.72	LE	3.2	0.77	HE	3.67	0.71	VHE
2.	Girls often drop out of school to get married, limiting their educational and economic opportunities.	3.05	1.19	HE	3.09	1.19	HE	3.02	1.22	HE
3.	Women are denied inheritance rights, and their assets often pass to male relatives.	3.18	0.77	HE	3.22	0.78	HE	3.19	0.77	HE
4.	Many parents believe that it is better for girls to marry young, as	3.66	0.54	VHE	2.67	0.54	LE	3.39	0.55	HE

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	it is believed that the earlier, they marry,									
	the less likely they are to be "spoiled".									
5.	Girls are often considered "ready" for marriage once they reach puberty, regardless of their actual age.	3.13	1.18	HE	3.19	1.18	HE	3.08	1.21	HE
	Grand Mean	3.05	0.88	HE	3.07	0.89	HE	3.27	0.89	HE

Source: Researcher's Field Result, 2024

Table 4.1 shows the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which gender inequalities are associated with early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria. The result shows that the grand mean for items 1, 2, 3, 4, -5, for the three categories of respondents were higher than the decision mean of 2.5 (that is **3.05**, **3.07**, and **3.27**), which shows that all the women groups (Early Married Girls, NGO workers, and health workers) share the same opinion that to a high extent the Gender inequalities is associated with early marriage in Northern part of Nigeria. This is further confirmed by the items-by-item analyses which mean ratings for these groups are higher than the benchmark of 2.5 with lower values of their respective standard deviations showing the homogeneity in their responses.

Research Question 2: What are the Poverty and Economic Factors Associated with Early Marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria?

Table 4.2: Mean Response of the respondents on the Extent to which Poverty and Economic Factors Associated with Early Marriage in Northern part of Nigeria.

	Items	Early Married Girls (N= 320)			NGO workers (N= 342)			Health (N=305) workers		
		$\bar{X}_1$	SD ₁	RK	$\bar{X}_2$	SD ₂	RK	$\bar{X}_3$	SD ₃	RK
6.	Many families marry their daughters early to reduce the number of mouths to feed.	3.61	0.75	VHE	3.21	0.74	HE	3.68	1.75	VHE

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7.	Girls often marry older men who can financially support their families.	3.55	0.61	VHE	3.5	0.63	VHE	3.55	0.61	VHE
8.	In some cases, families receive a bride price (dowry) when their daughters marry, which they can use to pay for other family members' expenses	3.74	0.44	HE	3.73	0.44	VHE	3.76	0.43	HE
9.	Girls who marry early often have little education and have difficulty finding work and supporting themselves financially.	3.2	1.25	HE	3.06	1.3	HE	3.15	1.29	HE
10.	Many girls who marry young become dependent	3.36	0.7	HE	3.6	0.75	HE	3.39	0.69	HE
	Grand Mean	3.49	0.75	HE	3.42	0.77	HE	3.51	0.95	VHE

Source: Researcher's Field Result, 2024

Table 4.2 contains the mean response on the extent to which poverty and economic factors are associated with early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria. The result shows that the grand mean for items 6, 7, 8, 9, and -10, for the three categories of respondents were higher than the decision mean of 2.5 (that is **3.49, 3.42, and 3.51**), which shows that all the women groups (Early Married Girls, NGO workers and health workers) share the same opinion except respondents who were health workers which opined that to a very high extent the poverty and economic factors associated with early marriage in Northern part of Nigeria. This is further confirmed by the items-by-item analyses which mean ratings for these groups are higher than the benchmark of 2.5 with lower values of their respective standard deviations showing the homogeneity in their responses. **Research Question 3:** What are the Cultural Norms and Practices Associated with Early Marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria?

Table 4.5: Mean Response of the Respondents on the extent to which Cultural Norms and Practices Associated with Early Marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria.

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	Items	Early Married Girls (N=320)			NGO workers (N=342)			Health (N=305) workers		
		$\bar{X}_1$	SD ₁	RK	$\bar{X}_2$	SD ₂	RK	$\bar{X}_3$	SD ₃	RK
11	Many families believe that it is best for girls to get married as soon as they reach puberty to protect their honor and virginity.	3.73	0.48	VHE	3.73	0.44	HE	3.76	0.43	VHE
12	Many communities believe that girls are ready for marriage after a certain age, regardless of their actual maturity or ability to consent.	3.17	1.26	HE	3.06	1.30	HE	3.15	1.29	HE
13	Dowry (bride price) is seen as strengthening social bonds between families, making it difficult for families to reject marriage proposals.	3.15	0.75	HE	3.17	0.73	HE	3.16	0.74	HE
14	Purdah (female segregation) is the practice in which women are separated from men and are not allowed to leave their homes without a male escort.	3.62	0.57	HE	3.63	0.55	HE	3.62	0.57	HE
15.	Watta satta (marriage exchange) is a custom in which two families agree to marry each other's sons and daughters.	3.34	0.46	HE	3.35	0.48	HE	3.37	0.49	HE
	Grand Mean	3.40	0.70	HE	3.39	0.70	HE	3.41	0.70	HE

Source: Researcher's Field Result, 2024

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Table 4.5 contains the mean response on the extent to which cultural norms and practices are associated with early marriage in the northern part of Nigeria. The result shows that the grand mean for items 11, 12, 13, 14, and -15, for the three categories of respondents were higher than the decision mean of 2.5 (that is **3.40**, **3.39**, and **3.41**), which shows that all the women groups (Early Married Girls, NGO workers, and health workers) share the same opinion that to a high extent cultural norms and practices associated with early marriage in Northern part of Nigeria. This is further confirmed by the items-by-item analyses which mean ratings for these groups are higher than the benchmark of 2.5 with lower values of their respective standard deviations showing the homogeneity in their responses.

Research Question 4: What are recommended measures aimed at mitigating the impact of early marriage in the in Northern part of Nigeria?

Table 4.5: Mean Response of the respondents on the recommended measures aimed at mitigating the impact of early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria.

	Items	Early Married Girls (N= 320)			NGO workers (N= 342)			Health (N=305) workers		
		$\bar{X}_1$	SD ₁	RK	$\bar{X}_2$	SD ₂	RK	$\bar{X}_3$	SD ₃	RK
16	Provide girls and boys with access to quality education, including sex education.	3.11	1.15	HE	3.13	1.14	HE	3.06	1.19	HE
17	Provide economic opportunity and financial literacy training for girls and women.	3.16	0.76	HE	3.19	0.76	HE	3.17	0.76	HE
18	Work with community leaders to change social norms around early marriage.	3.34	0.47	HE	3.35	0.48	HE	3.37	0.49	HE
19	Strengthen laws and policies that protect girls and women from child and early marriage.	3.50	1.15	VHE	3.13	1.14	HE	3.16	1.19	HE
20.	Work with religious leaders to raise awareness about the dangers of early marriage.	3.15	0.76	HE	3.19	0.76	HE	3.27	0.76	HE

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	Grand Mean	3.25	0.86	HE	3.20	0.86	HE	3.21	0.88	HE
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Source: Researcher's Field Result, 2024

Table 4.5 shows the mean response of the respondents on some of the recommended measures aimed at mitigating the impact of early marriage in the in Northern part of Nigeria. The result shows that the grand mean for items 11, 12, 13, 14, -15, for the three categories of respondents were higher than the decision mean of 2.5 (that is **3.25**, **3.20**, and **3.21**), which shows that all the women groups (Early Married Girls, NGO workers and health workers) share the same opinion that to a high extent some of recommended measures aimed at mitigating the impact of early marriage in the in Northern part of Nigeria. Some of the measures include; providing girls and boys with access to quality education, including sex education, providing economic opportunity and financial literacy training for girls and women, working with community leaders to change social norms around early marriage, strengthening laws and policies that protect girls and women from child and early marriage and work with religious leaders to raise awareness about the dangers of early marriage. This is further confirmed by the items-by-item analyses which mean ratings for these groups are higher than the benchmark of 2.5 with lower values of their respective standard deviations showing the homogeneity in their responses.

4.2 Test of Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of early married girls, NGO workers, and health workers on the extent to which gender inequalities and early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria.

Table 4.6: ANOVA Statistic on the difference in the mean ratings of early married girls, NGO workers, and Health Workers on the extent to which gender inequalities and early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria.

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	Means			Fcal	Fcrit	Decision
				Early Married Girls	NGO workers	Health Workers			
Between Groups	9.2451	2	4.6226	3.05	3.07	3.27	5.8793	0.0029	Rejected
Within Groups	757.9381	964	0.7862						
Total	767.1832	966							

Source: Researcher's Field Result, 2024

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Table 4.6 contains the results of the ANOVA Statistic on the difference in the mean ratings of early married girls, NGO workers, and Health Workers on the extent to which gender inequalities and early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria. The results show the degree of freedom (df) ((2, 964), 0.05 level of significance, $F_{crit}=0.976$. Since $F_{crit}=0.0029 < F_{cal} = 5.8793$, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of early married girls, NGO workers and health workers on the extent to which gender inequalities and early marriage in Northern part of Nigeria. This simply means that there is a significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of early-married girls, NGO workers, and health workers on the extent to which gender inequalities and early marriage in the Northern part of Nigeria.

2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of early married girls, NGO workers, and Health Workers on the extent to which poverty and economic factors and early marriage in selected states in the Northern part of Nigeria.

Table 4.7: ANOVA Statistic on the difference in the mean ratings of early married girls, NGO workers, and Health Workers on the extent to which poverty and economic factors and early marriage in selected states in the Northern part of Nigeria.

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	Means			Fcal	Fcrit	Decision
				Early Married Girls	NGO workers	Health Workers			
Between Groups	1.4687	2	0.7343	3.49	3.42	3.51	1.0792	0.976	Accepted
Within Groups	655.9764	964	0.6805						
Total	657.4451	966							

Source: Researcher's Field Result, 2024

Table 4.7 shows the results of the ANOVA Statistic on the difference in the mean ratings of early married girls, NGO workers, and Health Workers on the extent to which poverty and economic factors and early marriage in selected states in the Northern part of Nigeria. The results show the degree of freedom (df) ((2, 964), 0.05 level of significance, $F_{crit}=0.976$ since $F_{crit}=0.976 < F_{cal} = 1.0792$ we reject the null hypothesis while the alternative hypothesis which says that there is significant difference in the mean ratings of early

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married girls, NGO workers and Health Workers on the extent to which poverty and economic factors and early marriage in selected states in the Northern part of Nigeria is accepted.

3. **There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of early married girls, NGO workers and Health Workers on the Extent to which cultural norms and practices and early marriage in selected states in the Northern part of Nigeria.**

Table 4.8: ANOVA Statistic on difference in the mean ratings of early married girls, NGO workers and Health Workers on the Extent to which poverty and economic factors and early marriage in selected states in the Northern part of Nigeria.

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	Means			Fcal	Fcrit	Decision
				Early Married Girls	NGO workers	Health Workers			
Between Groups	0.0646	2	0.0323	3.40	3.39	3.41	0.0659	0.976	Accepted
Within Groups	472.3600	964	0.4900						
Total	472.4246	966							

Source: Researcher's Field Result, 2024

Table 4.8 contains the results of the ANOVA Statistic on the difference in the mean ratings of early married girls, NGO workers, and Health Workers on the extent to which poverty and economic factors and early marriage in selected states in the Northern part of Nigeria. The results show the degree of freedom (df) ((2, 964), 0.05 level of significance, Fcrit=0.976. Since Fcrit=0.976>Fcal =0.0659 we accept the null hypothesis which means that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of early married girls, NGO workers, and Health Workers on the extent to which cultural norms and practices and early marriage in selected states in the Northern part of Nigeria.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The findings in Table 4.1, Research Question 1 revealed that from the data analyzed, gender inequality is highly associated with early marriage in northern Nigeria. The results obtained from the respondents' answers for points 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are that many girls are victims of female genital mutilation (FGM), girls often drop out of school and often considered "ready" for marriage once they reach puberty, regardless of their actual age. Women are denied inheritance rights, and their assets are often transferred to male relatives. Many

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parents believe that girls should get married young. This is because it is believed that the earlier you get married, the less likely you are to be "spoiled," and girls are often deemed "ripe" for marriage sooner. They reach puberty regardless of their actual age. However, the results for Hypothesis 1 indicate that there are significant differences in the mean ratings of responses from early-married girls, NGO workers, and health workers regarding the extent of gender inequality and early marriage in northern Nigeria.

The findings of Table 4.2, Research Question 1 show that from the data analyzed, the respondents held the same opinion, except for the respondents who work in the health sector and believe that poverty and economic factors are very high. This finding was made possible because hypothesis testing confirmed that there are significant differences in the mean scores of early-married girls, NGO workers, and health workers in some states in northern Nigeria regarding levels of poverty, economic factors, and early marriage. is further supported. The findings in Table 4.3 show the average responses on the extent to which cultural norms and practices are associated with early marriage in northern Nigeria. The results show that the respondent's overall mean for items 11, 12, 13, 14, and -15 in these three categories were higher than the decision mean of 2.5 (i.e., 3.40, 3.39, and 3.41). This shows that the respondents share the opinion that cultural norms and customs have a lot to do with early marriage in northern Nigeria. The results of items 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 that emerged from the respondents' responses indicate that many families believe that girls should marry as soon as they reach adolescence to protect their honor and reputation. This shows that respondents believe that virginity is nothing in many northern communities. It is believed that girls of a certain age are ready for marriage, regardless whether they are actually mature or have capacity to consent, and dowry (bride price) is held between families. It is believed to strengthen social bonds between women and families, making it difficult for families to reject marriage proposals. Purdah (female segregation) is the practice in which women are separated from men and not allowed to leave their homes without a male escort, and vatta satta (marriage exchange) is the practice in which two families exchange for each other's sons and daughters. This result is further supported by testing Hypothesis 3, which shows that the average ratings of early-married girls, NGO workers, and health workers on the extent to which cultural norms and customs and early marriage are considered in the selected provinces. It was confirmed that there was no significant difference.

The results in Table 4.4 show the average responses of respondents to some recommended measures aimed at reducing the impact of early marriage in northern Nigeria. All women's groups (early married girls, NGO workers, health workers) share the same opinion that recommended measures aimed at reducing the impact of early marriage in northern Nigeria include providing girls and boys with access to quality education, including sex education, economic opportunities, and financial literacy training for girls and women, work with community leaders to change social norms around early marriage, and support girls and women, raise

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awareness about the dangers of early marriage by working with religious leaders to strengthen laws and policies to protect children.

Conclusion

Sociocultural risk factors associated with early marriage in Nigeria have far-reaching effects on various aspects of an individual's life, including education, health, psychological well-being, and socio-economic development. Addressing these risk factors requires a multifaceted approach, including legal reform, community engagement, and educational efforts. By empowering girls and women, promoting gender equality, and combating harmful cultural practices, Nigeria can end early marriage and work towards building a more inclusive and just society. Based on the findings, the study recommended, among other things, that both girls and boys should be provided access to quality education, including sex education. Furthermore, economic opportunities and financial literacy training should be provided to girls and women to reduce poverty and its associated economic factors. Given the prevalence of early marriage in northern Nigeria, community leaders need to work with the government to change early marriage and the social norms associated with it as well strengthen laws and policies that protect girls and women from child and early marriage.

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