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Early marriages and parental influence: An evidence from Momba District in Tanzania

James Anthony Nyangas[1*] and Tabia Aswile[2]

[1]Department of Educational Foundations and Management, School of Education, Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), P. O. Box 3038, Morogoro-Tanzania.
[2]Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, J. M. Kikwete Secondary School, P. O. Box 190, Tunduma, Tanzania.

This study aims to find how parents influence early marriage among girls in Momba District. Households' socio-economic characteristics were explored as factors influencing parents to marry off their daughters early. Cross-sectional design was adopted in the collection of data from 120 respondents in Momba District. Multiple regressions were used to analyze the data. Results showed that age, occupation, and household size were significant factors influencing parents to marry off their children early. The study recommends that the parents and community should be educated to discourage early marriage. Education can also help them to make informed decisions. Households should diversify their economic activities as majority in the area rely on farming which is a very sensitive occupation. Parents should also maintain small family sizes and see girls as having equal rights to education and growth as boys. The government should enforce policies that prohibit early marriage and set up strict laws to end early marriage practices in society.

Key words: Early marriage, parental influence, Momba District.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is wedlock or a social union between man and woman and becoming one with each other (Gallagher, 2002). According to The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2001), early marriage is considered a marriage, which is conducted when girls are under eighteen (18), before they are physically, psychologically and physiologically prepared to undertake the marital responsibilities. Although the marital age is generally on the rise, the marriages of children and adolescents below 18 years old are still in wide practice (UNICEF, 2001). Children marriages are fairly spreading in some countries of Africa and South Asia (UNICEF, 1998). Africa has over 70% of children marriage, which is the highest observed rate in the world. The countries with a high rate of marriage under 18 years old are Niger, Mali, Chad, and Ethiopia.

Tanzania's prevalence rate of child marriage is among the highest in the world, and on average two out of five girls are married before 18 years (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2012).

The extent of early marriage varies from society to society. The prevalence of early marriage is also highest in Shinyanga, Tabora, Mara, Dodoma, Lindi, Singida, and Mbeya (UNFPA, 2006). Child marriage is a serious

*Corressponding author. E-mail: nyangas@sua.ac.tz.

problem, and it is common due to various reasons including poverty, financial status, illiteracy, and rural residence (Levine et al., 2009). Today, many parents, relatives, or guardians conduct involuntary marriages on their children (Mutyaba, 2011). Many children particularly teenagers as young as 14 to 15 years old girls are forced into marriage. They may drop out of school to get married. As such they are denied the opportunity to mature and make decisions on their own before marriage (UNICEF, 2009).

Early marriage in Tanzania has become a serious problem; it leads to school dropouts and early motherhood in most regions of the country, particularly in the rural, coastal, and poor populations in urban areas (UNFPA, 2006). The Tanzania Marriage Act (United Republic of Tanzania (URT), 1971) gave power to parents and judges to marry off as young as 14 years old children. This law provided a loophole for the parents to marry off their children in the past. Even though this law allowed marriage at such young age, the practice violated girls' human rights (Jensen and Thornton, 2003). Early marriage leads to disruption in the accumulation of human resources due to school drop-out, removal from labour market, and adverse health effects resulting from early child-bearing (UNICEF, 2011).

In many early marriages, girls experience physical and sexual abuse from their husbands and in-laws after being married and become mothers at a young age (Nyakubenga, 2009). This leads to reproductive consequences during birth including maternal death, obstetrics fistula, premature delivery, malnutrition, and anemia. In Momba District, this problem is very serious; it has been found that many young girls that get married before their 18th birthday are unable to continue with their schooling (UNFPA, 2012). This problem exists mostly in families with a poor living standard. Even though many researchers (Levine et al., 2009; Mothiba, 2012; Panday et al., 2009) attempted to find out the factors contributing to early marriage, this study intended to determine what influence parents have on early marriage in Momba District, Songwe Region, Tanzania.

Objectives and questions of the study

The main objective of the study is to determine parental influence on early marriage. Specifically, the study aims to examine the factors influencing parents to marry off their children early.

This study was guided by the following question:

What factors cause parents to marry off their children early and their influence on early marriage?

Conceptual framework

Early marriage is among the major socio-cultural customs

influenced by parents/guardians of the girls. Therefore, it is essential to understand the factors influencing parents to marry off their children early at the local level. The high rate of early marriage of girls is associated with poverty, dowry, lack of education, peer pressure, poor parenting causing girls to engage in early marriage (International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), 2015). Some girls get married early because of the hard life of their families. Also, the illiteracy of parents contributes to early marriage because parents fail to realize the importance of educating their daughters. In a family with good living standards and a high level of education the rate of early marriage in their family is relatively low. This relationship is shown in Figure 1.

METHODOLOGY

Study area

This research was conducted in Momba District, Songwe Region, Tanzania. The region is located in the Southwestern part of the Southern highlands of Tanzania. It was created in 2016 and was a former part of Mbeya Region. Momba District is one of the four districts of Songwe Region. The district has a population size of about 196,818 (URT, 2012). It lies at Latitudes 8°10' South and 9° 15' South of the Equator and Longitudes 32°5' East and 32° 45' East of the Greenwich meridian. It is bordered by Zambia and Rukwa to the west, Chunya District to the north, Ileje District to the South, and Mbozi District to the east (URT, 2017).
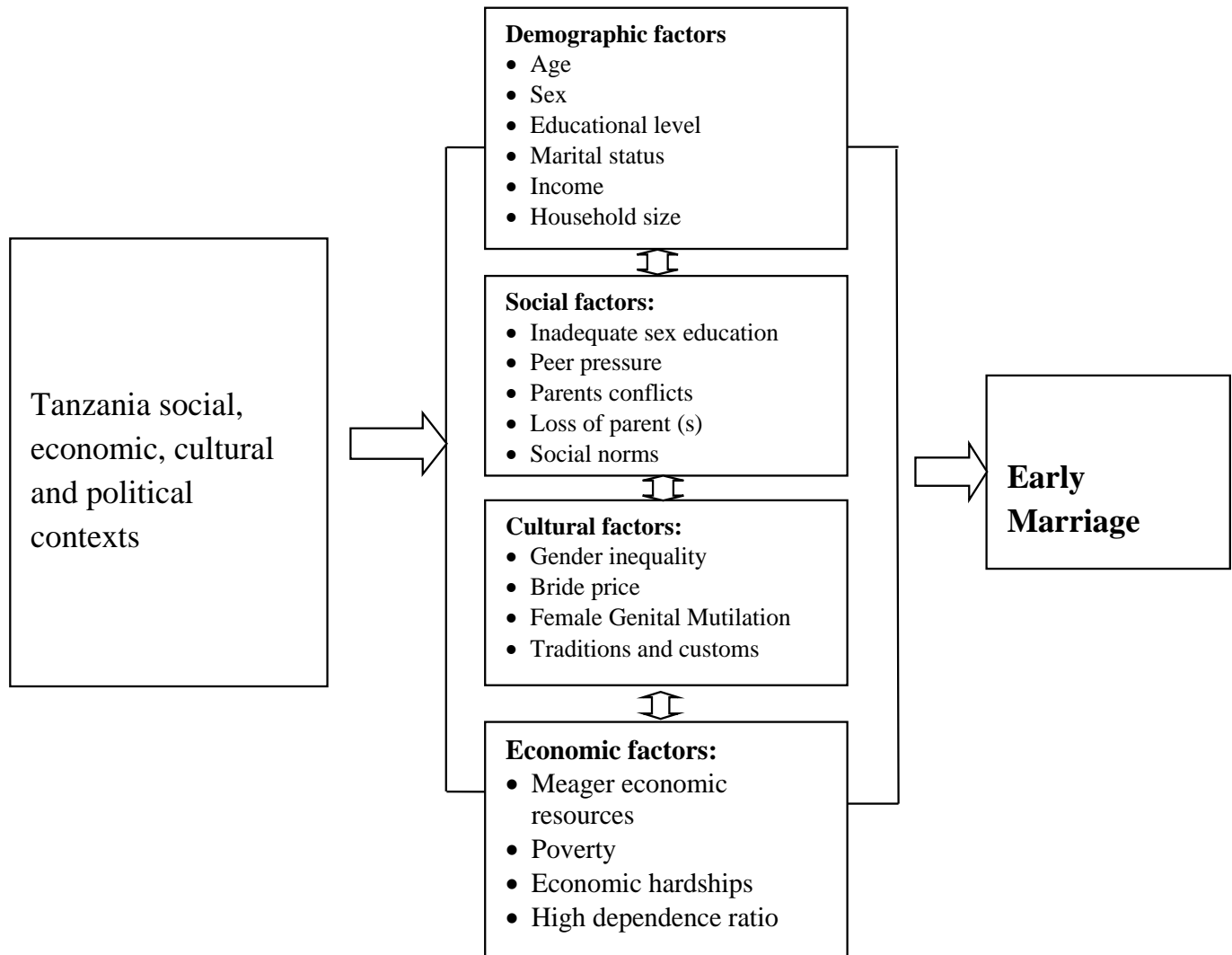
Study design

In this study, a cross-sectional design was adopted in the collection of data on the influence of parents on early marriage. This design was chosen because it was quicker, cheaper, and enabled the researcher to collect data at a single point in time (Levin, 2006). This design is also appropriate for descriptive studies and measuring of relationships between variables (Varkevisser et al., 2003).

Data and instruments

In the study area, both primary and secondary data were collected. The interview schedules were conducted to capture the primary data on parental influence on early marriage. Secondary data were obtained from various literature from the library and the internet. Focus Group Discussions were used to get in-depth information about early marriages in the study area. Two groups (of 10 people each) were formed according to gender and age. Also, Key Informants were used, whereby the elders and leaders who are well versed in the history of the community were selected to offer some information about the prevalence of early marriages in Momba District. Data collection instruments included questionnaires, which were used to collect primary data, and checklists or interview guides for the collection of qualitative data.

Target population

The target population of the study included all parents/guardians and households used as the unit of analysis in which heads of households were interviewed.

Demographic factors
- Age
- Sex
- Educational level
- Marital status
- Income
- Household size

Social factors:
- Inadequate sex education
- Peer pressure
- Parents conflicts
- Loss of parent (s)
- Social norms

Cultural factors:
- Gender inequality
- Bride price
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Traditions and customs

Economic factors:
- Meager economic resources
- Poverty
- Economic hardships
- High dependence ratio

Tanzania social, economic, cultural and political contexts

Early Marriage

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the influence of parents on early marriages (Source: Author).

Sampling of the study

Multistage sampling was adopted for this study; purposive sampling was used to select the region and district and random sampling was used to select the parents among the households. The criteria for the sampling frame of this study involved the list of all parents/guardians from the households. A sample size of 120 respondents was randomly drawn from the study population. Saunders et al. (2007) acknowledge a sub-sample of 30 household heads as the minimum requirement for statistical data analysis irrespective of population.

Data analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed. Qualitative data, obtained from the focus group discussions, were analyzed by using content analysis. While, the quantitative data were coded, edited, compiled, and analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The quantitative analysis included both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive

statistics analyzed percentages and frequency, while inferential statistics analyzed the t-test and Chi-square to test the significant associations among parents' influence on early marriage, if any. Multiple regressions analysis was used to determine the influence of the parents to marry off their daughters early. The regression model is expressed as:

$$y_i = \alpha + a_1 x_{i1} + a_2 x_{i2...} + a_7 x_{i7} + u_i$$

Where y_i is the early marriage, x_i is the explanatory variables for parental influence on early marriage (x_{i1}=Sex, x_{i2}=Age, x_{i3}=Occupation, x_{i4}=Educational level, x_{i5}=Income status, x_{i6}=Peer influence, x_{i7}=Household size) while a is coefficient of the explanatory variables, α is the constant and u_l is an error term.

During regression, multicollinearity diagnosis was done to detect if there was a correlation amongst the independent (x_i) variables. The multicollinearity problem can be described by the presence of linear or near-linear relationships among explanatory variables (Pallant, 2011). The diagnostic test of the model on multicollinearity was done by using the Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) test, which builds in the regression of each independent

Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.

Variable	Respondent	Proportion (%)
Sex	Male	72.7
	Female	27.3
Occupation	Farmer	59.1
	Student	27.3
	Employed	13.6
Age	Below 35	61.3
	36-40	20.5
	41-55	11.4
	Above 55	6.8
Household size	Below 2 people	4.0
	Between 2 and 3 people	11.0
	Between 4 and 5 people	35.0
	Above 5 people	50.0

variable. As a rule of thumb, a tolerance value less than 0.10 and a VIF above 10 suggest multicollinearity (Pallant, 2011).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

Socio-economic characteristics of respondents included the variables such as sex, occupation, age, and household size. The results are presented in Table 1. Table 1 shows that 72.7% of respondents were females, while the remaining 27.3% were males. According to these results, female respondents dominated the area. From this finding, we can assume that there are more females than males in the study area. About 59.1% of the respondents are farmers, 27% are students and 18% are employed. The results show that majority of the respondents (61.3%) were aged below 35 while few respondents were above 36 years old. Such a high proportion of young household heads has implications on child marriage. About 50% of the household's size has above 5 people, 29% of households have 4 and 5 people and 4% of households have below 2 people. The pressure of large household size makes parents unable to take care of their children.

The influence of parents on early marriage among girls

In this study, multiple regressions were used to determine parents' influence on early marriages in Momba District. Before regression analysis multicollinearity diagnosis was

carried out and the results indicated that no variable had a VIF value less than 1 and above 10. Results are presented in Table 2. In addition, the Watson D test was conducted. The results showed that Durbin Watson was 2.068, indicating that there was a positive correlation. Also, it can help to determine predictors which are significant (Kutner et al., 2005). As a rule, the statistic values in the range of 1.5 to 2.5 are relatively normal.

Table 2 shows that most of the respondents allow their children to marry early due to different reasons: age, occupation, and household size, which are significant (P ≤ 0.022, P ≤ 0.021, P ≤ 0.011 respectively).

Age of respondents

The age of the household's head had a great influence in determining child marriage. It was found that most of the household heads (61.3%) were below 35 years old, which indicates that parents at this age are not mature enough. The association between age and early marriage was statistically significant (P ≤ 0.022). Parents in this age category are likely to allow their children who are under 18 years old to get married due to their lack of maturity. UNICEF (2011) noted that lack of maturity has proven to be one of the significant reasons for the higher rate of child marriages among girls. Parents and household heads decide to marry off their daughters with little regard for the consequences. They fairly look upon marriage as a family-building strategy, an economic arrangement, or a way of protecting girls from unwelcome sexual advances. Regarding age, it was also noted during FGD that one elderly woman informed us of very distinctive characteristics of young household heads, especially

Table 2. Factors determining parents' influence on early marriage in Momba District.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients			Standardized coefficients		Co linearity Statistics	
	B	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	5.514	2.122		2.599	0.014		
Sex	0.134	0.456	0.049	0.293	0.771	0.804	1.244
Age	-0.802	1.281	-0.631	-0.626	0.022*	0. 022	1.560
Occupation	0.484	1.327	0.377	0.365	0.021*	0.718	1.892
Education level	-0.319	0.408	-0.129	-0.782	0.440	0.815	1.227
Income status	-0.560	0.454	-0.204	-1.234	0.226	0.813	1.229
Peer Influence	-0.080	0.139	-0.094	-0.576	0.568	0.831	1.204
Household size	-0.248	1.820	-0.197	-0.137	0.011*	0.892	1.295

*Significance at 0.05.

stepfathers:

"… Households composed of young couples, particularly with very young stepfathers who are household heads, have shown a tendency to marry off their daughters early." She added, "This happens because most of the young couples are not well settled and not yet matured to take care of family responsibilities, especially children care. By marrying off their daughters early they relieve off their shoulders from children's dependence and use the dowry which is obtained from marriage as the source of income to support the households" (FGD, Momba District).

The above findings imply that contrary to young couples older adults have experience which can be applied to endure difficulties that come with household responsibilities (Blane et al*.,* 2011). Also, when the parents consist of a young husband or household head, who is a stepfather to a daughter, is likely that the stepfather would like to relieve himself from the responsibility of children by marrying them off early. Older parents cope better with the stresses of children that occur in a household. Comparatively, younger parents may lack some means to cope with households' parental problems.

Occupation

Occupation of the respondents showed that there was significance between occupation and early marriage (P ≤ 0.021). In the study area, there are various occupations among which the farmers constitute the major proportion (over 59%). Farming occupation is unreliable with low-income to handle the households' needs and children. This is the main reason that influences early marriage as physical agricultural workers are more likely to practice early marriages. Farmers marry off their daughters to wealthy families so that they can gain economic benefits (Karam, 2015).

This view was also supported by the results obtained

from Focus Group Discussions conducted in Momba District. In such cases, parents get a greater financial offering from marrying off their young girls as bride price. Young females from the poorest families are married early because of poverty, and some of the girls perceive that marriage will be a solution to secure a better future. Marrying off their daughters allows parents to cut the family expenses. It is also a way to repay household debts, and resolve disputes, and the dowry obtained can be used to buy agricultural equipment so that parents can improve their agricultural activities and benefit from marrying off their daughter (ICRW, 2015).

Household size

The study shows that household size was statistically significant (P ≤ 0.011) among factors that influence the parents to marry off their daughters early. Often, the typical household in Africa consists of a large number of children (Lucy, 1969). This is due to the lack of safety net available for poor families. Thus, parents often rely on their offspring for support when growing old. Early marriage of children provides the parents with a greater chance of getting more children. Also, UNFPA (2006) attributed poor conditions and insufficient medical care, in which not all children are likely to survive as the reasons for having many children (family size) as a security measure.

When it happens that a household raises many children, to cut the cost of having many girls, child marriage is considered the best option when dealing with financial deficits (Duncan and Brook-Gunn, 2000). One tradition which is related to early marriage practices is the fact that the girl's family receives a form of "payment" for the girl. This can be either an amount of money or other forms of support from the husband to be and his family. For this reason, it can be more profitable for the household when girls enter marriage very young to get rid of the cost of the girl and possibly receive an amount of money in exchange (UNFPA, 2006).

According to Wagner et al. (1985), large families are more often engaged with early marriage and rapid birth of first children because the parents tend to cut the number of children in their family. This is the reason they marry off their daughters. In the study area, during Focus Group Discussions some discussants revealed that some families practice early marriage because of traditions and social norms. In this way, families appear to have a desire to conform that they are coordinating with the rest of society; hence, keeping the tradition of child marriage alive. Similarly, Singh and Samara (1996) acknowledge that staying away from shaming the family and instead of continuing with the tradition is often an alternative.

A lot of parents still prefer to live according to the old traditions. Also, many parents who marry off their daughters before they reach adulthood do that because they believe that they are acting in their best interests. They believe that marrying off their daughters is the best way to protect them from sexual violence and the husbands will provide them with their needs. On the contrary, early marriages can be the beginning of the problems which are associated with early pregnancy and child-birth. The babies given birth to by young mothers are more likely to suffer from various problems such as low birth weight, late physical and cognitive developments (Gaffney-Rhys, 2011).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that age, occupation, and household size were significant factors that influenced the parents to marry off their children early. The age of parents is one of the significant factors that influence early marriage due to the lack of maturity of the parents who marry off their daughters before they reach the legal age of getting married. Occupation of parents was also the reason parents marry off their daughters early. The majority of parents were farmers, and therefore this kind of occupation is unreliable in handling household needs. This study revealed that household size was significant in influencing the parents to marry off their daughters early as large families were mostly associated with early marriage. Parents allow early marriage because they are unable to take care of their families.

Due to these findings, the study recommends that education should be provided to the parents and community to discourage early marriage because the girls are not physically, psychologically, and physiologically ready for marriage. Also, young girls cannot make free and informed decisions. Households should diversify their economic activities as the majority in the area is relying on farming which is unreliable and sensitive to climate change variability; as such many farming households live in poverty due to low productivity and income. Parents should maintain small family sizes and regard girls as having equal rights to education and growth as their counterparts. Small household sizes will reduce over dependence on the households' heads, which will, in turn, discourage early marriages. The government should make and enforce policies that prohibit early marriage and set up strict laws for those who will practice early marriage.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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