

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Assessment of Motivations and Sequels of Early Marriage Among Females Attending Zagazig University Hospitals: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: While the age of marriage is generally on the rise, early marriage below the age of 18 is still widely practiced. According to UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2016, one out of five girls was married before the age of 18 y in the Middle East and North Africa. The most contributed factors for early marriage are poverty, cultural traditions, laws that allow child marriage, religious and social forces, patient ignorance, fear of being unmarried, illiteracy, and women's perceived inability to earn money. So, girls are often committed to an arranged marriage without their knowledge. A cross-sectional study was carried out on a sample size of 200 married females aged (18-50) years old, attending Zagazig university hospital, Sharkia governorate, Egypt.

Results: In the current study, ¼ of the studied females get married younger than 18 years old, 52.5% were against early marriage, 95% of them disagree with the idea that early marriage is protective for female, 80% had satisfactory knowledge about motives and sequel of early marriage with statistically significance in relation to education, occupation, social class, and the age of marriage.

Recommendations: For families, stop depriving their children of their childhood and not exposing them to early marriage's harmful effects. For government: application of penalties to those who violate the early marriage. For the community: show multi-sector cooperation to improve the community's socioeconomic status to eradicate early marriage. For other researchers: provide health education about hazards of early marriage.

Keywords: Early marriage, prevalence, motivation

INTRODUCTION

Before reaching a certain age, child marriage is a formal marriage, specified by some global organizations as high as the age of 18 years^[1]. According to United Nations (UN), "child, early, and forced marriage" Is considered a fundamental violation of human rights. Marriage before the age of 18 is undesirable because it denies females the right to the best possible general, sexual, and

reproductive health, as well as a life free of violence^[2].

Between 2000 and 2011, it was anticipated that one in every three women aged 20–24 years in the global south (excluding China) married before turning 18. In 2010, this amounted to roughly 67 million women, with one in nine or 12 percent of these women married before 15 years old. At the current rate, 39.000 girls are expected to marry under the age of 18 every day, resulting in over 14.2

million females marrying under 18 per year over the next decade. ^[3]. in Egypt, child marriage was 27% in 1995 and declined to 17% in 2008). Early marriage is still a social phenomenon worldwide, with over 17% of girls being early married ^[4].

Causes of child marriages include poverty, cultural traditions, laws that allow child marriages, religious and social pressures, male dominance, fear of remaining unmarried, illiteracy, and perceived inability of women to work for money, so girls are often committed to an arranged marriage without their knowledge ^[5].

Early married Girls tend to be from low-income and low education families. If they marry men outside their village, they must move, which creates an intensely lonely and isolated life ^[6]. Child marriage is a significant consequence of isolation, depression, sexually transmitted infection, cervical cancer, infant and maternal mortality ^[7].

Due to the considerable age gap between husband and wife, there is a difference in mutual understanding. As a result, the girls are rejected, isolated, and depressed as girls are immature, a high frequency of child and maternal death occurs ^[8].

Girls' virginal status and physical immaturity increase the risk of HIV transmission secondary to the hymenal, vaginal lacerations. Girls below 18 years have small pelvises and are not ready for childbearing. Therefore, morbidity and mortality rates are higher not only for girls but also for their children ^[9].

Girls who marry early have a lower chance of receiving an adequate level of education to live a healthy and empowered life ^[10].

Five evidence-based strategies by the international center for research on women to prevent child marriage: Empower girls with information and support networks, Provide economic support to girls and their families, Educate parents and community members, Enhance girls' access to high-quality education, and Encourage supportive policies for the next generation of development programs to make ending child marriage a priority ^[11].

Rationale for selection

There is a spread of early marriage among people less than 18 years in the Middle East and north of Africa, especially low socioeconomic and uneducated people in rural areas.

There are many adverse sequences of early marriage on teenagers, who are deprived of their childhood period, bear the responsibilities of marriage, the harmful effects on society, and increased divorce among young women. Early marriage leads to the creations of destroyed generations of society.

AIM OF WORK & OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to prevent child marriage and decrease its adverse sequence through the following objective:

- To assess the prevalence of early marriage among females attending Zagazig university hospital.
- To assess the association between early marriage and socioeconomic status.
- To highlight the consequences of early marriage in Sharkia.

SUBJECT AND METHOD

1. Study design: A cross-sectional study

2. Study setting and participant population: The participants were married females aged 18-50 years attending gynecology and obstetrics outpatient clinic in Zagazig University Hospital, Egypt. From February 2018 to August 2018.

3. Sampling technique:

By assuming that the average number of attendees to obstetrics and gynecology outpatient clinics during the year was 1800 females and the percentage of early marriage in Egypt 17% according to demographic health survey (2008), with the power of test 80% and confidence interval 95%, the sample size was calculated to be 194. By calculating a 10% non-response rate, the sample size was 213. Thirteen female participants refused to complete the interview so, the actual number of interviewed females was 200.

It was calculated by Epi-info (Epidemiological Information Package) software version 6.04.

4. Study tools:

A-Sociodemographic questionnaire by El-Gilany ^[12] for the socioeconomic characteristics of the studied group such as age, sex, and residence; also (Educational

level, Occupation, Income, and crowding index) were included. The total score of socioeconomic class equals 39. Subjects were classified into three social classes: Low lower than < 13-, Moderate from 13 to 26, and High socioeconomic status from 26 to 39.

B- A structured questionnaire by the researchers for assessing knowledge about motivates and sequel of early marriage. Its total score equal seven Unsatisfactory knowledge and satisfactory knowledge were classified according to median, total score below 50% scored to be unsatisfactory, and knowledge score above 50% was satisfactory.

5-Administrative and ethical design:

After explaining the research benefits to all participants, an informed verbal consent was obtained.

Data management

The collected data was computerized, statistically analyzed, and presented by tables and graphs using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 16. Frequencies and percentages were used to reflect Descriptive data. Mean and standard deviation was used to summarize quantitative results. Chi-squared test (χ^2) was used to compare categorical variables. P-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant

RESULTS

The mean age of the studied group was 28.5 ± 6.6 years old. Most of the studied group were working (82.5%), with enough income (62.5%), living in urban (52.5%), highly educated (65%), and with middle socioeconomic status (55%), **Table (1)**.

Prevalence of early marriage among the studied females was 25% as $\frac{1}{4}$ of them get married younger than 18 years old, as regards their attitude about early marriage, (52.5%) were against while (47.5%) have a positive attitude, ninety-five percent of the participants disagree with the idea that early marriage is protective for female, **Table (1)**. Most of the studied females had witnessed early marriage inside their family members (62.5%).

Most of the studied females agreed that early responsibilities and childhood deprivation have the worst effect on an early married couple (55% and 35%), respectively. Furthermore, the worst effect of early marriage on the community was the high divorce rate (47.5%) and the government has not successfully eliminated early marriage (70%) as shown in **Table (2)**.

Most of the studied group had satisfactory knowledge about early marriage issues (80%), **Figure (1)**. There were high statistically significant relations between the degree of knowledge and education, occupation, social class, and the age of marriage **Table (3)**.

Table (1): assessment of Sociodemographic data and opinion about early marriage among the studied group

Variable	N=200	
Age		
mean \pm SD	28.5 \pm 6.6	
Range	18-46	
Variable	N	%
Age of marriage		
< 18 years old	50	25.0
\geq 18 years old	150	75.0
Occupation		
Working	165	82.5
Not working	35	17.5
Education		
Illiterate	10	5.0
Primary	60	30.0
High	130	65.0

Variable	N=200	
Income		
Not enough	75	37.5
Enough	125	62.5
Residence		
Slums	15	7.5
Rural	80	40
Urban	105	52.5
Socioeconomic		
Low	85	42.5
Middle	110	55
High	5	2.5
Opinion about the age of marriage		
With early marriage	95	47.5
Against early marriage	105	52.5
Opinion about early marriage protection of females		
Agree	10	5.0
Disagree	190	95.0

Table (2): Effect of early marriage on couples and community, and possible solution for the eradication of early marriage from the participant's point of view

Variable	N	%
On couple		
Early responsibilities	110	55.0
Deprivation of childhood	70	35.0
Bad effects on education	15	7.5
Premature aging	5	2.5
On community		
Low socioeconomic	15	7.5
Child abuse	20	10.0
Maternal health deterioration	70	35.0
High divorce rate	95	47.5
Governmental success		
Yes	60	30.0
No	140	70.0
Solutions		
Educational program	45	22.5
Legislation	45	22.5
Family support	35	17.5
All	75	37.5

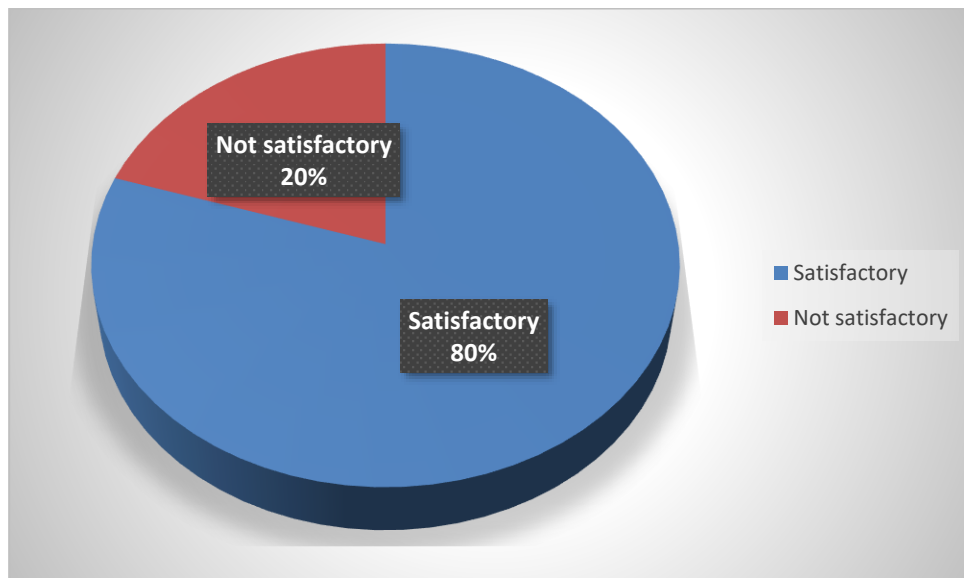


Figure (1): Assessment of knowledge score about motives and sequels of early marriage among the studied females

Table (3): Relation between knowledge score and sociodemographic factors:

Variable	Satisfactory Knowledge					P-value
	Total	Yes (N=160)		No (N=40)		
		N	%	N	%	
Social class						
Low	85	55	64.7	30	35.3	0.001*
Middle	110	100	90.9	10	9.1	
High	5	5	100.0	0	0.0	
Education						
Illiterate	10	1	10.0	9	90.0	0.001*
Primary	60	34	56.7	26	43.4	
High	130	125	96.2	5	3.8	
Occupation						
Not working	35	5	14.3	30	85.7	0.001*
Working	165	155	93.9	10	6.1	
Age of marriage						
< 18	50	30	60.0	20	40.0	0.001*
≥18	150	130	86.7	20	13.3	

Chi-square test

*p-value is significant < 0.05

DISCUSSION

This research has been to draw on diverse literature to provide an idea of the variability in women's marriage age, its percentage, motivations, and implications for public health.

The mean age of the studied group was 28.5 ± 6.6 years old. With middle socioeconomic status (55%), this is consistent with a study in Bangladesh that revealed that most early-married females are of middle socioeconomic

level. Over half of the women who lived in urban areas show that income is enough for their needs. With increasing the educational level, the probability of child marriage decreases, and the percentage of working females is very high, about 90% [13].

The percentage of early marriage in girls before the age of 15 has also declined over the last 25 years [14]. In our study, the percentage of early marriage in our studied group (25%). this nearly consistent with the demographic

health survey in Egypt 2008, which reported the decline of the percentage of early marriage to 17% [4]

Most of the studied females had witnessed early marriage inside their family members (62.5%); this does not agree with the study done in Egypt, which revealed that every woman has 36% of her family members who early married girls who less than 15 years [15]. Child brides face enormous challenges due to being married as children; our study revealed that most of the studied group saw that early responsibilities and childhood deprivation are the worst effects on early married couples (55% and 35%), respectively. In addition, the worst effect of early marriage on the community was a high divorce rate of 47.5%.

Isolated, often with their freedom curtailed, girls frequently feel disempowered due to the deprivation of their fundamental rights to health, education, and safety (35.0%). Child brides who are not physically or emotionally ready to become wives and mothers are 55 percent more likely to have hazardous pregnancy and childbirth difficulties, get HIV/AIDS, and suffer domestic violence by 35%. They and their families are 12.5 percent more likely to live in poverty because they lack access to education and economic opportunities [16].

In Egypt, child marriage declined from 27% in 1995 to reach 17% in 2008. In Egypt, a national strategy was developed to prevent child marriage was developed between November 2013 and June 2014, which aimed to decrease early marriage by 50% at the end of the five-year plan and focus on areas with the highest rates or increase the trends of early marriage [17].

Most of the studied group has satisfactory knowledge about early marriage issues (80%), on the other side a study of Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan, found that about 68.4% of the studied group have unsatisfactory knowledge about early marriage and only 26.5% of the studied group have satisfactory knowledge about early marriage [18].

In The current study, there was significant relationship between the degree of knowledge and education, occupation, social class, or the age of marriage, this in agreement with a study

in America by UNCIF showed a significant relationship between the degree of knowledge and education, occupation, social class or age of marriage, multiple factors had linkages with early marriage, including education, rural-urban divide, caste/ethnicity, and family economic status. However, these factors do not determine the women's age at marriage independently; instead, these factors are interrelated and produce a collective effect to determine the women's age at marriage. The poor socioeconomic status leads to poor access to education and fewer economic opportunities that deprive the minor of educational and other career opportunities, resulting in early marriage [19].

CONCLUSIONS

Our study shows that age at marriage of most of the studied females was >18 years and their opinion were against early marriage, most of the studied females had witnessed early marriage inside their family members, with high statistically significant relationship between the degree of knowledge and education, occupation, social class or age of marriage according to our study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1- For patients: stop depriving their children of their childhood and not exposing them to the harmful effects of early marriage.
- 2- For government: for persons who violate the early marriage law, the government should apply the penalties.
- 3- For the community: show multi-sector cooperation to improve the socioeconomic status of the community to eradicate early marriage. For other researchers: provide health education about hazards of early marriage.

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