



GIRL CHILD EARLY MARRIAGE AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF CROSS RIVER STATE

OLUFOWOKE MARY OYEYIPO
Email: Olufowokeyeyipo@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate primarily the extent of girl child marriage and how it impacts education in Cross River State. Four purpose, research questions and hypothesis guided the study. The research design adopted for this study was the survey research design. The population for the study was all parents with school aged girls in their homes in Cross River State, Nigeria. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select nine local government for the study out of the 18 local government in the state. The actual sample respondents of 378 parents with school aged girls in their homes in Cross River State was drawn for the study from the sampled LGA. Three experts validated the instruments both the used to collect data for the study. Instrument was used for the study, the instrument was titled "Girl Child Early Marriage and Education questionnaire" was administered to the respondents to elicit their responses. The instruments was 23 items with 4-option answer format and 3 items to elicit the respondent's demographic data. A pilot study was conducted on a sample of 40 participants and internal consistency coefficient ranging from .80-.83 was obtained using Cronbach alpha reliability estimate methods. The researchers administered the instruments on the sampled respondents in the selected faculty. The data that was collected was analyzed using and the hypothesis was tested using independent t-test, one way analysis of variance and Pearson product moment correlations at 0.05 level of significance. The result showed that Rate of Girl child marriage, Girl child family Social economic status, and Girl child Parental type education does significantly influence education in Cross River State. It was further fund that there is a strong positive relationship between Old folktales about girl child early marriage and education in Cross-River State. Above all it was recommended that government should create and implement policy that will efficiently improve educational accessibility among minority groups.

KEYWORD: Girl Child Marriage, Education, Rate of Girl child marriage, Girl child family Social economic status, Old folktales about girl child early marriage and Girl child Parental type education

INTRODUCTION

In many parts of the world including Africa, the worrisome practice of early forced marriage still persists despite global and national attempts to eradicate such practices especially because they are against the fundamental rights of individuals as supported by the global sustainable development goals as well as other international and national laws and acts.

Several factors are cited as being responsible for the promotion of such barbaric practices and these include socio-cultural practices, poverty, economic factors, socio-economic status of the victim's families, religion, unequal gender roles, lack of opportunities for girls beyond marriage, fear of social stigma of pregnancy before wedding, fear of pregnancy amongst others as supported by several researchers including Phiri, Musonda &

Olufowoke Mary Oyeyipo, Guidance and Counselling, School Director, Shepherd's Academy, Shepherd's Porch Church, Off MCC, Akai efai, Calabar, CRS, Nigeria

Lenba (2023), Human Rights Watch 2022, & Unimna, Odey & Ekuri (2019) amongst others. Nigeria has the highest statistics of girl child marriage in Africa and is rated as the third highest in the world. Statistics show that 43% of girls are married before the age of 18, while 16% of them get married before the age of 15. Nigeria currently has over 3.5million under 18 girls currently living as child brides and such high numbers are primarily because the laws forbidding such practices are not properly enforced, therefore, perpetrators of such acts feel comfortable about continuing those practices (Mobolaji, et.al.2020, Human Right Watch 2022 & Statista 2022).

In specific areas like the North West and North East of Nigeria, 68% and 55% of women respectively aged 20-49 were married before they turned 18. The South East had 89% of women married before 15. (HRW 2022) & (United Nations Development Program 2022 Report). The southern part of Nigeria is not left out of this sad practice. Information from reliable sources including newspapers, researchers and individuals attest to the presence of a girl child marriage practice called 'Money Woman' in Cross River State. Although there are a lot of researches which highlight the reasons and impact of girl child early marriage in the Northern parts of Nigeria, there is significantly less data on this phenomenon in southern parts of the country. Coincidentally, Cross River State seems to be experiencing a high rate of school aged children dropping out of school for several reasons, including hawking or joining one of the most notable groups of drop-outs in Cross River State tagged "Skolombo" children also known as 'street children'. (Bassey 2021).

With the high dropout rate of the street children and now the implications of the girl child marriage in the state, it leaves one to wonder what the fate of the state economically, technologically and educationally would be in the next few years. For a while now, Cross River state has been classified amongst the educationally disadvantaged states in the country and statistics show that youths between the ages of 15-45 make up more than half of the entire population of the state (National Demographic Health Survey 2018, Unimna et.al. 2019 & Odey 2019). On the backdrop of these negative statistics, this research is poised to investigate the extent of girl child marriage and how it impacts education in Cross River State.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Every child has the right to be cared for and protected according to the fundamental, basic human right laws and stipulations. Every country also has an obligation in line with global laws and regulations to ensure the protection of their citizens. Any deviation from such is supposed to be fought against and prohibited by every means. While this is attainable to a large extent in developed countries, limitations and deficiencies abound in the execution of such rights in developing countries, including Nigeria. Several areas including the provision of human security according to global expectations and best practices remain unattained. One of such deficiencies is expressed in the persistence of the girl child marriage despite measures promoted to tackle such by the government, non-governmental organizations and schools amongst other stakeholders. Researchers have cited several factors as the drivers of this practice and they include; poverty/socio-economic factors, socio-cultural practices, religion, fear of stigmatization from unwanted pregnancy amongst others.

In Nigeria, there has been a lot of interest and attention paid to the case of girl child marriage in the Northern parts of the country, and several researches have been carried out to investigate the occurrence. Recently, there has been a discovery of such incidences in the Southern area of the country, particularly in Cross River State. The statistics of this incidence and its implications towards education in Cross River has been relatively understudied. The question the researcher therefore intends to answer is: What is the extent of girl child marriage in Cross River State and how does it impact education?

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was the survey research design. The population for the study was all parents with school aged girls in their homes in Cross River State, Nigeria. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select nine local government for the study out of the 18 local government in the state. The actual sample respondents of 378 parents with school aged girls in their homes in Cross River State was drawn for the study from the sampled LGA. Three experts validated the instruments both the used to collect data for the study. Instrument was used for the study, the instrument was titled "Girl Child Early

Marriage and Education questionnaire" was administered to the respondents to elicit their responses. The instruments was 23 items with 4-option answer format and 3 items to elicit the respondent's demographic data. A pilot study was conducted on a sample of 40 participants and internal consistency coefficient ranging from .80-.83 was obtained using Cronbach alpha reliability estimate methods. The researchers administered the instruments on the sampled respondents in the selected faculty. The data that was collected was analyzed using and the hypothesis was tested using independent t-test, one way analysis of variance and Pearson product moment correlations at 0.05 level of significance.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study sought to investigate primarily the extent of girl child marriage and how it impacts education in Cross River State.

HYPOTHESES

1. Rate of Girl child marriage does not significantly influence education in Cross River State.
2. There is no significant relationship between Old folktales about girl child early marriage and education in Cross-River State
3. Girl child family Social economic status does not significantly influence education in Cross-River State.
4. Girl child Parental type education does not significantly influence girl child education in Cross-River State.

Old folktales about girl child early marriage and education

In a study carried out by Amali (2014), found out that a vital component of traditional literature, folktales teach children social, cultural, religious, and educational values. They also provide literary inspiration for contemporary works of fiction. They need an interface between the folktale genre and the media, nevertheless, because they are threatened. This research looks at how folktales, specifically Idoma folktales, might help prepare kids for the problems of the twenty-first century. These tales instill discipline, moral rectitude, hard work, bravery, and negative traits like rudeness, thievery, hate, wickedness, and dishonesty. In order for the folktale genre to continue existing in society, the media is essential in promoting it. The dramatic and instructional elements of folktales are highlighted in Samson-Akpan's (1986) research, which explores their function in education.

The structure and form of folktales, which stimulate children's curiosity, promote social engagement, and heighten mental attentiveness, are highlighted in the study. It also emphasizes how folktales help people grasp problems pertaining to both people and animals.

Also, in a carried out by Agbenyega, Tamakloe, and Klibthong, (2017), investigated the influence of Ghanaian folklore, especially Ghanaian tales, on children's reflective thinking about social life was examined in this study using a "stimulated recall" approach. Children were asked to recollect their thoughts both during and after stories, and character dramatization and questions were filmed using a digital video recorder for the study. The results indicated that children's learning and growth in imagination, idea formulation, and thinking, as well as beyond the self in social connections, may be greatly enhanced by traditional oral storytelling.

Similarly, a research carried out by Akachi, (2017), concluded that disregard for the basic values of ethnic nations and an unwillingness to apply these values in education are blamed for Nigeria's falling educational standards and rising rates of juvenile delinquency among young people. Many young people lose their sense of identity and idealism as a result of their ignorance of their mother languages and cultural customs. In order to solve this, a culture of decency, honesty, hard effort, innovation, and tolerance may be instilled in young people by going back to the varied cultural traditions of Nigeria's numerous ethnic nations and using them as a basis for youth raising and education. Folklore is an essential component of this admirable objective, which is to restore tradition and culture's prominent place as educational instruments for children.

Girl child family Social economic status and education

In a study carried out Muhammad, Danjuma, Jega, and Samaila, (2021), investigated the socioeconomic variables in Jega, Kebbi state, that have an impact on females' schooling. Twenty-one instructors were chosen from the entire population, three secondary schools were chosen out of fourteen, and 250 pupils were chosen from the target demographic. Information was gathered using a questionnaire. According to the findings, 82% of respondents believed that parental money has an impact on a female child's education, and 56% said that a girl child's education is permitted by their religion.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) should enforce girls' re-enrollment in school after giving birth and support them as equals to boys, according to the researcher's recommendations for policy implementation.

In another study conducted by Eliasu, (2021), concluded that global education disparities still exist, but Ghana has made strides in achieving equitable access, even if there is still more work to be done. In terms of gender parity in schooling, the Northern Region has the lowest rates. Various factors that hinder females' education include child betrothal, foster care, early marriage, religious rituals, limited parental income, poverty, household responsibilities, and polygyny. These elements further obstruct the socioeconomic advancement of girls. Affirmative action regulations, bye laws, sex education, vocational training, educational campaigns, and school management committees are all necessary to ameliorate the situation. These initiatives seek to advance girls' development by lowering socioeconomic and cultural barriers.

Also, in a related study conducted by Mboho, (2024), using Akwa Ibom State as a case study, this study examines the connection between female child education and socioeconomic development in Nigeria. The goal of the study is to address the gender gap in educational attainment as well as the discrimination and stereotypes against females that come from politics, religion, and society. The study employed Dugbazab's liberal feminist theory of gender inequality in conjunction with a survey research design. The findings demonstrated a significant degree of gender inequality in education and the barriers to girls' education that come from poverty, illiteracy, and cultural norms. The research suggests that the government and other relevant parties establish favorable circumstances to dissuade the conventional wisdom that women belong in the kitchen and that society prefers male offspring. Young females should get counseling on interest, self-esteem, aggressive social skills, and changing attitudes from counselors.

Similarly, the study carried out by Nwakwesiri and Jude (2017), looked into how parents' socioeconomic condition affects their daughters' schooling in Anambra State's Anambra West Local Government Area. Three study topics were developed: how the educational background of parents influences the education of their daughters; how the social standing of parents

influences the education of daughters; and how the educational background of parents influences the education of daughters. Simple random sampling was utilized to pick 126 respondents for the descriptive survey design. A statistical mean score of 2.50 was used to examine the data, and the results showed how important education for girls is to the prosperity of the country.

Girl child Parental type of education and girl child education

A research carried out by Grätz, (2023), estimated the impact of women's education on their kids using quasi-experimental evidence from six European educational reforms that extended the duration of obligatory schooling. The impacts of female education on fertility and children's schooling are estimated by instrumental variable estimates and data from the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe. This paper offers the first investigation of prospective models of intergenerational impacts utilizing quasi-experimental variation in schooling. Increased levels of female education also lead to increased fertility rates. Female education has a beneficial direct impact on children's educational achievement. Studies that employ retrospective models, however, could understate the overall impact of female education on child schooling.

In a similar researcher carried out by Abubakar, (2023), aimed to look at the variables influencing Yobe State girls' secondary education. There were eight senior ladies secondary schools represented in the population, along with female principals, instructors, and students. A systematic questionnaire was used to gather the data, which was then analyzed using chi-square and simple percentages. A number of factors, such as teachers' tardiness, the impracticality of school buildings, parents' low financial situation, a lack of basic amenities, early marriage, a lack of parental involvement, negative attitudes, illiteracy, a lack of qualified teachers, a lack of basic amenities, inadequate security measures, and a lengthy commute to school, had an impact on girls' education. The report suggested eliminating prejudices against women's education, encouraging early marriage, providing free secondary education, and establishing scholarships for underprivileged female students. Also, in another study conducted by Safiya, (2016), investigates how girls' occupational skill development in junior secondary schools in Kaduna state, Nigeria, is influenced by their

parents' educational backgrounds. It seeks to ascertain what parents, educators, and principals think about how family history affects girls' career abilities. A sample of 13, 12815 pupils and 381 instructors from six schools are part of the research design. To assess the hypothesis design, the study employed an ANOVA, Chi-square statistics, Cronbach Alpha co-efficient statistics, and a questionnaire. The findings demonstrated that girls' occupational skill acquisition was not negatively impacted by their family background. The opinions of male and female students differed significantly, with the former rating highest and the latter ranking lowest. Additionally, the study discovered notable variations in the impact of

Also, in another study carried out by Sanni (2020), In Southwestern Nigeria, the study looked at how a father's degree of formal education affected his daughter's enrollment in part-time National Certificate of Education (NCE) programs. Primary and secondary data were employed in the study, along with a multistage sampling strategy. Using pretested questionnaires, 250 female participants from Ogun and Oyo states were chosen for the study. The study could not discover any conclusive link between female involvement in NCE programs and fathers' formal education. Nonetheless, a high correlation between female participation and dads' encouragement was discovered. According to the study, dads in Southwestern Nigeria, irrespective of their level of formal education, have a substantial impact on their daughters' involvement in NCE programs.

Girl Child Marriage and Education

A study by Bob-Manuel & Goodluck (2022) revealed that the North Western parts of Nigeria has an estimated rate of 76% of girl child marriages, 88% is estimated for the North East, 33% for the North Central, 10% for the South East and 17% for the South South region which comprises Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Abia, Cross River, Edo, Ondo and Imo states. Coming down to the Southern states specifically, statistics from the National Demographic Health Survey (2013), a decade ago revealed that quite a significant percentage of girls got married before the age of 18. Abia state had 16.2%, Akwa Ibom 39.8%, Bayelsa 57.9%, Delta State 37.7%, Edo state 25.3%, Imo State 18.9%, Ondo 30.5% and Rivers State at 23.3%. This gave an average of 31.2% of girls getting married before 18 years in the Niger Delta regions of Nigeria.

Although estimates have been made concerning the extent of girl child marriage in the South South parts of the country, a further and specific examination of research findings on the girl child marriage in Cross River State ended up being quite revealing. The National Population Commission of Nigeria cited in City Population Statistics (2022) records that Obaniliku Local Government Area, hosts up to 167,000 indigenes, collectively called "the Becheve Community,". This community upholds a practice called 'money marriage', which is currently ongoing. Statistics show the existence of at least one money woman in every family in the Becheve community. Money marriage refers to a form of customary marriage contracted for the girl child by her parents when they have no money or resources to settle outstanding debts to another man; the girl child is therefore sold for an agreed sum to the debtor. Sometimes, this marriage is contracted as a favor to someone who has been benevolent to the girl's family. The girl child in this context is called a 'money wife'. (Daily Trust, & Richards 2019). The money wife in this case has no say about the proceedings of this marriage because she automatically becomes a possession to her husband. Unfortunately, this husband is never held responsible for the welfare of his wife. He rather uses her as a slave to work on his farms. When she becomes pregnant eventually, she is also responsible for taking care of her children.

Similarly, this barbaric practice is also found in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State. This was reported by Agabi (2022) who carried out a study to appraise the customary law marriage in Bekwarra local government area. The research revealed that there was no precise marriageable age under the Bekwarra customary law marriage, hence female children could be married off once they showed signs of physical development at puberty. The practice of girl child marriage is therefore normalized and the people of Bekwarra support this custom because of their belief that once parental consent is obtained and a dowry of an agreed amount is given to the girl's parents, she automatically becomes the man's property. Apart from the practice of child marriage in Bekwarra, succession was also found to be actively operational. This happens when the husband of a money woman dies, the widow is considered a property and therefore may be inherited by her husband's brother or male relative.

These findings agree with the study from Oshie, Ebuara and Ikwen (2017) who carried out a research on Nigerian Education and Gender equality as a potent strategy for achieving sustainable development. The area of this study was the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State which comprises Yala, Ojoja, Bekwarra, Obudu and Obanliku. They noted that there was a high rate of gender inequality in these local government areas because of the norms and traditions of their land which particularly treated females as second-class citizens while giving the male children a preferential treatment. This degrading treatment for females stemmed from the cultural belief that males and females could never be the same and it was an abomination to even infer so. Women education was therefore regarded as a tool that could potentially place both sexes side by side, hence it wasn't to be condoned. In these local government areas, the general perception is that males are entitled to

schooling because they grow up to maintain the family name and lineage, while the females would get married and become members of another family. Motherhood is therefore considered the primary purpose of the girl child's existence. Sexual slavery, child marriage, sexual violence including marital rape were therefore mentioned as factors responsible for gender inequality in the Northern parts of Cross River State.

Presentation of Result

Hypothesis one

Rate of Girl child marriage does not significantly influence education in Cross River State.

The independent variable is Rate of Girl child marriage which is divided into high rate and low rate while girl child education in Cross River State serves as the dependent variable. To test the hypothesis the scores of the two groups of respondents was collated and compare to check its influence on the dependent variable (girl child education in Cross River State.). Independent t-test statistics was employed for data analysis.

Table 1: Summary of Independent t-test on the influence of Rate of Girl child marriage on girl child education in Cross River State

Variable	N	X	SD	t	p-value
High	203	8.78	1.67		
Low	175	16.62	2.20	11.56	.001*

$p < .05$, $DF = 376$

The result in table one (1) showed that there is a difference on the mean score as well as on the standard deviation scores of both groups of respondents. This means score differences shows that girl child education in Cross River State is influenced by Rate of Girl child marriage. Similarly, calculated t-value of 11.56 representing the difference between girl child educations in Cross River State was significant at p-value of .001 at .05 level of significance with 376 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This therefore implies that Rate of Girl

child marriage has a significant influence on girl child education in Cross River State.

Hypothesis two

There is no significant relationship between Old folktales about girl child early marriage and education in Cross-River State. To test this hypothesis, the relationship between the dependent variable (education in Cross-River State) and the independent variable (Old folktales about girl child early marriage) was established using the Pearson product moment correlation analysis, the result is presented in table 2

TABLE 2: Pearson product moment correlation analysis showing the relationship between Old folktales about girl child early marriage and education in Cross-River State. (N=378)

Variable	X	SD.	r-Cal	P-Value
Comprehensiveness component	12.99	4.38	.917	.000
Job performance	12.93	4.26		

Significant at .05 level, r- Critical = .195, df= 376

The result of the analysis in table 2 shows that the calculated r value .917 is greater than the r critical or table value of .195 at .05 level of significance with 376 degree of freedom, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant positive relationship existing between Old folktales about girl child early marriage and education in Cross-River State. That is the more the people practice Old folktales about girl child early marriage, the more the decline in girl child education in Cross-River State and vice versa. By this result, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was upheld. This therefore, shows that Old folktales about girl child

early marriage has a positive relationship with level of education in Cross-River State.

Hypothesis three

Girl child family Social economic status does not significantly influence education in Cross-River State. The independent variable is Girl child family Social economic status which is divided into high and low while girl child education in Cross River State serves as the dependent variable. To test the hypothesis the scores of the two groups of respondents was collated and compare to check it influence on the dependent variable (girl child education in Cross River State.). Independent t-test statistics was employed for data analysis.

Table 3: Summary of Independent t-test on the influence of Girl child family Social economic status on girl child education in Cross River State

Variable	N	X	SD	t	p-value
High	198	16.80	1.89		
Low	180	8.79	1.64	6.05	.014*

p<.05, DF=376

The result in table three (3) showed that there is a difference on the mean score as well as on the standard deviation scores of both groups of respondents. This means score differences shows that girl child education in Cross River State is influenced by Girl child family Social economic status. Similarly, calculated t-value of 6.05 representing the difference between girl child educations in Cross River State was significant at p -value of .014 at .05 level of significance with 376 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This therefore implies that Girl child family Social economic status has a significant influence on girl child education in Cross River State.

Hypothesis four

Girl child Parental type education does not significantly influence girl child education in Cross-River State. The independent variable is Girl child Parental type education which is divided into formal and informal type of education while girl child education in Cross River State serves as the dependent variable. To test the hypothesis the scores of the two groups of respondents was collated and compare to check it influence on the dependent variable (girl child education in Cross River State.). Independent t-test statistics was employed for data analysis.

Table 4: Summary of Independent t-test on the influence of Girl child Parental type education on girl child education in Cross River State

Variable	N	X	SD	t	p-value
Formal	199	8.79	1.65		
Informal	179	16.77	1.95	7.05	.008*

$p < .05$, $DF = 376$

The result in table four (4) showed that there is a difference on the mean score as well as on the standard deviation scores of both groups of respondents. This means score differences shows that girl child education in Cross River State is influenced by Girl child Parental type education. Similarly, calculated t-value of 7.05 representing the difference between girl child educations in Cross River State was significant at p –value of .008 at .05 level of significance with 376 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This therefore implies that Girl child Parental type education has a significant influence on girl child education in Cross River State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Rate of Girl child marriage does not significantly influence education in Cross River State. The result showed that Rate of Girl child marriage does significantly influence education in Cross River State Nigeria. This result agrees with the findings of a study carried out by Bob-Manuel & Goodluck (2022) revealed that the North Western parts of Nigeria has an estimated rate of 76% of girl child marriages, 88% is estimated for the North East, 33% for the North Central, 10% for the South East and 17% for the South South region which comprises Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Abia, Cross River, Edo, Ondo and Imo states. Coming down to the Southern states specifically, statistics from the National Demographic Health Survey (2013), a decade ago revealed that quite a significant percentage of girls got married before the age of 18. Abia state had 16.2%, Akwa Ibom 39.8%, Bayelsa 57.9%, Delta State 37.7%, Edo state 25.3%, Imo State 18.9%, Ondo 30.5% and Rivers State at 23.3%.

There is no significant relationship between Old folktales about girl child early marriage and education in Cross-River State.

The result showed that there is a significant relationship between Old folktales about girl child early marriage and education in Cross-River State Nigeria. This result agrees with the findings of a study carried out by Amali (2014), found out that a vital component of traditional literature, folktales teach children social, cultural, religious, and educational values. They also provide literary inspiration for contemporary works of fiction. They need an interface between the folktale genre and the media, nevertheless, because they are threatened. This research looked at how folktales, specifically Idoma folktales, might help prepare kids for the problems of the twenty-first century. These tales instill discipline, moral rectitude, hard work, bravery, and negative traits like rudeness, thievery, hate, wickedness, and dishonesty. In order for the folktale genre to continue existing in society, the media is essential in promoting it.

Girl child family Social economic status does not significantly influence education in Cross-River State. The result showed that Girl child family Social economic status does have a significant influence on education in Cross-River State. This result agrees with the findings of a study carried out by Nwakwesiri and Jude (2017), looked into how parents' socioeconomic condition affects their daughters' schooling in Anambra State's Anambra West Local Government Area and the results showed how important education for girls is to the prosperity of the country.

Girl child Parental type education does not significantly influence girl child education in Cross-River State. The result showed that Girl child Parental type education does significantly influence girl child education in Cross-River State Nigeria.

This result agrees with the findings of a study carried out by Sanni (2020), In Southwestern Nigeria, the study looked at how a father's degree of formal education affected his daughter's enrollment in part-time National Certificate of Education (NCE) programs. According to the study, dads in Southwestern Nigeria, irrespective of their level of formal education, have a substantial impact on their daughters' involvement in NCE programs.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of these findings, it was concluded that there was a significant rate of girl child marriage in Cross River State with emphasis on two local Government Areas which are Obanliku and Bekwarra in the Northern parts of the state. Furthermore, education is significantly impacted by the issue of girl child marriage in the state. This practice has contributed to the high rate of school drop outs recorded in the state as well as the decrease in educated man power and subsequently sustainable development goals of the state. The study therefore established the existence of child marriages in Cross River State. It also pinpointed that this harmful practice contributed quite significantly to the high school drop out rate in the state and consequently the poor economic and educational achievement rate in the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with recommendations proffered by other researchers concerning this menace, the following recommendations were made:

1. Laws enforcing protection of children according to the child right' act should be propagated, domesticated, adopted, and enforced in every state of Nigeria.
2. Sensitization through seminars and symposiums about SDG 5 which advocates for gender equality and how it relates with sustainable development goals of the country must be organized at the grass root level. This can be sponsored by government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), schools, worship places, individuals or organizations as part of their corporate Social Responsibility.
3. Cultural and traditional practices which promote gender inequality must be discouraged.
4. Adult and continuing education centres must be revived in our communities to ensure that interested people can enroll.

5. Customary laws of marriage must be assessed and reviewed to ensure its compliance with the country's statutory marriage requirements. This can be enforced through village heads and the local government councils.

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