

Perspectives on Early Marriage of Females in Northern Nigeria: A Comparative Study of Islamic and Contemporary Views

Fatima Ahmad Garba^{1*}, Aliyu Muhammad Mudi²

¹Department of Islamic Studies, Federal University, Gashua. ¹<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8934-5832>

²ATB COE kangere, Bauchi State

*Corresponding Author: Fatima Ahmad Garba

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>Objective: The study investigates the early marriage of females in Northern Nigeria. Early marriage is deeply rooted in cultural, religious and socio-economic contexts for young girls, and this stands in the way of their education, health and socio-economic status. Methods: A mixed-methods approach is employed in the research, which includes qualitative interviews with community leaders, young brides, and Non-Governmental Organisation personnel, as well as quantitative surveys, providing a comprehensive analysis of the practice. Result: Results show that misinterpreted Islamic teachings are frequently used to misrepresent the Islamic justification of the cultural early marriage practices that victimize young girls, causing physical and mental harm. This early marriage practice is very dangerous not only to the girl but also to create barriers to her educational opportunities, destroying her educational chances by high dropout rates and under developing her career. Young brides are prone to health risks; the most common are maternal complications and mental health challenges. In addition, early marriage exacerbates the already adverse effects, such as economic dependency and social isolation. Conclusion: The study emphasizes the vital importance of community and religious leaders playing a role in addressing this issue, provided they receive support through education and vocational training, which will serve as transformative tools.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Early Marriage, Female, Islam, contemporary view, Northern Nigeria</p>
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<p>Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.</p> <p>Citation: Fatima Ahmad Garba, Aliyu Muhammad Mudi. (2025). Perspectives on Early Marriage of Females in Northern Nigeria: A Comparative Study of Islamic and Contemporary Views. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHS), volume 1(issue7), 144-164.</p>	

INTRODUCTION

The period of adolescence holds profound global significance for girls, with experiences during this phase exerting a substantial impact on future life trajectories (Mensch et al., 2014). In many developing regions, puberty's onset signifies increased vulnerability to early marriage (Loaiza & Wong, 2012) and initiation into sexual activity (Santhya & Jejeebhoy, 2015) for numerous girls. Consequently, early marriage remains a contentious global social issue, particularly concerning the female demographic. Northern Nigeria remains the main region where early marriage exists as a common social and economic and cultural institution. This marriage occurs before accomplished eighteen years of age. Many parents throughout different regions support their daughters' child marriages since they believe it will provide financial advantages as well as cultural standing. Early marriage as a cultural phenomenon creates major negative impacts that

harm the education and health and total well-being of young female individuals. Early marriage has become a traditional practice throughout the Northern Nigerian region because of the deeply rooted Islamic and customary beliefs that dominate that area. The practice violates human rights to prevent girls' growth while producing risky early pregnancies and social isolation along with inadequate learning possibilities and inadequate job training that sustains gender-based poverty (NBS, UNICEF, and UNFPA 2013).

Academic research reveals all the various elements which contribute to the widespread early marriage patterns in Nigeria. Traditional cultural norms, strong patriarchal hierarchies, financial needs and religious beliefs contribute jointly to maintaining this custom according to Smith (2017). The amalgamation of these elements creates a

complex societal fabric where early marriage not only emerges as a social norm but frequently serves as a mechanism for ensuring familial economic stability (Clark, 2019). Within the context of this study, Adolescent Girls (AGs), denoting females aged 12 to 18, confront substantial constraints in Northern Nigeria that impede their ability to realize their full potential (Christian Aid, 2017). Girls from these communities feel excluded and lost power because cultural and religious beliefs force them to adapt to social norms. NPC and ICF Macro (2009) show that a major portion of the population faces social as well as institutional discrimination. The prevalence of child marriage reaches its highest point at 87% in the northwest region according to statistics which show that 43% of Nigerian girls get married before turning 18 years old (AfriDevInfo, 2016).

The paper by Ahmed et al. (2018) demonstrated how parents view early marriage as a financial solution because it reduces their costs for daughter care. The traditional values that govern communities strengthen this traditional practice because they believe child marriage protects young women from social dangers while preserving family reputation (Amzat, 2019). The correlation between a girl's educational attainment and the likelihood of early marriage is prominently established in research. In Nigeria, the National Population Commission (NPC) and ICF Macro's 2009 demographic survey reveals stark differences: 82% of uneducated women wed before 18, while only 13% of those completing secondary education did so. Notably, the North-west and North-east regions have significant educational inequality because a high number of women remain uneducated while the South shows fewer than 15% uneducated women (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009). The investments directed toward adolescent girl education and empowerment represent an essential method of poverty cycle disruption which yields wide-ranging advantages for both individual lives and family structures and communal structures and national development (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009). The economic development of girls through empowerment leads to increased income alongside favorable advantages that spread from personal spaces to broader communities (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009; Amzat, 2019). Early marriage in Northern Nigeria shows strong support from Islamic religious doctrine and teachings. The interpretation of Islamic scholars about marriage age limits together with their views on women's family duties has supported North Nigerian communities when they accept early marriages (Usman, 2016).

Young girls lose their childhood education and future possibilities because of early marriage which societies support through cultural economic and religious reasons (Amzat and Razum, 2018). This practice, predominantly prevalent in rural areas, is sustained by societal norms and

traditions, and if current trends persist, it is anticipated to witness a significant surge in child marriage rates by 2030 (UNFPA, 2012). A critical global objective seeks the eradication of early marriage, prioritizing the enhancement of adolescent girls' well-being. According to Lemmon and ElHarake (2014) the practice elimination requires more than a moral commitment because it produces multiple damaging effects upon both victimized girls and their surrounding communities. According to Lemmon and ElHarake (2014), exposure to early marriage endangers girls by restricting their education while threatening their future economic prosperity and exposing them to elevated health risks along with limited self-esteem and reduced autonomy and early pregnancy pressures leading to high fertility rates along with diminished social mobility and insufficient labor market qualifications which all generate additional adverse impacts.

Many adolescent girls leave school because of forced marriage which creates educational deficiencies that diminish their workforce participation potential (UNFPA, 2012). The situation diminishes their economic independence which eventually reduces their ability to bring important issues like sexual safety and birth control methods and marital authority over decisions into public view. Research conducted by Raj (2009) identifies the three main vulnerabilities that lead to child marriage including gender inequality and restricted schooling and lacking employment. Gender inequality which begins with low appreciation of women from birth until death functions as the main cause that drives girls into early marriage. Child brides face multiple vulnerabilities according to Parsons et al. (2015) because their youth interacts with financial hardship and limited formal education to reduce their capability within marital relationships. These universal vulnerabilities affect both personal wellness and national advancement while existing in Nigeria and additional parts of the world. Nevertheless, in Northern Nigeria, promising initiatives led by non-governmental organizations and civil society groups aim to challenge cultural norms and advocate for girls' education and empowerment, as observed by Adams (2020). The intricacies surrounding the practice of early marriage in Northern Nigeria necessitate a comprehensive investigation. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for the development of effective interventions that respect cultural nuances while addressing the adverse consequences of early marriage on the lives of young females. This research aims to delve deeper into these complexities, examining the intricate interplay of cultural, societal, and religious factors that influence the prevalence of early marriage in Northern Nigeria. The research seeks to establish knowledge which will help create culturally suitable interventions for resolving

problems experienced by young females effectively married early in the region.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Researchers must conduct in-depth investigation to address the complex issue of early marriage among females within Northern Nigeria. This cultural and socio-economic and religious practice deeply affects young female lives through multiple interconnected difficulties. The practice impinges on educational advancement which leads to school abandonment for girls while perpetuating onward cycles of poverty and weak empowerment. Early pregnancies and childhood childbirth risks caused by early marriage create severe health threats to these adolescent girls that produce elevated maternal mortality rates with additional health complications. The practice of early marriage strengthens existing gender disparities because it blocks women from contributing economically or socially which leads to prolonged inequality patterns. An analysis of early marriage motives rooted in culture and religion within Islamic traditions requires detailed exploration to reveal the different cultural interpretations. In order to understand this challenging issue properly one must study Islam's perspectives next to modern societal views which will help create specific policies for supporting young women who experience early marriage in this region. Young girls lose their childhood education and future possibilities because of early marriage which societies support through cultural economic and religious reasons (Amzat & Razum, 2018). To this end, this study investigates the differences between Islamic and contemporary perspectives on early marriage in Northern Nigeria.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This research aims to delve into the differences between Islamic and contemporary perspectives on early marriage in Northern Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to:

- i. Analyse and compare cultural and religious rationales for early marriage within Islamic and contemporary societies.
- ii. Assess the implications of early marriage on the education, health, and socio-economic status of young females.
- iii. Provide insights for potential interventions and policy implications aimed at mitigating the challenges posed by early marriage.

1.4 Research questions

- i. What are the main cultural and religious justifications for early marriages in Islamic and contemporary societies in Northern Nigeria?
- ii. How does early marriage affect the educational attainment, health outcomes, and socioeconomic status of young women in Northern Nigeria?

- iii. What interventions and policies can be implemented to mitigate the negative impacts of early marriage in Northern Nigeria?

2. LITERATURE GAP

Previous studies collectively expose critical facets of gender issues, particularly focusing on early marriage and its multifaceted implications within different cultural, religious, and geographical contexts. They spotlight the prevalence and social perceptions surrounding early marriage in various regions, notably in Northern Nigeria, Iran, and Bangladesh. The studies unveil the entrenched nature of early marriage despite discrepancies between belief systems and actions, emphasising the critical role of community perceptions and faith leaders in mitigating this practice (Amzat, 2019). Furthermore, they emphasize the determinants of early marriage, such as familial structures, decision-making autonomy, and responses to needs, shedding light on the complexity of factors influencing early marriage decisions (Montazeri et al., 2016). In Nigeria, these studies highlight the violation of girls' rights due to child marriage, advocating for a deep examination of socio-cultural factors contributing to its continuation and the need for interventions to combat this practice (Adediran, 2021). Meanwhile, within the Nigerian context, studies explore the relationship between early marriage, fertility behaviours, and women's empowerment, showcasing the significant influence of marriage age on both (Solanke, 2015).

Furthermore, a study scrutinizes the disparities in women's inheritance rights in Islamic and customary laws in Nigeria, advocating for reforms in customary laws to align with Islamic practices known for their equitable treatment of women (Megbele, 2016). Outside Nigeria, research investigates the impact of transnational Muslim marriages and their recognition in Western legal systems, highlighting discrepancies and advocating for a more inclusive legal framework (Sona, 2020). Additionally, studies endeavor to clarify the rights of women within Islam and dispel misconceptions, calling for improved awareness and understanding of Islamic teachings regarding women's rights, especially within specific cultural contexts such as Bangladesh (Patoari, 2019). Stonawski's research sheds light on the demographic divergence between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, linking it to various societal aspects affected by religious influences, including fertility rates and family behavior (Stonawski, 2016). However, while these studies offer critical insights into various aspects of early marriage and gender-related issues within different contexts, there is a discernible gap concerning a specific comparative study of Islamic and contemporary views on early marriage in Northern Nigeria. The existing literature touches on various dimensions but lacks an in-

depth comparative analysis of Islamic perspectives and contemporary societal views in the context of early marriage among females in this region. This gap underscores the need for research that juxtaposes traditional Islamic perspectives on early marriage against contemporary societal beliefs, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the nuances and potential areas of convergence or divergence in addressing the issue.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employed a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative phase involved in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were collected through surveys questionnaires. The qualitative data collection was conducted through purposive sampling of participants, including six (6) young females affected by early marriage across both states, three (3) community/religious leaders, five (5) NGO personnels, and within Northern Nigerian communities in Gombe and Yobe states. Semi-structured interviews facilitate in-depth exploration of individual experiences and diverse perspectives. The quantitative data collection involved the distribution of structured online surveys among a larger sample (N=68), aimed at assessing broader trends, opinions, and experiences related to early marriage in Bauchi, Gombe and Yobe states. Qualitative data analysis employed thematic analysis techniques, involving coding and categorization of data obtained from interviews. This process identify recurrent themes and patterns to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural, social, and religious factors influencing early marriage. Quantitative data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), employing descriptive statistical methods to interpret responses from the survey regions.

4. DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Biographical Information

From the survey, majority of participants belong to the age category of 31 and above (41.18%) while younger subjects aged 25–30 (29.41%) compose another notable percentage with additional participants under 18 (7.35%) and 18–24 (22.06%). This statistic suggests that first marriage occurs throughout different age groups across Northern Nigeria. Males (55.88%) outnumber females (44.12%) which suggests a possibility of a male perspective dominating a female perspective in the survey; however, reports from the interviews with young married females in both states were used to ensure a balance of opinion. 54.41% of respondents are indigenes of Northern Nigeria, 44.12% in the North-East region while only 1.47% are from southern Nigeria.

In interviews conducted in Gombe and Yobe States, community leaders, married women, and NGO personnel shared varied views on early marriage. In Gombe, Leaders A and B advocate for a balanced approach, with a championing the reconciliation of cultural traditions and girls' rights through education, while B opined that Islamic teachings influence these cultural practices. Married women's experiences vary: Participant C discusses the challenges of early marriage, while D, E, and F highlight their ability to pursue education and careers with familial support. NGO personnel G and H stress the urgent educational and health challenges for young brides, promoting community engagement and health services. In Yobe, Participants I and J share their experiences; Participant I faced dropout and health issues, while J successfully balanced education with marriage. Leaders K, L, M, and N highlight the necessity of education, vocational training, and law enforcement to combat early marriage's negative effects.

4.2.1 Respondents' Understanding of Early Marriage

The survey revealed the majority of respondents (51.47%) agree that early marriage happens before the age of 18 because it matches international standards for understanding this phenomenon. Religious beliefs and cultural factors stand as the principal cause for Northern Nigerian early marriage according to 50.00% of those surveyed. While a majority of participants (32.35%) believe Islamic religious instructions significantly influence early marriage practices, there are varying opinions, with 30.88% noting an average influence and a small minority (2.94%) asserting no influence, highlighting a recognition of other contributing factors as well. Majorly, it was found that family honour maintenance (43.38%), together with cultural ties (34.56%), function as major drivers for parents to marry their children early. Modernization and globalization have significantly reduced early marriage practices in Northern Nigeria, with 70.59% of respondents noting this decrease, although some (5.88%) attribute a rise in early marriage to socioeconomic factors both in the country and those related to globalization, indicating a need for further research.

4.2.2 Participants' Perspective on Cultural and Religious Justifications

- **Protection of Morality and Honor**

The theme of "Protection of Morality and Honor" emerges prominently in the discussions surrounding early marriage in Northern Nigeria. Cultural and religious motivations often underpin this practice, with the intention of safeguarding the morality and dignity of young girls. Central to the practice of early marriage is the belief that it protects the morality and honour of young girls. Participant

A, a community leader from Gombe State, articulates this sentiment clearly:

"Early marriage... is seen as a way to instil discipline and ensure a young girl's proper upbringing. It was also a way to respect elders and maintain societal norms." (Participant A)

This reflects the cultural imperative to uphold familial and community honour through the regulation of young girls' behaviours and futures.

Religious justifications for early marriage are equally significant. Participant B from the same region emphasizes,

"Islam permits early marriage to protect young girls from sins, particularly related to sexual desires. In Northern Nigeria, this justification is well understood and practiced as a means of preserving the dignity of young girls." (Participant B)

This perspective aligns the practice with religious doctrine, suggesting that early marriage serves as a preventive measure against moral transgressions and ensures the girls are reared in a controlled, honourable manner.

However, while the intention behind early marriage may be to protect morality and honour, its impact on personal development can be detrimental. Participant I, an early married lady, reveals, *"Marriage ended my education. I had to drop out of school to focus on family responsibilities."* (Participant I) This statement highlights a critical contradiction: the very mechanism meant to safeguard a girl's honour can simultaneously curtail her personal and educational growth, leading to a constrained future. Also, the protection of morality and honour through early marriage also has profound implications for health and well-being. Participant C notes, *"I faced complications during childbirth due to my young age and lack of proper prenatal care."* (Participant C) Such narratives underscore the physical risks associated with early marriage, suggesting that the pursuit of moral protection can inadvertently compromise young brides' health.

The roles of community and family are pivotal in perpetuating the practice under the guise of moral protection. Participant K, a community leader, explains,

"Families often push young girls into early marriage before they can make decisions on their own. Community norms further reinforce this practice, limiting the girls' options." (Participant K)

This insight reveals how societal expectations and familial pressures converge to uphold early marriage as a moral imperative, limiting young girls' autonomy and life choices.

Moreover, modernization and globalization present conflicting perspectives on early marriage. Participant H, an NGO personnel, observes,

"Globalization and modernization have drastically reduced early marriage by promoting education and awareness, especially through media and NGOs." (Participant H)

This observation indicates a growing awareness of the adverse effects of early marriage and a shift towards prioritizing education and individual rights over traditional notions of morality and honour.

• Economic Reasons

The practice of early marriage in Northern Nigeria is influenced by myriad factors, among which economic reasons play a pivotal role. Economic pressures and financial constraints are often cited as primary reasons for early marriage. Many families believe that marrying off their daughters early will reduce financial burdens and secure their futures. As Participant I noted, *"My family believed early marriage would secure my future. However, it has limited my socio-economic opportunities."* (Participant I) This sentiment underscores the prevalent notion that early marriage is seen as a means of economic relief for struggling families. Additionally, the interviews reveal a dual perspective on economic dependency post-marriage. While some participants reported worsened economic status due to reliance on their husbands, others experienced improved financial stability. Participant J highlighted this dichotomy: *"It has improved. My husband has taken full responsibility for our needs, ensuring financial stability."* (Participant J) This illustrates that while early marriage can offer financial security through a husband's support, it simultaneously limits the bride's financial independence and career opportunities.

Early marriage significantly affects young brides' educational and employment prospects, as they often have to abandon their studies and economic activities. Participant I shared, *"Marriage ended my education. I had to drop out of school to focus on family responsibilities."* (Participant I) This interruption in education restricts their ability to gain employment and contribute to their communities' economic development. Furthermore, the absence of personal earnings leads to a cycle of poverty, as noted by NGO personnel:

"Early marriage often leads to economic dependency. Many young brides are confined to the home, taking care of children and performing household chores, which means they miss out on employment opportunities or the chance to pursue a career." (Participant G)

The socio-economic consequences of early marriage extend beyond individual financial stability to the broader community. Early marriage restricts young girls' potential to contribute economically, as their opportunities for education and personal growth are curtailed. Participant H emphasized,

"Early marriage limits their ability to contribute to economic development as it restricts their opportunities for education and personal growth, which are vital for economic productivity." (Participant H)

This results in a loss of potential talent and productivity, negatively affecting the community's economic development.

While early marriage often limits educational and employment opportunities, some narratives highlighted instances where young brides engaged in entrepreneurial activities within the home or community. Participant N observed, "Early marriage can enhance their contributions, especially for those with an entrepreneurial mindset." However, the success of these ventures often depends on the level of support from their families and husbands. As Participant F mentioned, *"Early marriage has allowed me to pursue entrepreneurship. With the support of my husband, I was able to start my own business."* (Participant F) The critical analysis of economic reasons behind early marriage reveals a complex interplay of financial constraints, dependency, and socio-economic consequences. While early marriage can provide financial stability for some, it overwhelmingly limits educational and employment opportunities for young brides, perpetuating a cycle of poverty.

• Cultural Traditions

Cultural traditions play a pivotal role in shaping the social fabric of communities. They encompass the collective customs, practices, and beliefs passed down through generations, influencing various aspects of life, including marriage, education, and socio-economic opportunities. Cultural traditions are often seen as a means of preserving identity and heritage. In the context of early marriage, these traditions are particularly influential. As Participant A, a community leader from Gombe State, noted, *"Culturally, early marriage was seen as a way to instill discipline and ensure a young girl's proper upbringing."* (Participant A) This perspective underscores the belief that early marriage serves as a protective measure, safeguarding the moral and social values of the community.

The family and community play central roles in perpetuating cultural traditions. Participant H, an NGO personnel, highlighted that *"Community norms and family expectations are significant factors that perpetuate early*

marriage." These norms often dictate the age at which girls are married, emphasizing the importance of aligning with cultural expectations. The influence of family is further evidenced by Participant C, a married female, who shared,

"My marriage was highly influenced by my parents. While my entrepreneurial ventures were poorer after marriage due to my husband's lack of support, my parents continued to support me." (Participant C)

In many communities, cultural traditions are closely intertwined with religious beliefs. Participant B, a community leader, explained that *"Islam permits early marriage to protect young girls from sins, particularly related to sexual desires."* (Participant B) This justification aligns with cultural norms, reinforcing the practice of early marriage as a means of preserving purity and morality. Similarly, Participant K emphasized that *"Islamic teachings often emphasize family values and responsibilities,"* (Participant K) which are echoed in cultural practices.

While cultural traditions hold significant sway, modernization and globalization are introducing new dynamics. Participant G observed that *"Globalization and modernization have brought new challenges, particularly with young girls wanting to pursue further education and career paths."* (Participant G) This shift creates a tension between maintaining cultural traditions and embracing modern values. Participant E, a married female, noted, *"Balancing family responsibilities with personal goals has not been difficult for me, as I am guided by Islamic principles,"* (Participant E) suggesting that some individuals find ways to harmonize tradition with modern aspirations.

Education and economic factors play crucial roles in shaping the practice of cultural traditions. Participant I, an early married lady, expressed that *"Marriage ended my education. I had to drop out of school to focus on family responsibilities."* (Participant I) This highlights the trade-off between adhering to cultural expectations and pursuing educational opportunities. Conversely, Participant F, another married female, shared a more positive experience:

"Marrying at 16 didn't hinder my education at all. In fact, my husband encouraged me to continue with my studies, even after marriage." (Participant F)

The persistence of cultural traditions presents both challenges and opportunities. For many young brides, early marriage leads to health risks and limited socio-economic opportunities. Participant L, an NGO personnel, pointed out that

"Early marriage often leads to economic dependency. Many young brides are confined to the home, taking care of children and performing household chores, which means they miss out on employment opportunities or the chance to pursue a career." (Participant L)

However, with the right support, some individuals manage to navigate these challenges successfully. Participant D, a married female, noted,

"Early marriage did not negatively affect my involvement in economic activities. I continue to support my family, but I haven't pursued entrepreneurial ventures." (Participant D)

Community and religious leaders play pivotal roles in addressing the challenges associated with cultural traditions. Participant M, an NGO personnel, emphasized that

"Community and religious leaders have great influence in many northern Nigerian communities. They can promote the importance of education for girls and encourage families to support their daughters in pursuing their dreams rather than pushing for early marriage." (Participant M)

This collaborative approach can help mitigate the negative impacts of early marriage while respecting cultural and religious values. Cultural traditions are deeply ingrained in the social fabric of communities, shaping various aspects of life, including early marriage. While these traditions provide a sense of identity and continuity, they also present challenges, particularly in the face of modernization and globalization.

• Religious Interpretations

The theme of "Religious Interpretations" plays a pivotal role in the discourse on early marriage within Northern Nigeria. Religious Interpretations in the context of early marriage reveals a complex interplay between traditional teachings and modern realities. The narratives of the participants highlight the need for a nuanced approach that considers individual readiness, promotes education, and engages religious leaders in advocating for the holistic development of young girls.

Islamic teachings often serve as a primary justification for early marriage, with several participants pointing to the flexibility and guidance provided by religious texts. For instance, Participant B emphasized that *"Islam permits early marriage to protect young girls from sins, particularly related to sexual desires."* (Participant B) This perspective underscores the belief that early marriage acts as a safeguard against moral transgressions and preserves the

dignity of young girls by ensuring they grow up in a protected environment within marriage. Furthermore, Participant K elaborated on the interpretation of Islamic maturity, stating that

"Islam sets the age of maturity based on physical and mental readiness, typically around puberty, which can vary from person to person." (Participant K)

This highlights the divergence between religious and legal definitions of adulthood, where Islamic teachings prioritize individual readiness over a fixed age limit.

Religious leaders and community norms significantly shape the practice of early marriage. Participant K noted, *"Islamic teachings often emphasize family values and responsibilities,"* (Participant K) which translates into community practices that align with these religious principles. The alignment of cultural traditions with religious teachings is evident in the insistence on early marriage as a means of preserving a girl's modesty and preventing exposure to immorality. However, the narratives also reveal tensions between cultural practices and the well-being of young brides. Participant H observed that community norms and family expectations *"limit the girls' options and often trap them in roles they are not prepared for."* (Participant H). This observation points to the potential negative consequences of adhering strictly to traditional interpretations without considering the holistic development of the girl.

Modernization and globalization have introduced new challenges to early marriage, compelling a re-examination of traditional religious interpretations. Participant K remarked,

"Western education has brought significant changes. Many girls now prioritize completing their studies before marriage, which has reduced the prevalence of early marriages." (Participant K)

This shift indicates an evolving mindset where education and personal development are increasingly valued alongside religious obligations. Moreover, community and religious leaders are pivotal in navigating these changes. Participant H advocated for a collaborative approach, stating,

"Religious and community leaders can help by promoting the benefits of education and vocational training through sermons, public discussions, and community gatherings." (Participant H)

This suggests that while religious teachings remain influential, there is room for adaptation to contemporary

contexts prioritizing young girls' well-being and empowerment. The narratives underscore a consensus on the need for comprehensive reforms that balance religious values with the rights and well-being of young girls. Participant K recommended, *"Reforms should include education campaigns, poverty alleviation, and enforcement of minimum marriage age laws,"* (Participant K) emphasizing the importance of a multi-faceted approach that respects cultural and religious values while protecting the rights of young brides.

• Protection and Security

The theme of Protection and Security emerges prominently in the narratives of early marriage participants from Northern Nigeria. Early marriage is often justified within these communities as a means of protecting young girls from societal ills and ensuring their security. This protection is seen through various lenses - moral, physical, and socio-economic. As Community Leader 2 conveys, *"Islam permits early marriage to protect young girls from sins, particularly related to sexual desires."* (Participant B) This statement underscores the belief that early marriage is a safeguard against moral corruption. Moreover, community norms and family expectations play a significant role in perpetuating early marriage, seeing it as a protective measure. However, this often conflicts with modern views on individual rights and well-being. Participant B notes, *"Preserving cultural traditions is important, but the rights and well-being of young girls should always come first."* (Participant B) This highlights the tension between adhering to cultural practices and ensuring the health and rights of the young brides.

The narratives also reveal the health implications of early marriage. An early married lady, Participant I, shares, *"I faced complications during childbirth due to my young age and lack of proper prenatal care."* (Participant I) This statement starkly illustrates how the protection intended through early marriage can paradoxically compromise health security. Another participant, Married Female 2, states,

"Some young girls suffer through childbirth because of early marriage, but I did not experience any significant health issues myself." (Participant D)

This variance in experiences points to the uneven protection that early marriage offers, contingent on various factors such as family support and access to healthcare.

Economic security is another dimension where early marriage is seen as a protective measure. Community Leader 1 explains, *"Economic hardship sometimes pushes families to marry off daughters early to reduce financial burdens."* (Participant K) However, this perceived

economic protection can turn into a constraint, as is evident from the experience of Participant I, who notes, *"It has worsened because I rely solely on my husband's income and have no personal earnings."* (Participant I)

One of the most poignant aspects of the narratives is the impact of early marriage on education and personal development. Participant C advises,

"My advice is for young girls to make sure they marry the right spouse, not just rush into it without proper planning. Even after early marriage, there should be an agreement between the husband and her parents to allow her to continue her studies and pursue her goals." (Participant C)

This recommendation emphasizes the need for a balanced approach that ensures both protection and the opportunity for personal growth.

4.2.3 Impacts on Educational Attainment, Health, and Socioeconomic Status

• Disruption of Education

The theme of disruption of education is a significant issue within the context of early marriage and its impact on young girls in Northern Nigeria. Through narratives from various participants, this analysis delves into the multifaceted challenges young brides face in pursuing their education. It also explores how societal norms, family expectations, and early maternal responsibilities collectively hinder their academic progress and opportunities. Moreover, early marriage significantly disrupts the educational trajectories of young girls. Participant I, an early married lady, starkly illustrates this point: *"Marriage ended my education. I had to drop out of school to focus on family responsibilities."* (Participant I) This quote underscores the abrupt halt in academic pursuits many young brides experience due to the overwhelming domestic responsibilities thrust upon them.

The attempt to balance family duties with educational aspirations presents another layer of complexity. Participant I further elaborates on the difficulties faced: *"It's difficult to balance household chores, childcare, and personal goals. I struggle to find time for myself."* (Participant I) The overwhelming responsibilities of household management and childcare leave little to no room for academic endeavors, causing young brides to abandon their studies prematurely. Additionally, societal norms and familial expectations play a pivotal role in perpetuating early marriage and, consequently, educational disruption. Participant K, a community leader, highlights the cultural and religious justifications that support early marriage: *"In our community, many believe that once a girl reaches the age of maturity, she is ready for marriage, which is seen as*

fulfilling Islamic principles." This culturally ingrained belief system prioritizes marriage over education, thereby limiting the educational opportunities available to young girls. This further points to the fact that the misunderstanding of Islamic teaching about early marriage can often be used to back up cultural practices that result in harmful treatment of young girls within the society understudy. More about is discussed in section 4.2.3.

Economic considerations also significantly influence the prevalence of early marriage. Participant K notes, *"Economic hardship sometimes pushes families to marry off daughters early to reduce financial burdens."* (Participant K) This economic strategy, while alleviating immediate financial pressures, unintentionally curtails the long-term educational and economic prospects of young girls. Early marriage not only disrupts education but also adversely affects the health of young brides, further complicating their ability to pursue academic goals. Participant I mentions health complications arising from early marriage: *"I faced complications during childbirth due to my young age and lack of proper prenatal care."* (Participant I) The physical strain from premature childbirth and inadequate healthcare further detracts from their capacity to engage in educational activities.

While some participants highlight the lack of support systems, others note the potential for educational continuity despite early marriage. Participant J, who married early but had a supportive husband, shares a contrasting experience:

"Marrying at 16 didn't hinder my education at all. In fact, my husband encouraged me to continue with my studies, even after marriage."
(Participant J)

This narrative underscores the importance of supportive familial structures in mitigating the educational disruption caused by early marriage. The disruption of education due to early marriage is a pervasive issue with profound implications for the socio-economic development of young girls in Northern Nigeria.

• Health Risks and Complications

Early marriage is a complex and multifaceted issue with significant health risks and complications that affect young girls' physical and mental well-being. One of the most prominent health risks associated with early marriage is complications during childbirth. Participant I from Yobe State illustrates this, stating, *"I faced complications during childbirth due to my young age and lack of proper prenatal care."* (Participant I) This quote underscores the vulnerability of young brides, whose bodies are often not physically prepared for the demands of pregnancy and childbirth. Early pregnancies can lead to severe health issues such as obstructed labor, preeclampsia, and even

maternal mortality. Moreover, this sentiment is echoed by Participant H, who highlights the *"significantly higher maternal health risks"* for young brides, such as *"preeclampsia, infections, or postpartum hemorrhage."* (Participant H) These complications are exacerbated by the lack of access to adequate prenatal and postnatal care, which is often limited in communities where early marriage is prevalent.

The mental health implications of early marriage are equally concerning. Participant G notes that many young brides *"suffer from anxiety, depression, and a sense of being overwhelmed"* (Participant G) due to the sudden and demanding responsibilities of marriage and motherhood. The psychological stress of managing a household, coupled with the social isolation that often accompanies early marriage, can have long-lasting effects on mental health. Participant I's experience further highlights this issue: *"It's difficult to balance household chores, childcare, and personal goals. I struggle to find time for myself."* (Participant I) The lack of personal time and the overwhelming burden of responsibilities can lead to mental exhaustion and emotional distress, which are often overlooked in discussions about early marriage.

Access to healthcare services is another critical factor influencing young brides' health outcomes. Participant C from Gombe State shares her experience of feeling *"shy to attend antenatal check-ups,"* (Participant C) indicating the social barriers that prevent young brides from seeking necessary medical care. This reluctance to access healthcare services can result in untreated health issues and complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Participant H emphasizes the need for *"comprehensive maternal health services, including access to prenatal care, skilled birth attendants, and family planning services."* (Participant H) This recommendation is crucial for improving the health outcomes of young brides and ensuring they receive the medical attention they need.

• Economic Dependency

The theme of economic dependency emerges prominently in discussions surrounding early marriage, particularly in Northern Nigeria. Through participants' narratives, it becomes evident that economic factors are crucial in perpetuating early marriage, thereby limiting young females' socio-economic opportunities. Economic hardship often compels families to marry off their daughters at a young age, viewing it as a means to alleviate financial burdens. As Participant K, a community leader, notes, *"Economic hardship...sometimes pushes families to marry off daughters early to reduce financial burdens."* (Participant K) This practice, however, creates a cycle of economic dependence for the young brides, limiting their personal development and future prospects.

Early marriage often results in the discontinuation of education for young girls, which in turn affects their employment opportunities and financial independence. Participant I, an early married lady, shares her experience: *"Marriage ended my education. I had to drop out of school to focus on family responsibilities."* (Participant I) This interruption in education not only limits their potential for career development but also entrenches their economic dependence on their husbands. Young brides often find themselves financially dependent on their husbands, as illustrated by Participant J: *"It has improved. My husband has taken full responsibility for our needs, ensuring financial stability."* (Participant J) While this might offer immediate financial relief, it perpetuates a dynamic where the young bride's economic well-being relies entirely on her spouse. An NGO personnel, Participant M, further emphasizes this point:

"Most are fully dependent on their husbands for financial needs, though some engage in entrepreneurial activities." (Participant M)

The narratives reveal that early marriage restricts young girls' ability to engage in economic activities, such as employment or entrepreneurship. Participant I reflects,

"I've had to abandon plans for entrepreneurship or any economic activities due to family responsibilities." (Participant I)

This economic dependency not only affects their personal growth but also limits their contributions to the community's economic development. Moreover, participants highlighted the need for education and vocational training to mitigate the economic dependency resulting from early marriage. Participant K suggests, *"Reforms should include education campaigns, poverty alleviation, and enforcement of minimum marriage age laws."* (Participant K) These initiatives can provide young girls with the skills and opportunities to become economically independent, thereby breaking the cycle of dependency.

• Social Isolation

Early marriage often results in social isolation for young brides, disrupting their connections with peers and limiting their social interactions. This seclusion can lead to a range of adverse effects, including mental health challenges, reduced access to education, and constrained socio-economic opportunities. The narratives of the participants highlight these dimensions, offering a vivid portrayal of the social isolation endured by young brides. One of the most poignant aspects of social isolation is the disruption of peer relationships. Participant I, an early married lady, articulates this disruption clearly: *"I lost touch with friends and peers after marriage. My social circle is now limited to*

family members." (Participant I) This statement underscores the abrupt severance from a supportive peer network, which is a critical source of emotional and social support for adolescents.

Marriage at a young age also restricts social interactions beyond the immediate family. Participant I further explains, *"My husband's family often preferred traditional remedies over taking me to the hospital."* (Participant I) This preference not only highlights the insular nature of social interactions but also points to the reliance on familial networks for healthcare, exacerbating the isolation from broader community resources. Additionally, the psychological toll of social isolation is evident in the narratives of the participants. The lack of peer support and limited social interactions can lead to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. For instance, Participant C mentions,

"It was difficult to balance family responsibilities with personal goals, but with support from my parents and friends, I was able to manage some of my life goals." (Participant C)

This indicates that limited support systems within the marital home can exacerbate mental health challenges.

Social isolation also has significant socio-economic implications. The disconnection from educational and economic opportunities is a recurrent theme in the participants' narratives. Participant I notes, *"I had to abandon plans for entrepreneurship or any economic activities due to family responsibilities."* (Participant I) This reality underscores how social isolation, combined with early marriage, curtails young brides' potential for economic independence and personal development. Furthermore, the role of community and family dynamics in perpetuating social isolation is critical. Participant N, an NGO personnel, observes,

"In most cases, the decision is mutual between couples, and forced or arranged marriages are less common. Communities have a relatively minimal role." (Participant N)

This suggests that while community and family expectations influence early marriage, the resulting isolation is often a byproduct of the marital arrangement itself rather than coercive practices.

• Mental Health Challenges

Mental health is a significant aspect of overall well-being, yet it is often overlooked, especially in the context of early marriage. The narratives of young women who marry early reveal a range of mental health challenges that stem from the pressures and responsibilities thrust upon them

prematurely. Early marriage often results in a disruption of normal adolescent development, leading to various mental health issues. Many young brides find themselves unprepared for the roles and responsibilities imposed by marriage and motherhood, which can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders.

One of the most common mental health challenges faced by young brides is anxiety and stress. Participant J, for instance, mentioned the immense pressure of balancing family responsibilities and personal goals. She stated, *"I have experienced numerous challenges in this regard."* (Participant J) This pressure is often compounded by the expectation to manage household chores, childcare, and, in many cases, continued education or vocational training. The overwhelming nature of these responsibilities can lead to chronic stress and anxiety. Depression is another significant mental health challenge for young brides. Participant I, who had to drop out of school after marriage, described the isolation she felt: *"I lost touch with friends and peers after marriage. My social circle is now limited to family members."* (Participant I) This sense of isolation, coupled with the loss of personal aspirations, can lead to feelings of hopelessness and depression. The lack of a supportive social network exacerbates these feelings, making it difficult for young brides to cope with their new reality.

Early marriage can also have a detrimental impact on a young woman's self-esteem. Participant C discussed the challenges of not being able to continue her education and the effect it had on her self-worth:

"It was difficult to balance family responsibilities with personal goals, but with support from my parents and friends, I was able to manage some of my life goals." (Participant C)

The inability to achieve personal goals and the constant comparison to peers who continue their education can lead to diminished self-esteem and self-worth. Moreover, maternal mental health is a critical aspect that is often neglected in the context of early marriage. Participant D highlighted the maternal health issues that young brides face:

"Some young girls suffer through childbirth because of early marriage, but I did not experience any significant health issues myself." (Participant D)

The physical strain of early childbirth, combined with the psychological burden of motherhood at a young age, can lead to postnatal depression and other maternal mental health disorders.

Early married women face a number of mental health challenges, some of which are contributed to. Lack of educational development, social support, economical dependence and the pressure to fit cultural and religious expectation could be considered here. One of the major causes of a mental health issue that is first, the inability to continue education after marriage. As Participant I stated, *"Marriage ended my education. I had to drop out of school to focus on family responsibilities."* (Participant I) Education is not only a road to economic independence but also a path to a productive and contented personal life. It can also lead to a sense of inadequacy and lacking a sense of purpose by means of the loss of educational opportunities.

Social support system is very important for mental well-being. Nevertheless, many young brides are isolated from their peers and friends after forging marriage. Participant C stated that without the help of family and friends she would not have managed some of her life goals *"With support from my parents and friends, I was able to manage some of my life goals."* (Participant C) Without such support, those young brides feel alone and overwhelmed. Another factor linked to mental health issues is economic dependence on their husband. Participant I added that *"It has worsened because I rely solely on my husband's income and have no personal earnings."* (Participant I) Such dependence can result in a lack of power over life and a lack of control over one's life which can intensify existing mental health troubles.

Religious teaching that incorrectly supports the custom of early marriage and the mental health problems associated with it, encourage and perpetuate the cultural expectation of early marriage. Participant K explained,

"Islamic teachings often emphasize family values and responsibilities. In our community, many believe that once a girl reaches the age of maturity, she is ready for marriage, which is seen as fulfilling Islamic principles." (Participant K)

This is a case of cultural expectation being inaccurately supported by misinterpretation of Islamic teachings. This is because the definition of female maturity require a girl to demonstrate "ability to manage a good life, her level of acceptance of the responsibility of motherhood and child-rearing, as well as her appropriateness in social behaviour" (Arifa, 2021). The requirement to perform Salat (prayer) and Sawm (fasting) within Islamic practical laws at puberty age does not guarantee social or economic productivity according to this definition standards. Not displaying these abilities makes someone qualify as adolescent without being necessarily 'mature'. The best suitable age to marry girls therefore requires the consideration of both

psychological and mental maturity levels as per Islamic teachings. These cultural expectations, therefore, can be said to contradict Islamic teachings on this subject and can place immense pressure on young 'adolescent' brides to conform, even at the expense of their mental well-being. A multi-faceted approach addressing the mental health challenges of early married women would be needed, for instance through education, social support, economic empowerment and community engagement.

It is important to progress and increase awareness about the mental health problems of early marriage. Education campaigns that bring the need to care for mental health and where this can be found can help young brides to seek help. Participant G advised, *"Community-based awareness campaigns, involving traditional and religious leaders, raising the minimum age of marriage to 18, and enforcing these laws effectively."* (Participant G) There is need for young brides to build strong social support systems for their mental health. They include setting up safe spaces for them to share their experiences and emotionally support each other. Through his experience, Participant C highlights the significance of family and friends support to address mental health challenges.

Young brides who receive financial opportunities after marriage tend to develop a better sense of independence along with personal value. Educational courses about occupational skills and business management enable these women to produce income for their families and experience personal achievement. Participant F described her successful experience when her husband supported her to establish her own business. In her words, *"With the support of my husband, I was able to start my own business."* (Participant F) Effective mental health solutions require involvement of both religious directors and community representatives. Such leaders possess potential to modify traditional cultural practices and foster psychological health of young brides. Participant M emphasized, *"Their preaching and advocacy have been very effective in promoting alternatives like education and vocational training."* (Participant M) Multiple social economic and cultural elements have a complex effect on the mental wellness difficulties experienced by early married women.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The study demonstrates that early marriage practices in Northern Nigeria result from numerous cultural and religious elements together with economic conditions but shows both commonalities and distinctions relative to existing research findings. The collected data shows that early marriage occurs when females marry before turning 18 and religious values and cultural customs serve as the primary reasons for parental approval of this practice. More than half of respondents in the research survey selected

religious beliefs as the primary reason for early marriage which matches findings reported by Montazeri et al. (2016) and Amzat (2019) regarding Islamic-based protection and moral explanations. According to Islamic beliefs this practice exists to protect girls from immoral actions while defending family reputation which survey results together with qualitative stories confirm. The investigation performed by Solanke (2015) and Makama (2013) through conventional research approaches shows that these practices lead to major educational disturbances and enduring social-economic problems.

The survey demonstrates how early marriage leads to educational failures because most respondents (69.96%) indicate it obstructs education while causing many students to drop out. Early marriage restricts personal development and future career paths according to conventional findings as documented by Solanke (2015) and Adediran (2021). Results from the qualitative segment revealed few cases where marriage did not prevent education but most survey participants documented its negative impact on students' future education. Both the study and wider discourse present early marriage as an impediment to economic self-reliance which sustains economic deprivation among young women according to Makama (2013) study of gender-related economic dependency issues.

Health implications stand out as an essential agreement point between the research outcomes in this study and other existing studies. Most research participants acknowledge high health risks in early marriage which lead to pregnancy complications while causing mental health problems. Research by Adediran (2021) and Solanke (2015) verifies the findings by showing that pregnant young brides experience higher maternal mortality rates and face negative health consequences. Although some Islamic teachings are interpreted in a way that justifies and supports early marriage as a way of protecting young women from promiscuous lifestyles. However, it appears that this viewpoint is majorly used to protect certain cultural practices of early marriage that are detrimental to the psychological and mental health of young girls.

Qualitative evidence from this study also helps to dispute the protective narrative that is put forward when Islamic teachings are inaccurately used to support some cultural practices of early marriage because it reveals major physical and psychological burdens that young adolescent girls were not ready for at the time they were married off. This is the point of conventionalism criticism. However, the reported practical results of early marriage are thus not in line with the objectives of the Islamic teachings on early marriage because respondents describe outcomes that point to inherent negative effects that result from a lack of proper consideration for the psychological and mental readiness of

young adolescent females for early marriage, child-bearing, family and other related responsibilities that come with it.

A majority of study participants along with literature witnesses showed that modern values combined with increased education levels are acting as factors that cause early marriage to decrease. The study by Alam, Mollah, and Naomi (2023) supports this trend by demonstrating that improved education together with economic power empower people to resist early marriage. A potential method exists to unite Islamic tradition with standard human rights standards through education-based modernization which recasts early marriage practices in societal settings. These reframed cultural perspectives combined with religious arguments would solve both traditional justifications and minimize education losses and health issues and economic difficulties.

The research examines early marriage in Northern Nigeria by viewing it as an issue containing religious protective elements while also presenting substantial conventional problems. The results from both qualitative themes and quantitative survey methods demonstrate that early marriage creates severe education-related difficulties and health issues while threatening family honour as seen through Islamic perspectives. The two-sided nature of religious beliefs about early marriage demands special interventions which unite educational and economic programs with culturally appropriate communications that involve both religious leaders and community members. This balanced combination represents a vital requirement to change the practice and better the lives of young females in the region.

The thematic results yield complex information which both matches and diverges from data examined through existing studies. The current research confirms the reality reported by Montazeri et al. (2016) and Amzat (2019) regarding early marriage's roots in cultural and religious favor. The participants viewed early marriage as a defense against moral violations and dishonor to young women despite sharing common ground with other research showing cultural and religious needs and familial control influence this practice. Islamic teaching regarding permissible early marriage to prevent moral transgressions among young women received support from several participants according to Sona's (2020) research on Shari'ah-compliant marriages and Patoari's (2019) discussion about women's rights in Islam. The protective rationale is shown through these justifications but the narrative evidence implies the existence of adverse education and health outcomes which cast doubt on the practical value of this protective rationale.

The research evidence strengthens our understanding of education loss and economic dependency as well as health risks in early marriage just like standard studies such as

Solanke (2015) established between early marriages and lower female empowerment and negative fertility patterns. The research participants shared personal experiences of early school dropout together with health complications during delivery and economic dependency on husbands which supports Makama's (2013) feminist approach to patriarchy analysis and Adediran's (2021) study on child marriage practices violating girls' human rights. Traditional perspectives deeply condemn early marriage because it inhibits personal growth then sustains economic hardship thus this approach stands against perspectives grounded in religious reasoning. The research demonstrates marked differences between the experiences of child marriage participants and traditional academic findings due to varied impacts of supportive relative networks but demonstrates mostly negative effects on personal potential.

4.4 Policy Implications and Interventions

This research validates the importance of education together with vocational training combined with community participation as transformational tools which support Alam et al. (2023) in their findings about adolescent childbearing reduction through educational and economic empowerment. Religious leaders should participate in intervention efforts according to Islamic doctrine and conventional frameworks although their roles show slight variations. According to Islamic principles reform initiatives match the built-in protective functions of faith as long as they maintain fair balance between spiritual traditions and present-day rights standards. The conventional method described in Megbele (2016) and Stonawski (2016) supports enforcing legal standards while reanalysing cultural customs detrimental to female youth rights. The identification of negative consequences from early marriage remains shared between analysts but their interpretive approaches differ since Islamic interpretations allow certain acceptable instances and mainstream analysts demonstrate consistent support for postponing marriage benefits general welfare.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The research takes readers beyond simple classification of early marriage problems by presenting an elaborate approach to change. The research establishes that religious and traditional practices of early marriage in Northern Nigeria exist to defend family status but create serious obstacles for young females to pursue education while limiting their health and financial prospects. The research demonstrates a fundamental dilemma because established traditional arguments continue to exist simultaneously with undeniable evidence showing reduced possibilities and decreased welfare outcomes. This paradox creates opportunities to develop innovative services which address

specific situations properly. A sustainable transition to positive change needs the involvement of religious leaders and community members who will conduct conversations about Islam alongside development of educational and economic empowerment models. The study proposes developing a new approach which links cultural principles with progressive rules to empower young women in their fight against systematic obstacles while allowing them to reach their maximum potential. This research study provides the basis for developing these recommendations:

- i. Local community authorities together with education agencies and NGOs need to run awareness programs that teach families about the negative effects of underage marriage while grooming young girls emotionally and changing traditional customs.
- ii. Local authorities and government agencies need to execute minimum marriage age legislation by implementing strict oversight mechanisms and harsh punishments to defend young women's constitutional rights.
- iii. Young married females will gain more economic independence along with professional prospects through flexible education programs that vocational training offers when provided by Education departments together with NGOs.
- iv. Leaders and religious scholars in the Islamic community must work together to educate society on the correct understanding of the Islamic rules and system regarding marriage, family law, and the care of girls because everything Islam brings is guidance and benefits to humanity.
- v. Local health departments alongside their medical staff need to enhance young brides' access to premium quality maternal and mental healthcare and reproductive medicine in order to decrease medical risks and increase life satisfaction.
- vi. Local public entities together with community-based organizations should organize financial support systems and training programs for business creation because they aim to reduce economic motivations behind early marriages as well as empower young families and their female members.

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Fatima Ahmad Garba: Introduction, literature review, Methodology, Results and Conclusion

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APPENDIX

Survey Statistics

Table 1: Age	Frequency	Percentage
Under 18	5	7.35
18–24	15	22.06
25–30	20	29.41
31 and above	28	41.18
Total	68	100

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 2: Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	38	55.88
Female	30	44.12
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 3: Region of Origin	Frequency	Percentage
Northern Nigeria	37	54.41
Southern Nigeria	1	1.47
South-East Nigeria	0	0.00
North-East Nigeria	30	44.12
Other	0	0.00
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 4: How would you define early marriage?	Frequency	Percentage
Marriage before 18 years of age	35	51.47
Marriage before 21 years of age	11	16.18
Marriage before completing secondary education	13	19.12
Other	9	13.24
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 5: In your opinion, what is the most common reason for early marriage in Northern Nigeria?	Frequency	Percentage
Religious beliefs	34	50.00
Cultural traditions	25	36.76
Economic factors	6	8.82
Social expectations	1	1.47
Other	2	2.94
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 6: To what extent do you think Islamic teachings influence the practice of early marriage in Northern Nigeria?	Frequency	Percentage
Very large extent	22	32.35
Large extent	15	22.06
Moderate extent	21	30.88
Small extent	8	11.76

No influence	2	2.94
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 7: In your opinion, what are the cultural reasons that support early marriage in Northern Nigeria?	Frequency	Percentage
Preservation of family honour	59	43.38
Continuation of family traditions	47	34.56
Early establishment of family	29	21.32
Other	1	0.74
Total	136	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 8: How has modernization and globalization affected the practice of early marriage in Northern Nigeria?	Frequency	Percentage
Decreased the practice	48	70.59
Increased the practice	4	5.88
No significant effect	8	11.76
I don't know	8	11.76
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 9: Do you think early marriage negatively affects young females' access to education?	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	26	38.24
Agree	21	30.88
Disagree	15	22.06
Strongly disagree	6	8.82
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 10: To what extent do you believe early marriage impacts a young female's opportunity to pursue higher education?	Frequency	Percentage
Very large extent	22	32.35
Large extent	14	20.59
Moderate extent	14	20.59
Small extent	10	14.71
No impact	8	11.76
Other	0	0.00
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 11: In your opinion, does early marriage contribute to higher dropout rates among young females in secondary or tertiary education?	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	19	27.94
Agree	30	44.12
Disagree	14	20.59
Strongly disagree	5	7.35
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 12: Do you believe that married young females should be given opportunities to continue their education after marriage?	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	52	76.47
Agree	14	20.59

Disagree	2	2.94
Strongly disagree	0	0.00
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 13: What factors, in your opinion, are the biggest obstacles for young brides in continuing their education after marriage?	Frequency	Percentage
Family responsibilities	52	25.49
Lack of spousal support	57	27.94
Financial constraints	50	24.51
Cultural/religious beliefs	25	12.25
Lack of access to educational programs	18	8.82
Other	2	0.98
Total	204	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 14: Do you think early marriage poses health risks to young females, especially during pregnancy?	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	21	30.88
Agree	26	38.24
Disagree	14	20.59
Strongly disagree	7	10.29
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 15: Have you encountered or heard of any health issues (e.g., complications during childbirth, maternal mortality) related to early marriage?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	52	76.47
No	16	23.53
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 16: To what extent do you believe early marriage impacts the mental health of young females?	Frequency	Percentage
Very large extent	13	19.12
Large extent	21	30.88
Moderate extent	12	17.65
Small extent	10	14.71
No impact	12	17.65
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 17: How accessible are healthcare services (e.g., maternal care, reproductive health services) to young brides in early marriages, in your opinion?	Frequency	Percentage
Very accessible	9	14.49
Accessible	42	60.87
Not accessible	17	24.64
Not accessible at all	0	0.00
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 18: What do you think are the most common health risks faced by young brides in early marriages?	Frequency	Percentage
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Complications during pregnancy or childbirth	55	45.45
Mental health challenges (e.g., depression, anxiety)	34	28.10
Lack of access to sexual and reproductive healthcare	19	15.70
Domestic violence	10	8.26
Other	3	2.48
Total	121	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 19: In your opinion, how does early marriage affect the socio-economic status of young females?	Frequency	Percentage
It improves their status	29	42.65
It worsens their status	18	26.47
No significant effect	13	19.12
I don't know	8	11.76
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 20: Do you think early marriage limits young females' economic independence?	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	9	13.24
Agree	36	52.94
Disagree	20	29.41
Strongly disagree	3	4.41
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 21: What factors, in your opinion, contribute most to the economic challenges faced by young brides?	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of education	29	42.65
Limited job opportunities	14	20.59
Social restrictions	10	14.71
Family responsibilities	14	20.59
Other	1	1.47
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 22: How does early marriage affect a young female's ability to participate in economic activities (e.g., employment, entrepreneurship)?	Frequency	Percentage
Significantly reduces participation	33	48.53
Somewhat reduces participation	23	33.82
No effect	12	17.65
Increases participation	0	0.00
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 23: In your opinion, how does early marriage impact a young bride's long-term economic prospects (e.g., financial independence, career development)?	Frequency	Percentage
Very negatively	16	23.53
Negatively	23	33.82
No impact	17	25.00
Positively	11	16.18
Very positively	1	1.47
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Respondents' Attitudes Towards Early Marriage

Table 24: Do you think early marriage is still widely practiced in Northern Nigeria?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	54	79.41
No	12	17.65
I don't know	2	2.94
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 25: What do you believe should be done to address the issue of early marriage in Northern Nigeria?	Frequency	Percentage
Increase awareness of its risks	28	41.18
Enforce stricter laws on age of marriage	5	7.35
Promote education for girls	20	29.41
Provide economic support to families	13	19.12
Other	2	2.94
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 26: In your opinion, what role does religion play in the continuation of early marriage practices in Northern Nigeria?	Frequency	Percentage
Major role	34	50.00
Minor role	21	30.88
No role	7	10.29
I don't know	6	8.82
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 27: Do you believe cultural traditions in Northern Nigeria make it difficult to challenge or change early marriage practices?	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	24	35.29
Agree	35	51.47
Disagree	8	11.76
Strongly disagree	1	1.47
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 28: To what extent do you believe modernisation and education are reducing the prevalence of early marriage in Northern Nigeria?	Frequency	Percentage
Very large extent	18	26.47
Large extent	22	32.35
Moderate extent	24	35.29
Small extent	3	4.41
No impact	1	1.47
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Respondents' Personal Experience

Table 29: Have you or someone you know been directly affected by early marriage?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	41	60.29
No	27	39.71

Total	68	100.00
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Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 30: If yes, how did it affect your or their education and economic opportunities?	Frequency	Percentage
Completely prevented further education	32	47.06
Delayed education but continued later	17	25.00
No effect on education	5	7.35
I don't know	14	20.59
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 31: What challenges did the individual face in terms of health after getting married at a young age?	Frequency	Percentage
Complications during pregnancy/childbirth	30	44.12
Mental health challenges (e.g., stress, depression)	14	20.59
Lack of access to healthcare services	1	1.47
No significant health challenges	12	17.65
I don't know	11	16.18
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 32: How did early marriage impact the individual's economic opportunities (e.g., employment, financial independence)?	Frequency	Percentage
Significantly limited opportunities	28	41.18
Somewhat limited opportunities	23	33.82
No impact on opportunities	14	20.59
Improved opportunities	3	4.41
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 33: Based on your personal experience or knowledge, what do you think would have been different if early marriage had been delayed?	Frequency	Percentage
Improved access to education	34	50.00
Better health outcomes	13	19.12
More economic opportunities	3	4.41
Stronger social support systems	13	19.12
Other	5	7.35
Total	68	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2025)