

Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice of Early Marriage among Female Secondary Students: A Cross-Sectional Study in Aden, Yemen

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ABSTRACT

Background: Early marriage remains a major challenge in Yemen, which affects development and contradicts human rights.

Objective: The present study aims to assess the knowledge, attitude, and practices regarding early marriage among female secondary school students in Yemen.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted on 100 female secondary school students aged 14–19. Stratified sampling recruited students in the scientific section of grades 10–12. There were structured questionnaires to gather data for demographic, socioeconomic, and thematic variables of early marriage. Analysis was performed using SPSS.

Results: The majority of respondents were unmarried, aged 14–16, and had completed high school or university; nearly 72% had previously been exposed to some information about marriage, and 42% had a family history of underage marriage. 72% of participants believed that early marriage was unfair to girls, and they primarily attributed decision-making to the girls themselves (42%) or their families (38%). The main causes of early marriage were poverty (23%) and customs and traditions (69%), and the most common result was increased divorce rates (80%). The majority of participants (76%) believed that the best way to prevent early marriage is to raise awareness among girls and the general public.

Conclusion: The results highlight the necessity of community awareness campaigns, evidence-based policymaking, and educational interventions that empower teenage girls and aid in reducing the incidence and effects of early marriage in Yemen.

Key words: Early marriage, Knowledge, Attitude, Practice, Secondary female students.

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INTRODUCTION

Early marriage is an entrenched and injurious practice in Yemen, with serious implications for human rights, public health, and national development (1). The most recent available estimates reveal that 52% of Yemeni girls are married before 18 years of age and 14% are married before age 15 (2). The absence of a legally required minimum age for marriage—following the repeal of the erstwhile imposed restrictions in 1999—has further encouraged this culture, especially among rural and poor segments of the population where traditionalism and economic constraint are more prevalent (3).

The common practice of early marriage undermines girls' education, tending to lead to dropout at adolescence when they enter domestic and maternal responsibilities (4). Inequities in education are glaring: early-married girls are significantly less likely to complete secondary schooling, thereby perpetuating gender inequity cycles and limiting socioeconomic mobility (4). From a health perspective, teen childbearing is associated with increased maternal death and illness, and pregnancy complications are the leading cause of mortality for Yemeni girls aged 15–19 years (5).

Moreover, Yemeni child marriage is a human rights concern linked with domestic violence, marital rape, and repression of girls' autonomy over their bodies and decisions. The tradition is supported by cultural principles of respect for honor, female sexuality, and rigorous gender norms—particularly in traditional, tribal, and conflict settings (5). Despite ongoing strife and socioeconomic deterioration, poor households increasingly marry off daughters in order to secure dowries or perceived protection for the children (6). To counter this entrenched practice takes several interventions, including legal reform to have the age of 18 years at marriage, community-level awareness, and more opportunities for girls' schooling and economic empowerment (7).

This study contributes to understanding this environment by examining knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to early marriage among Yemeni secondary school girls, with implications for identifying potential entry points for targeted interventions.

METHODS

Study Area

The study was conducted in October's Congregation, which consists of both middle schools (grades 7–9) and secondary schools (grades 10–12).

Study Population

The target population was the female secondary school students aged 14 to 19 years.

Inclusion Criteria

Female students aged between 14 and 19 years and enrolled in secondary school.

Exclusion Criteria

Students under the age of 14 or older than 19 years were excluded from the study.

Study Design

An observational, analytical, cross-sectional study design based on the Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) model in a community setting was used.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

100 female students were randomly chosen from a target subgroup of 440 students. Stratified sampling was used to obtain proportional representation from among the three grades: 46 from Grade 10, 30 from Grade 11, and 24 from Grade 12.

Data Collection Tool

Data were gathered through the use of a standard questionnaire on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, knowledge, attitude, and practice about early marriage and corresponding health education.

Statistical Analysis

The data was analyzed using SPSS version 22 (IBM, Chicago, USA). Descriptive statistics were employed to present the data.

RESULTS

The results show that the distribution of the age of the surveyed girls is relatively uniform, with 52% between 14 and 16 years and 48% between 17 and 19 years. In terms of marital status, the overwhelming majority of the participants (87%) are unmarried, 11% are engaged, and only 1% are married or otherwise reported. In terms of overall



levels of education, most of the respondents (52%) have reached university level, followed by 34% at high school and 11% only at primary. In terms of grade levels currently at, 46% are at Grade Ten, 30%

at Grade Eleven, and 24% at Grade Twelve (Table 1). This indicates a bias of students at lower secondary levels, decreasing gradually at higher levels.

Table 1: Frequency of demographic data among female students of secondary school

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
The Age of Girl	14-16	52	52.0
	17-19	48	48.0
Marital Status	Single	87	87.0
	Married	1	1.0
	Engaged	11	11.0
	Others	1	1.0
The Level of Education	Primary Education	11	11.0
	High School	34	34.0
	University	52	52.0
	Grade Ten	46	46.0
	Grade Eleven	30	30.0
	Grade Twelve	24	24.0

Regarding the prevalence of knowledge among female students of secondary school, the findings indicate that the majority of the respondents (72%) read or viewed something regarding marriage, while 28% did not. When asked whether someone within their family had gotten married at the age of majority, 42% said "yes," thereby illustrating that early marriage is present within a significant percentage of

the subjects' families, while 58% said "no." Of the ideal age for marriage, only 3% believe it ought to occur within the 14–17 age group. A greater number, 45%, find 18–21 acceptable, and most (52%) find 22–30 the best age for marriage. This indicates a general preference for later ages of marriage (Table 2).

Table 2: Prevalence of knowledge among female students of secondary school

Variable	Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Have You Read or Watched Any Thing About Marriage	YES	72	72.0	72.0
	NO	28	28.0	28.0
Any One of Your Family Had Married in Under Age	YES	42	42.0	42.0
	NO	58	58.0	58.0
The Appropriate Age of Marriage	Age 14-17	3	3.0	3.0
	Age 18-21	45	45.0	45.0
	Age 22-30	52	52.0	52.0



For prevalence of attitude among female students of secondary school, information indicates that the majority of the girls (72%) view marriage as a girl inequity, meaning perceived shortcomings in terms of fairness or equality. In addition, 16% comment that it is acceptable if the girl wants it, and 12% believe they lack enough information to have an opinion. Regarding who makes the decision about marriage, 42% say the girl herself, 38% say families should, and

20% say the father should be the main decision-maker. When queried about who typically promotes marriage, 70% said men, and only 30% reported that women play such a role (Table 3). These results are one perspective on gender imbalance, both in attitudes towards marriage and in the social forces propelling it.

Table 3: Prevalence of attitude among female students of secondary school

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Girls' Opinion About Marriage	Iniquity of Girl	72	72.0	72.0
	It Is Ok as Long as She Wonts It	16	16.0	16.0
	I Don`t Have Enough Information to Answer	12	12.0	12.0
Who Makes the Marriage Decision?	The Girl	42	42.0	42.0
	The Family	38	38.0	38.0
	The Father	20	20.0	20.0
Who Encourages Marriage?	Women	30	30.0	30.0
	Men	70	70.0	70.0

The study reveals that the major reason for early marriage among the respondents is tradition and custom, cited by 69% of the respondents. Poverty is cited by 23%, while only 8% cite influence by the media as a factor. In the effect created by early marriage, the most common cited effect is a high divorce rate, cited by 80% of the respondents. Polygamy, population growth, and so-called settling of the girl were each mentioned by a considerably lower proportion (8%, 6%, and 6%, respectively). When asked about preventing early marriage, the

majority (76%) believe that the best way is to make girls aware as well as society. Another 23% believe that education and job opportunities for girls are the solution. Only 1% believes in helping only the girl. These results highlight a clear belief in the importance of social awareness and the empowerment of girls through working and education in order to prevent early marriage (Table 4).



Table 4: Prevalence of the reasons, effects, and ways to limit early marriage among female students of secondary school

Variable	Category	Frequency	Valid (%)	Percent
Reasons for Early Marriage	Poverty	23	23.0	
	Media Influence	8	8.0	
	Customs and Traditions	69	69.0	
Effects of Early Marriage	Increased Divorce Rate	80	80.0	
	Polygamy	8	8.0	
	Population Growth	6	6.0	
	Settlement of the Girl	6	6.0	
Ways to Limit Early Marriage	Awareness and support for the girl only	1	1.0	
	Providing education and work for the girl	23	23.0	
	Raising awareness for the girl and society	76	76.0	

DISCUSSION

Overall, the findings support the high rates of early marriage and relationship formation among Yemeni adolescent girls, particularly in Aden, where these outcomes are more than twice as prevalent as those reported in earlier research (9). Yemen is home to 4 million child brides; of these, 1.4 million married before age 15. According to data from the Yemen Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) from 2013, almost a third (32 percent) of all young women aged 20–24 had been married before age 18, and 9 percent before age 15 (9). The major finding in our study about the girls' opinion about the appropriate age for marriage was between 20 and 30, so we did not find Only one girl married, while the number of girls engaged was 11, and the number of single girls was 87. Over a quarter of participants in our study narrated that they suffered from several health problems, such as frequent pains, disturbed menstrual cycles, abortion, difficulty in childbirth, and physical weakness, which were more than those of their counterparts who were married after the age of twenty.

While low socioeconomic status, which is defined by a lack of funds to maintain a healthy diet or access expensive healthcare, may be the direct cause of these health problems, previous research and studies from nearby nations show that child marriage is associated with poor fertility-control outcomes. Even after taking into consideration social vulnerabilities

like women's home location, ethnicity, education, and economic status. This raises the question of whether cultural factors and attitudes regarding child marriage—rather than societal vulnerabilities—are responsible for its continued prevalence in Aden and domineering behavior of spouses and in-laws toward young married women. Insufficient education and media exposure, especially in rural areas, along with women's limited control over health-related decisions within the family, may explain why the women in our study were not aware of the negative health effects of child marriages, as reported in previous studies (10).

The fact that the majority of women in our survey who were married as children expressed satisfaction and thought their parents were right to arrange their marriages at such a young age was concerning. The fact that most of the women in our study disagreed with the nation's ban on child marriages, viewing it only as a family matter, was especially disturbing.

The majority of the participants in the previous study narrated their willingness to marry their daughters before the age of 18 years, subject to the availability of a good marriage (11). This may differ in our study; in our study, the majority of girls believe that the one who makes the decision to marry is the girl herself (42%), and 38% see the father as having the right to make the decision of marriage.

Protecting the “family honor is listed as one of the reasons for child marriages in earlier studies. The



moment girls reach puberty, they are believed to be a source of attraction and lust for boys; parents, thus, feel relaxed and free of the burden of guarding their girls from unchastity by marrying them at an early age. By marrying girls before the age of 18 years, parents believe that this practice could protect their daughters from unwanted attention from men and the likelihood of objectionable illegal relationships (12). Further, dropping girls out of schools in the name of protecting family honor is an unfortunate consequence (12).

According to the attitude of early marriage among the current study, we found that more than half of the girls were of the opinion that early marriage is an iniquity to the girl, while 16% of the female students were of the opinion that early marriage is ok as long as she wants it, but 12% of the female students were of the opinion that early marriage is "I don't have enough information to answer." Thirty of the girls argued that women are the main advocates for early marriage, while more than half of the girls thought men were the main proponents. Twenty students claimed that the father makes the decision regarding marriage, forty-two students thought that the girl should make the decision to marry, and thirty-eight students argued that the family makes the decision.

CONCLUSION

The opinions and factors influencing early marriage among female secondary students in Aden were examined in this study. It exposed preconceived notions and highlighted the negative effects on economic well-being, family stability, and health. Most of the participants lived in Enma, were single, and had mothers with only a primary education and fathers with a university degree. They generally believed that the girl should have the freedom to make her own decisions and that an early marriage was unfair, with the ideal marriage age being between 22 and 30. While most participants linked early marriage to higher divorce rates, tradition was the main justification given by participants for getting married young. Many of them had previously come across educational materials on the topic. The study emphasizes the need for programs, regulatory changes, and awareness campaigns to increase girls' autonomy and reduce the prevalence of child marriage.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest.

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