

Child Marriage: Knowledge, practice and its attributed consequences among early married women in Jumla, NepalPrakash Shahi^{1*}, Pasang Devi Tamang^{1,2}, Padam Simkhada², Kishor Singh Rawat^{1,3}¹Community Integrated Development Center, Nepal²Liverpool John Moores University³Nobel College, Pokhara University

Received: 28-01-2019 / Revised: 10-03--2019 / Accepted: 14-03-2019

Abstract

Background: Child marriage is a clear violation of international laws. In Nepal, child marriage is illegal since 1963. The current law sets the minimum age of marriage as 20 years for both men and women but can marry after 18 years old with parental consent. **Objectives:** The study aimed to identify the knowledge, practices and the consequences faced by the early married women of 15-25 years in Jumla, Nepal. **Methods:** Descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in Jumla among women aged between 15-25 years who were married at ≤ 18 years old. The study was conducted from April to September 2017. Convenient sampling method was used to select a total of 160 participants. Data were collected using semi-structure questionnaire and then analyzed using SPSS version 20, MS-Excel and MS-Word 2007. **Results:** 73% of women have heard about child marriage among which only 31% have knew about legal age of marriage in Nepal. Majority of the female (60%) decided themselves for their marriage. 76% of the early married mothers had withdrawn their education, 31% of mothers have their health condition declined due to work load and child birth. Violence of any or all kinds (physical or sexual, mental and verbal) by in law or husband was experienced by 33% of women. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that the prevalence of child marriage is still common in Jumla Nepal. Knowledge about legal age at marriage among women in this study group is low which calls for joint action from all level against it in order to stop child marriage.

Keywords: Child marriage, early marriage, health consequence, Knowledge, Nepal**Introduction**

The UN convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC) and international labor organization (ILO) state child as those who are under 18 years of age. Child marriage is defined as marriage before the age of 18 whether its formal or informal unions in which children live with a partner as married [1]. However, in the context of Nepal, the current marriage law for both boys and girls is 20 years without parental consent and 18 years with parental consent [2,3].

Child marriage is a clear violation of international laws that includes Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, International Convention on Civil and Political Rights 1966 (ICCPR), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979 (CEDAW), and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC). Globally, 700 million women alive today were married as children and one-third of these marriage were before the age of 15 [1, 4]. Around 25,000 new marriages happen every day under the age of 18 years worldwide [5]. Today, more than half of all child brides live in South Asia [6]. Even though child marriage is illegal in Nepal since 1963, Nepal has the third highest rate of child marriage (37 percent before 18 and 10 percent before 15) in Asia, after Bangladesh and India [2,7] with median age at first marriage for women is 17.9 compare to 21.7 for men i.e. on average, women marry 4 years earlier than men [8]. Child marriage practice is strongly established social violence carried on from generation to generation. It has overwhelming impact on girls, their

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communities and their countries. Child marriage can lead to maternal health risk, great exposure to HIV/AIDS and domestic and sexual violence, deprivation of childhood and a future [9, 10]. Child marriage has no benefit for the young girls themselves, who are more likely to bear children before they are physically ready. Indeed, for some 70,000 young brides who die every year as a result of pregnancy or childbirth complications, early marriage is a death sentence [6]. Early marriage was traditionally been norms in Nepalese culture. It was nearly 75% of young women aged 15-19 years were married in 1961, in 2007, 51.4% of young women aged under 18 were married and is now 37% of girls marry before the age of 18 and 10% before the age of 15 in 2015 [11, 12, 13]. Even though Nepal has a long way to go, with high percent of early married girls, Nepal government has made some effort to mitigate or end child marriage. Child marriage is illegal in Nepal since 1963 with the current law sets the age of minimum 20 years for both men and women. National legislation of marriage registration act 1971 adopted for minimum marriageable age. On 2014 in London "Girl Summit," Nepal pledged the ambitious goal to end child marriage by 2020 and has subsequently worked to develop a strategy to achieve this goal. This goal was later changed in 2016 to ending child marriage by 2030 [11]. The government of Nepal has signed many international instruments designed to tackle this problem such as CEDAW (ratified in 1993) and convention on the right of the child (ratified in 1990) [12]. Beside these, Nepal government has been working with many INGOs to end child marriage in Nepal. Even though the government is in the process of developing a national action plan to address the problem, authorities so far have done little to prevent child marriage or to assist married children [2,11,14]. Educationist and researcher dealing with children's issues have done a lot of studies and research on child labor, education, childcare but the issues of child marriage in rural part of Nepal still needs to be researched. The importance of the problems involved in the area is cause for great alarm and is still being practiced in some part of Nepal. There is high prevalence of child marriage in villages of remote areas in Nepal. According to NDHS 2016, median age at first marriage among women age 20-49 in rural and urban is 17.4 years and 18.6 years respectively [8]. Hence, this study aimed to identify the knowledge, practices, factors related of child marriage and to identify the

health consequences faced by the early married women who are 15-25 years in Patarashi rural municipality of Jumla, Nepal.

Methods

This study used descriptive cross-sectional study design. Data was collected from early married women of Patarashi rural municipality, Jumla, Nepal from April to September 2017. The study unit was a woman below age of 25 years old who was married at the age ≤ 18 years. A convenient sampling technique was employed in obtaining samples.

The sample 160 participants were determined by using a cross-sectional formula for infinite population considering the prevalence rate of child marriage as 37 percent [2] with 95 percent confidence interval, 5 percent of allowable error and 10% of non-response rate.

The sample size was determined by using the formula,
 $n = Z^2PQ / d^2$

Where, n = Sample size required in the study, Z = 1.96 (Standard normal deviate that corresponds to α -level of statistical significance), According to Human Rights watch report, In Nepal 37 % of girls marry before age 18. i.e. P = 37% = 0.37 Prevalence of child marriage in Nepal.

$$Q = 1 - P (1 - 0.37) = 0.63$$

D = Margin of error which is the precision of results required (8%) = 0.08.

Therefore,

$$n = (1.96)^2 \times 0.37 \times 0.63 / (0.08)^2 = 139.91$$

Again,

Non response rate = 10% of n

$$10\% \text{ of } 139.91 = 13.91$$

So total sample size = 139.91 + 13.91 = 153.90 \approx 160
 So, total sample of 160 early married women was taken for the study.

Verbal consent was taken from respondents before taking interview to participate in this study and Semi-structure questionnaire was used to collect the data then collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 20, MS-Excel and MS-Word 2007.

Findings

The study included 160 early married women aged ranging from 15 to 25 years where mean age of the respondents was 21 years with standard deviation of 2.81. The total literacy rate of mother was 42% and the major source of income was farming/agriculture (93.8%).

Table 1: Socioeconomic and demographic characteristic of mothers

| Variables | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Age of mother/respondents in year | | |
| 15-19 | 48 | 30 |
| 20-25 | 112 | 70 |
| Total | 160 | 100 |
| Ethnicity | | |
| Brahmin | 8 | 5 |
| Chhetri | 138 | 86.3 |
| Dalit | 9 | 5.6 |
| Janajati | 5 | 3.1 |
| Total | 160 | 100 |
| Religion- | | |
| Hindu | 145 | 90.6 |
| Buddhist | 5 | 3.1 |
| Christian | 10 | 6.3 |
| Family Types | | |
| Nuclear family | 65 | 40.6 |
| Joint family | 95 | 59.4 |
| Educational level | | |
| Illiterate | 93 | 58.1 |
| Primary | 15 | 9.4 |
| Lower secondary | 33 | 20.6 |
| Secondary | 19 | 11.9 |
| Total | 160 | 100 |
| Occupation of mother | | |
| Agriculture | 150 | 93.8 |
| Labor | 1 | 0.6 |
| Business | 9 | 5.6 |
| Total | 160 | 100 |
| Average Annual income (NRs.) | | |
| Up to 20,000 | 32 | 20 |
| 20,000-40,000 | 43 | 26.9 |
| 40,000-60,000 | 63 | 39.4 |
| 60,000-1,00,000 | 16 | 10 |
| Above 1,00,000 | 6 | 3.8 |
| Total | 160 | 100 |

Majority of the mothers (73%) have heard about child marriage of which only 28% could give correct

meaning (marriage before 18 years) and 31% of them knew the legal age of marriage (20 years without

consent from parents and 18 years with consent from parents) in Nepal. Major source of information was TV/Radio (39 percent) followed by Family/Friends and

health institution (34 and 26 percent respectively). Only 41% of mother have heard about organizations working against child marriage.

Table 2: Knowledge about child marriage

| Characteristics | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Heard about child marriage: | | |
| Yes | 117 | 73 |
| No | 43 | 27 |
| Correct statement of child married | | |
| Marriage before age 15 | 26 | 22.2 |
| Marriage before age 18 | 33 | 28.2 |
| Marriage before age 20 | 32 | 27.4 |
| Marriage before age 22 | 26 | 22.2 |
| Total | 117 | 100 |
| Legal age of marriage in Nepal | | |
| Correct | 50 | 31 |
| Wrong | 110 | 69 |
| | 160 | 100 |
| Source of information | | |
| TV/Radio | 63 | 39 |
| Newspaper | 8 | 5 |
| Health institution | 42 | 26 |
| Educational institution | 40 | 25 |
| Family/friends | 55 | 34 |
| Knowledge about organization working against child marriage | | |
| Yes | 66 | 41 |
| No | 94 | 59 |
| | | |

The median age of women at marriage was 15.5 with SD of 1.18. Majority of the respondents were married at the age of 17 (33%) followed by 15 years (28%) and 16 years (22%). Education plays major role in determining age at marriage. The educated are more likely to marry after the legal age of marriage than

uneducated and illiterate [15, 16]. Majority of respondents were illiterate (58%) when they married. For the decision of early marriage, it was found that 60% by self-decision and rest 40% female were married as decided by their parents, out of whom 50% was against their will or force child marriage.

Table 3: Factors related to practice of child marriage

| Variable | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Education level of respondent at marriage | | |
| Illiterate | 93 | 58.1 |
| Primary | 15 | 9.4 |
| Lower secondary | 33 | 20.6 |
| Secondary | 19 | 11.9 |
| | 160 | 100 |
| Marriage decision | | |
| Parents | 64 | 40 |
| Self-decision | 96 | 60 |
| Marriage against will (Force marriage) | | |
| Yes | 32 | 50 |
| No | 32 | 50 |
| Causes of Child Marriage | | |
| Poverty | 2 | 1 |
| Illiteracy | 39 | 24 |
| Female as a burden in family | 6 | 4 |
| Culture | 75 | 47 |
| love marriage | 110 | 69 |
| Family pressure | 50 | 31 |
| Other | 6 | 4 |

Love marriage was found to be the main reason for child marriage (69%) which is followed by culture, family pressure and illiteracy: 47, 31 and 24 % respectively. It was interesting to see that the poverty was the cause of child marriage in case of only 2 respondent and female as a burden in family in case of only 6 respondents.

Consequences of Child Marriage

Likewise, different studies of UNICEF [14, 17-20] pointed out that child marriage has strong effects to physical, intellectual, psychological, cutting off

educational opportunities and chances of personal growth, this study has also found consequences of child marriage from impact on socioeconomic to young mother's health. In this regard, 76% of the mother had withdrawn their education while 31 % of mother have their health condition declined due to work load and child birth. Mothers who faced any complications throughout the cycle of child birth i.e. during pregnancy, at the time of delivery and after delivery which was 21%, 17% and 33% respectively.

Table 4: Consequences of child marriage

| Variables | Total | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-------|-----------|------------|
| Education withdrawal | 67 | 51 | 76 |
| work load increased | 160 | 133 | 83 |
| health condition degraded/bad | 160 | 49 | 31 |
| Complication during pregnancy | 126 | 27 | 21 |
| Complication during delivery | 126 | 21 | 17 |

| | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|----|
| Illness after delivery | 126 | 41 | 33 |
| Unwanted pregnancy | 126 | 28 | 22 |
| Miscarriage | 126 | 16 | 13 |
| Violence by in law or husband (physically, mentally or verbally) | 160 | 52 | 33 |
| satisfied with child marriage | 160 | 123 | 77 |

Unwanted pregnancy (22.2%) and miscarriage (12.7%) were the other major problems among the study group. The study revealed that 33% of mothers have experienced any or all kind of violence (physical or sexual, mental and verbal) by in law or husband. 79% of the mother had given birth to child within 15-22 years and 21% of mothers had never given the birth.

The mean age of first child birth was 17.77 years with standard deviation of 1.66. This study found that there is no association between ethnicity of respondent with knowledge on legal age at marriage (P-value 0.285) whereas educational status and types of family had high significance with knowledge about legal age at marriage (p-value of <0.001 and 0.001 respectively).

Table 5: Bivariate association between different variables

| Variables | Knowledge on Legal age of marriage | | | | P-value |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----|-----------|------|---------|
| | Correctly | | Incorrect | | |
| | N | (%) | N | (%) | |
| Ethnicity of the respondents | | | | | |
| Brahmin | 2 | 4 | 6 | 5.5 | 0.285 |
| Chettri | 44 | 88 | 94 | 85.5 | |
| Dalit | 1 | 2 | 8 | 7.3 | |
| Janajati | 3 | 6 | 2 | 1.8 | |
| Education of the respondents | | | | | |
| Illiterate | 17 | 34 | 76 | 69.1 | <0.001 |
| Primary | 5 | 10 | 10 | 9.1 | |
| Lower secondary | 16 | 32 | 17 | 15.5 | |
| Secondary | 12 | 24 | 7 | 6.4 | |
| Unwanted Pregnancy | | | | | |
| Variables | Yes | | No | | P-value |
| | n | (%) | N | (%) | |
| Age at the time of birth | | | | | |
| Right age (≥ 20 yrs) | 0 | 0 | 21 | 21.4 | 0.004 |
| Under age for child birth (< 20 yrs) | 28 | 100 | 77 | 78.6 | |
| Behaved negatively | | | | | |
| Variables | yes | | No | | P-value |

| | <i>n</i> | (%) | <i>N</i> | (%) | |
|--------------------------------------------|----------|------|----------|------|--------|
| Illiteracy as a cause of child marriage | | | | | |
| Yes | 20 | 38.5 | 19 | 17.6 | 0.004 |
| No | 32 | 61.5 | 89 | 82.4 | |
| Culture as a cause of child marriage | | | | | |
| Yes | 24 | 46.2 | 51 | 47.2 | 0.899 |
| No | 28 | 53.8 | 57 | 52.8 | |
| Love marriage as a cause of child marriage | | | | | |
| Yes | 25 | 48.1 | 85 | 78.7 | <0.001 |
| No | 27 | 51.9 | 23 | 21.3 | |

The study showed significant association between age at the first baby and unwanted pregnancy (P=value 0.004). Unwanted pregnancy was directly association with under age of child birth (<20 years). Illiteracy and love marriage (causes of early marriage) have statistically significant association with any form of violence by the family members (Husband, mother-in-law and father-in-law) whereas culture has no significant association.

Table 6: Association between causes of child marriage and health after marriage

| Causes | Total (N=160) | | Health after marriage | | | | | | P-value |
|---------------|------------------|------|-----------------------|------|----------|------|----------------|------|---------|
| | | | Good | | Bad | | Same as before | | |
| | <i>N</i> | (%) | <i>N</i> | (%) | <i>n</i> | (%) | <i>N</i> | (%) | |
| Illiteracy | | | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 39 | 24.4 | 2 | 15.4 | 26 | 53.1 | 11 | 11.2 | <0.001 |
| No | 121 | 75.6 | 11 | 84.6 | 23 | 46.9 | 87 | 88.8 | |
| Culture | | | | | | | | | |
| yes | 75 | 46.9 | 1 | 7.7 | 20 | 40.8 | 54 | 55.1 | 0.003 |
| no | 85 | 53.1 | 12 | 92.3 | 29 | 59.2 | 44 | 44.9 | |
| Love marriage | | | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 110 | 68.8 | 12 | 92.3 | 24 | 49 | 74 | 75.5 | 0.001 |
| No | 50 | 31.2 | 1 | 7.7 | 25 | 51 | 24 | 24.5 | |

Regarding the association between cause of marriage and health condition thereafter, this study has found positive significance with educational status, culture and love marriage.

Discussion

This study was designed to find out the knowledge, practice, attribute factors and consequences of early marriage among married women who were between 15-25 years with mean age of 21 years (SD-2.81) in Patarasi rural municipality of Jumla district. The average median age at marriage from 15 districts was

18 years for females [3] but this study found lowest median age 15.5 years of women with SD of 1.18.

Only 31.3% of women have known about the legal age of marriage in Nepal and 41% of mother had heard about organizations working against child marriage. In the report of Plan Nepal (2012) data from respondents who married young revealed that 67.1% of child marriage occurred due to parental pressure, 30% cultural influences, 8% poverty and lack of awareness

and 32% as children own desire. The study carried in Gombi, Nigeria [21] found that, 47% of the respondents agreed that poverty was the major factor influencing child marriage in the area, while 21.5% mentioned culture. But in our study, only one percent responded that poverty was the cause of the early marriage and majority 69% of child marriage occurred due to love marriage, 47% cultural influences which is higher than plan Nepal report and study in Gombi, Nigeria but 31% due to family pressure which is comparatively lower. Regarding information about the early marriage, it is significantly associated with education status of women.

Likewise, different studies of UNICEF [14, 17-20] pointed out that child marriage has strong effects to physical, intellectual, psychological, cutting off educational opportunities and chances of personal growth, this study has found consequences of child marriage from impact on socioeconomic to young mother's health. Early marriage impact on women's health: According to a study conducted in Bangladesh [15] on "Early marriage impact on female's health and their satisfactory level", 59.3% of the respondents reported that they had experienced physical problems after marriage but in our study 30.6% of the respondents said that their health status has been declined after marriage which is lower than the study in Bangladesh.

Complication during delivery was experienced by 65.3% in the study of Bangladesh and 71% had experienced at least one serious pregnancy or birth related health problem [15 & 24] whereas in this study, 21.4% of the respondents had complication during child birth though 73.3% had unwanted pregnancy. In the study [21] child marriage against will was 77.3% but only 20% of females were married against their will in Jumla. One of the study [17] report from India found that young women who married early were 1.8 times more likely to have ever experienced physical or sexual violence and in our study 32.5% of women were found experienced violence or behaved negatively (physically or sexually, mentally or verbally) by in law or husband. Beside these health levels, women who were educated dropped or withdrawal the school after marriage was 76% which shows school dropout and child marriage are interrelated outcomes [22-24]. The association between ethnicity of respondents was not significant with knowledge on legal age of marriage in Nepal with p-value 0.285. There was no any significant association between socio demographic variables and decision of child marriage. However, there were significant associations between other different variables. According to the chi-square test, there was high significance between educational status of the

respondents and knowledge about right age of child marriage with the p-value (0.000) less than 0.001. There was high significant association between illiteracy and health status after marriage with p-value less than 0.001. There was significant association between culture as a cause with the health status after marriage with the p-value was less than 0.05 (p=0.003). There was significant association between complicated delivery and illness after delivery (p-value=0.002). So abolishment of child marriage could prevent both complicated delivery and illness that can be faced after delivery.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the prevalence of child marriage is high in Jumla Nepal. It is also alarming that around 70% of girls don't know about the legal age of marriage in Jumla. Factors that are related to child marriage are love marriage, culture, family pressure and illiteracy. This study shows that poverty is not the reason for child marriage in this area.

The consequences of child marriage are very bad for girls in terms of health and education. They had experienced complication during antepartum and postpartum period. It was the most common reason for school dropout. They were also at high risk of any form of violence by their family members (husband, father and mother in law).

Therefore, it calls for joint action from all level against child marriage in order to stop it. Child marriage can be eliminated from society by joint effort from various sectors such as strong political commitment at the highest levels, decision makers, development experts, international community and donors. These stakeholders should now turn their attention to what can be done to raise the awareness at remote, deprived people and stop early marriage and also think on ways to prevent and protect girls who are already married from any kind of violence.

Acknowledgement

It is our great privilege to acknowledge with deep sense of gratitude, the contribution and support given by all the early married women from the ward number 2, 3 and 4 of Patarashi rural municipality, Jumla Nepal and also thanks to Patarashi rural municipality who supported us during data collection.

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Conflict of Interest: None

Source of Support: Nil