

Causes and Consequences of Child Marriage: A Perspective

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Abstract— the incidence of child marriage is not only in Nepal but also in the world. It is mostly in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America. High incidence rate of child marriage in Nepal among South Asian countries is the key alarm in terms of child protection. However, child marriage occurs in poor, economically deprived and dalit communities of terai. There were major three forces those drive child marriages i.e. poverty, the need to reinforce social ties and the belief that it offers protection. It directly affected the girls' health and education. Most of the girls' drop out from school even not completing their primary or basic education. Worsen health of girls due to maximum workload at home i.e. engaged in cooking, grass cutting. Girls' became pregnant early in spite of maturity and led to maternal and child mortality rate. Girls' faced domestic violence from mother in law at home. Most of them suffer from sexually transmitted infection. Therefore, these are the central concern of this paper. Therefore, this paper studies the causes and consequences of the child marriage. Furthermore, this paper will bring the possible solution for the reduction or elimination of child marriage especially in terai region of Nepal.

Index Terms— Child marriage, child rights, dowry, education, out of school.

1 INTRODUCTION

THE government of Nepal has made considerable progress in education planning, leading to significant improvements in terms of gender parity at primary level but yet poor attendance, retention, and performance, high rates of grade repetition are common, and the enrollment data bides discrepancies in equality of access to an inclusive and effective education. Yet the current technical skill, teaching mindsets, and the education system from ministry to village level are insufficient to build on its successes and transform the schools into place of equal opportunity for all children to learn to the best of their ability (MOE, 2014).

Census (2011) justified it. Because it shows that still 14.9 % of children are out of school in Nepal and 27.7% in Dhanusha district (as cited in MOE, 2013). In the same way, Flash Report I of DOE (2012) shows that drop out and retention rates for children in primary school are worrisome with only 66 percent of children completing primary education (grade 8). Furthermore, it explained that about 27.1 percent of students' complete secondary education.

As can be observed, education status of girls' in terai is very poor. Most of them are from poor and marginalized communities. Most of the girls' drop out from school even not completing their primary or basic education due to child marriage. Worsen health of girls due to maximum workload at home due to engaged in cooking, grass cutting. Girls' became pregnant early in spite of maturity and led to maternal mortality rate and child mortality rate as well. Girls' faced domestic violence from mother in law at home. Most of them suffer

from sexually transmitted infection. There is no proper and sufficient plan for them at local and district level institutions and authorities.

Thus, why children especially girls are out of school, why their voices are not heard and respected, why there is no appropriate and sufficient plan for girls to mainstream them into the education system at local and district level institutions and authorities, why parents are not sending girls to school are the major concerns these days.

Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to find out the causes and consequences of child marriage especially in Dhanusha district of terai. To fulfill the purpose of the study the following research questions designed:

1. What are the causes of child marriage in our society?
2. What are the consequences of child marriage?
3. How can be child marriage reduced especially in terai?

2 CHILD MARRIAGE

Gynecol (2009) stated that marriages in which a child under the age of 18 years is involved occur worldwide, but mainly seen in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America. A human rights violation, child marriage directly affects girls' education, health, psychological well-being, and the health of their offspring (as cited in Nour, 2009). I observed that girls became drop out from school after marriage. They are depressed, suffered from sexually transmitted infection, and impacted to maternal mortality. Their offspring are at an increased risk for premature birth and, subsequently, neonatal or infant death.

Child marriage generally occurs below the age of 18 years. It affects not only the health of child but also on their education. Though it also affects psychologically increases the risk of depression. Therefore, school is the best place for children to protect them from child marriage.

The author further expressed that more than 60 million marriages happened under the age of 18 years worldwide. Out

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of that about 31 million child marriages found in South Asia, 14 million in sub-Saharan Africa, and 6.6 million in Latin America and the Caribbean. It found that 25000 girls were married every day worldwide. About 60 percent of girls were married under the age of 18 in sub-Saharan countries and Bangladesh while 40 to 60 percent of girls get child marriages in India. Child marriage not only occurred in Nepal but it is also most common in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Bangladesh and India too (as cited in Nour, 2009).

Similarly, International Planned Parenthood Federation (2006) pointed out that, "Any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years, before the girl is physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing" (as cited in Rodgers, 2012). Furthermore, Verveer (2010) stated that about 25,000 girls become child brides every day. It is also estimated that out of seven girls one marries before she turns fifteen in the developing world (as cited in Rodgers, 2012). If child marriage occurs, the girls should have to physically and mentally prepare for childbearing.

In the same way UNICEF (2011) highlighted that, " Child marriage is a major social concern and a violation of children's rights – whether it happens to a girl or a boy – as it denies the basic rights to health, nutrition, education, freedom from violence, abuse and exploitation and deprives the child of his/her childhood". Therefore, child marriage not only denies the fundamental rights of the children but also stolen their childhood.

Such report also stated that about 43 percent of women aged 20 to 24 were married before the age of 18 years in India. In spite of child marriage commonly practiced all throughout the country, girls in rural areas (48 percent) are mostly affected by it more than in urban (29 percent). Girls from poorer households, scheduled castes and tribes are tended to marry at younger age in addition to girls with less education.

The same report mentioned that child marriage was found as extremely common in Nepal with population of 30 million. About 51 percent of Nepalese married as children. NDHS (2006) found that 60 percent of Nepalese women were get married by the time they reached 18 between the ages of 20 to 49 (as cited in UNICEF, 2011). It was found that child marriage is extremely common in Nepal. It directly impacts girls' education and health rights.

However, United Nations (1990), Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier"(as cited in Rodgers, 2012). Furthermore, United Nations (1948), Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that marriage should be "entered only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses". In the same way, the Organization of African Unity (1999), the 1990 African Charter

on the Rights and the Welfare of the Child forbidden that child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys; and calls on governments to take effective action, including legislation, to specify a minimum age of 18 years in order to marry (as cited in Nnadi, 2014). In the same article, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines child, as the human beings below the age of 18 years while UDHR guided that marriage should be happened only with the full and free consents of the spouses.

There are three main types of early or child marriage in Ethiopia: *Promissory marriage*, whereby a verbal promise is made at infancy or even childbirth by the parents to have their children gets married. *Child marriage*, in which children under the age of 10 are wedded. *Adolescent marriage*, which involves girls aged between 10 and 15. In most cases, the child bride is taken to her in-laws immediately after the wedding; in other cases the parents agree that the girl stays with her parents until she is mature enough to live with her husband. In general, most of these children were married to older men, which presents serious communication problem, which is essential for a happy and successful marriage (Types of Marriage, n.d.).

3. METHOD

A qualitative type of research method used to collect the data from the informants on child marriage. Information was collected from only five key persons (lead actors of the organization) who are engaged in and have demonstrable experience in development sector especially in education and child marriage issues of terai. They all are from the NGOs (Aasaman Nepal, PAC Nepal and Life Nepal) working in terai and in Dhanusha district. They were interviewed with a small check list and through telephone conversations. The detail information note was maintained that they expressed during the telephone interview. Based on, such information matrix for participant responses developed. After that, data was interpreted, analyzed and based on it major findings and conclusions were derived.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the major causes behind child marriage especially in terai. It describes the ill effects of the child marriage. Finally, it provides us the possible solutions to minimize the incidence of child marriages in our rural community.

3.1 CAUSES OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Gynocol (2009) highlighted that there were major three forces those drive child marriages i.e. poverty, the need to reinforce social ties and the belief that it offers protection. He mentioned that parents have to ensure their daughter's financial security as well as to reduce the economic burden of daughter's place

on the family. He added that girls are taken as price in terms of feed, clothe and educate and finally there was no any output from girls to the family after leaving the household. Generally, marriage brings a dowry to the bride's family. It is seen that the younger the girl, the higher the dowry. Therefore, sooner the economic burden of raising the girl is lifted.

Finally, parents feel proud in the society by marrying their daughter to a "good" family in terms of social status. There was a common belief among the parents that marrying the daughters young should protect them from rape, premarital sexual activity, unintended pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections, especially human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and AIDS (as cited in Nour, 2009).

UNICEF (2011) focused on the following collective and individual attitudes and beliefs that led to compel girls for the marriage before the age of 18 years.

Unmarried girls are considered a liability to family honor. Child marriage is a way to ensure chastity and virginity of the bride, thus avoiding potentially dishonoring of the family.

Dowry perpetuates child marriage as it encourages parents to marry off their girls early to avoid an increase in the dowry amount (more educated girls usually require a higher dowry).

Girls are considered an economic burden for their family of origin and a "parayadhan" or property that belongs to the marital family. Hence, the tendency is to marry girls as early as possible and reduce investment in their daughters.

Investing in girls' education is not considered worthy as girls will be moving to the groom's household and will be employed in household chores. On the other hand, the limited education and livelihood options for girls lead to marriage being one of the few options for girls' future.

With the aim of reducing the costs of wedding ceremonies parents often marry off their children early seizing the opportunity of collective/community marriage ceremonies, marrying off all girls/daughters in one ceremony when there are multiple daughters in a family, and coupling a wedding with other celebrations – such as funerals – held in the community.

Impunity, weak law enforcement and limited knowledge of the law by society perpetuate child marriage.

Attendance of child marriages by local politicians and government officials contradicts their role as duty bearers against child marriage.

Skewed sex ratio in some states has led to trafficking of girls in the name of marriage.

It was found that the major causes behind occur the incidence of child marriage were poverty, social ties, protection, ensuring chastity and virginity of the bride, the more educated girls the more dowry, taken as economic burden for their family of origin and as "parayadhan", parent do not want to invest in girls' education because considered worthy as girls will be moving to the groom's household.

The respondents of the study expressed that parents generally marry girl before the age of 18 years because of social

prestige/pressure, responsibility to marry off, fear of dowry (Higher the education, higher the dowry), to lessen the economical burden, social prestige/pressure and girls are considered as liability to family honor. Dineshwar Sah, Program Coordinator, Aasaman Nepal, education activist expressed that generally girls are become early mature in terai due to environmental factors and they are mentally prepared for marriage.

They also expressed that child marriage especially occurs in rural communities with poor, illiterate, migrant, unemployment and high population of girls. It mostly found in dalit, janjati and Muslim communities.

They further expressed that the major causes of incidence of child marriage in Nepalese society were lack of awareness, less access to media, low knowledge level of government policy, investment to girls taken as waste of resources, fear from unmarried, higher the education higher the dowry, reduce the cost of wedding ceremonies and weak law enforcement.

3.2 CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Gynecol (2009) mentioned child marriage consequences isolation, depression, sexually transmitted infection, cervical cancer, infant and maternal mortality. After the marriage girls have to do the role of wife, domestic worker, as well as mother at their husband's household (as cited in Nour, 2009). I observed that husbands are generally older than the girls due to the high paid dowry in terai. Due to the huge age gap between husband and wife there is difference in mutual understanding, resulted the girls rejected, isolated, and depressed while girls are immature, and due to that high frequency of child and maternal death occur.

Generally, husbands infected the wives. One side girls always tried to prove their fertility and for that they had high-frequency of unprotected intercourse with their husbands while other side either husbands had prior sexual partners or polygamous. Finally, the girls' virginal status and physical immaturity of girls increase the risk of HIV transmission secondary to hymenal, vaginal, or cervical lacerations. Other sexually transmitted infections like herpes simplex virus type 2, gonorrhoea and Chlamydia are also common infrequent transmission and there is a high chance of the girls' vulnerability to HIV.

High death rates found due to eclampsia, postpartum hemorrhage, sepsis, HIV infection, malaria, and obstructed labor. Girls below the age of 18 years have small pelvises and they are not ready for childbearing. So, morbidity and mortality rate are seen higher due to the young mothers' poor nutrition, physical and emotional immaturity, and lack of access to social and reproductive services, and higher risk for infectious diseases.

In this regards, UNICEF (2011) pointed out that child marriage effects badly to both child and society. Child marriage

has a strong physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impact, cutting off educational opportunities and chances of personal growth for both girls and boys. The consequences of child marriage are awful for especially girls rather than the boys though girls are generally forced for early childbearing and social isolation. As a result child brides drop out of school and be exposed to higher risk of domestic violence and abuse, increased economic dependence, denial of decision-making power, inequality at home that further perpetuates discrimination and low status of girls/women.

Furthermore, such documents stressed that the practice of child marriage is directly impacting educational opportunities of young people of Nepal. Once girls' get married they drop out from school and started to take care of their in-laws at home and producing children. Child marriage and early pregnancy affects women's general health, their productivity, job opportunities and prospects for escaping poverty.

Therefore, it was found that the child marriage directly impacted the girls rather than the boys. The major consequences of child marriage were isolation and depression, risk of sexually transmitted, infection and cervical cancer, risk during labor and delivery and risk of infants. It has a strong physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impact, cutting off educational opportunities and chances of personal growth for girls.

The respondents also outlined high mortality rate, chances of divorce, dropout from school, malnutrition, mental disorders, migration, domestic and sexual violence, abuse, discrimination, exploitation, risk of HIV AIDS and repeated pregnancies were the major consequences of child marriage.

3.3 SOLUTIONS

According to UNICEF (2011), to address the child marriage India government has focused on

Development of the girl child and promoting girls' education

Conditional cash transfer scheme to encourage retention of the girl in school

Integrated Child Protection Scheme

Improve the nutritional and health status of adolescent girls between 11-18 years of age, and promoting school attendance

Scheme for empowerment of adolescent girls

Education for women's equality

National program for education of girls at elementary level

Setting up residential schools at upper primary level for girls belonging predominantly to the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backwards castes and minorities in difficult areas

Child marriage protest program - a nationwide awareness-raising program against child marriage

Incentive programs for girls- My Daughter, My Pride

Capacity-building efforts targeting stakeholders responsible for implementing the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act

Building the capacity of local faith-based leaders on child marriage to act as door messengers at the village level

The use of media and the production of awareness raising materials

Hence, to minimize the incidence of child marriage, government of India has already started special programs like girl's education, child protection, conditional cash transfer skill scheme, child marriage protest program, incentive program for girl's capacity building of stakeholders, media mobilization, empowerment of girls program and girls residential schools etc.

Similarly, Nour (2009) tinted that governmental and non-governmental policies should target to educate the community, raise awareness, engage local and religious leaders, involve parents, and empower girls through education and employment them. Programs should be designed those and implemented that give families financial incentives to keep their daughters in school so that they could feed their children during school hours. Education is the key tools that not only delays marriage, pregnancy and childbearing but also helps in changing the attitudes and practices that lead to minimize the risks of sexual behavior in marriage.

Finally, respondents were also suggested to organized nationwide awareness campaign for control over population, strong implementation of laws, orient and literate parents on importance of education to prevent their girls from child marriage. Behavior change communication related program should be designed and implemented to sensitize the parent on ill effect of child marriage. Economic uplift of the rural poor and disadvantaged community is also crucial so economical empowerment related program should also be targeted for those people to improve their economic status.

4. CONCLUSION

The incidence of child marriage is really one of the serious and important issues regarding the child protection because still it is happening throughout the world in 21st century. It is mostly seen in South Asia, Africa and Latin America. It is also alarming us the incidence of child marriage is higher in Nepal while comparing with South Asian countries. It is terrible within the country too if we compare terai with hill and mountain. Though it is mostly rooted in poor, dalit, marginalized and illiterate communities is the other dimension to think over in the Nepalese context.

The consequences of child marriage are also awful for girls in terms of their health and education rights because most of the girls' dropout from school after getting marriage. They faced isolation and depression. They are at high risk of sexually transmitted, infection and cervical cancer. Most of them died even with children during delivery due to complication in the absence of proper maturity.

Therefore, the time comes now to start the campaign stop child marriage with strong implementation of laws. For this joint effort from media, academia, civil society, and govern-

ment should be made.

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