

## **Socio-cultural Context of Adolescents' Motivation for Marriage and Childbearing in North-Western Nigeria: A Qualitative Approach**

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**Abstract:** Nigeria has experienced high fertility levels over the last three decades, despite the implementation of the National Policy on Population in 1988 which stipulated four children per woman, and eighteen years as the minimum age at marriage. The proportional contribution of adolescents' fertility (among women age 15-19) to the overall fertility rate among women age 15-49 has been increasing over time. A comprehensive understanding of adolescents' fertility behavior requires exploring the motivations and desires of both males and females as they influence male-female relationships and how the related behavioral outcomes are modified by contexts in which they occur. Hence, this research article investigated the contexts of adolescent motivations for marriage and childbearing in North-Western Nigeria. Primary data were obtained using qualitative methods. Thirty-six focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted among adolescents aged 15-19 years, stratified by sex, marital status, fertility status and residence; and 48 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with community-resident adolescents who have ever married or/and have begun childbearing. Results show that adolescents' attitudes are largely pronatalist. Motivations for teenage marriage and childbearing reflect various levels of influence, such as parental pressure and social norms. Individual needs and desires also feature prominently, including economic survival, connection with wealthy and powerful individuals, domestic help and guaranteed support, as well as high reproductive risks. There is need for an external catalyst to raise awareness and to address the reproductive behavior or norms in North-Western Nigeria.

**Key words:** Adolescent pregnancy, fertility behavior, motivation, reproduction, sexuality

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### **INTRODUCTION**

North-western Nigeria is one of the geo-political zones in the country with the highest incidence of teenage or early parenthood. Teenage marriage and child bearing remain widespread despite various efforts by governments and non-governmental organizations to discourage the practices. The 2000 Sentinel Survey of the National Population Program Baseline Report shows that over 50% of all teenagers in five out of the seven states in the zone, have begun childbearing - the highest at state level in the country. At age 19, more than 64% of teenagers in all the states in the zone have begun childbearing, with Katsina and Zamfara states exceeding 80%. The 2008 NDHS shows similar pattern of teenage marriage; in particular, 23% of women age 15-19 in Nigeria and 45% in North-Western zone are currently mothers or pregnant (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009). In fact, adolescent marriage and parenthood are a common sight in both urban and rural families in North-western Nigeria.

However, to date, motivations for adolescent reproductive behavior in northern Nigeria remain poorly understood, because very little research has examined motivation or predispositions towards the reproductive behavior, particularly marriage, pregnancy and childbearing among male and female adolescents. Little

is also known descriptively about the kinds of predispositions that adolescents have towards reproductive behavior. More disconcertingly, marriage and fatherhood among young men are generally poorly covered by the literature and by programs in the field of sexual and reproductive health. Thus, we know relatively little about married adolescent males and adolescent fathers in terms of their reproductive motivations, intentions and expectations. A comprehensive understanding of adolescents' fertility behavior requires exploring the motivations and desires of both males and females as they influence male-female relationships and how the related behavioral outcomes are modified by contexts in which they occur.

Essentially, Nigerian society is multi-cultural and the extent to which adolescent reproductive behavior is considered problematic varies across culture. Many cultural groups in Nigeria differ in their way of life, philosophy, and family orientation. These differences are expected to produce variations in individual attitudes, motivation and decision-making regarding fertility. Indeed, some studies (Bongaarts and Potter, 1983; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1999) have observed that fertility behavior in sub-Saharan Africa is governed by supply factors, thus pointing out the need to understand fertility behavior in the relevant socio-economic and cultural milieu. The

prevailing high incidence of adolescent marriage and parenthood in northern Nigeria, also suggests a strong need to understand the socio-cultural perceptions and attitudes towards the phenomenon. Perhaps it is in recognition of the existing gaps in the literature in this regard that Tawiah (2002) suggested, among other things, that both quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches should be used to collect information on socio-cultural practices and beliefs so as to provide a more accurate picture and better understanding of the circumstances surrounding adolescents' reproductive behavior.

In view of the fact that individual fertility behaviour takes place within the context of complex social organization and under the influence of multiple social, cultural and ideological realities (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994), drastic cultural differences may exist in the reproductive attitudes, motivation, intentions, and expectations in Nigerian society, and it is important to understand the problems in the context in which the problems emerged.

Therefore given the high levels of teenage marriage, pregnancy and childbearing in Northern Nigeria despite widespread efforts by government and non-governmental organizations to discourage the practices, and the fact that one of the 2004 Nigerian National Population Policy objectives is increasing the integration of adolescents and young people into development efforts and effectively addressing their reproductive health and related needs, it has become obvious that a lot of insight into the prevailing patterns and influences of adolescent sexual and fertility behavior in Nigeria, particularly the northern Nigeria, is urgently required. Thus, this study adopted qualitative approach in the investigation of socio-cultural contexts of adolescents' motivations for marriage, pregnancy and childbearing in North-Western Nigeria.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study location was North West geo-political zone of Nigeria. The zone consists of seven states, namely Jigawa, Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara, and has an estimated population of 35,479,758, which is about 25.9% of the national population of 137,794,744. The data used in this research article were collected between August and October, 2008 from a survey of three states in North-Western Nigeria, namely Kaduna, Kano and Katsina. The study was a community based cross-sectional research, and the data collection instruments adopted included focus group discussions and in-depth interview guides. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with teenagers (both male and female) between the ages of 15 and 19. The goals of these FGDs were to collect information on the beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and views of participants so as to examine whether they perceived early marriage and childbearing

to be issues that personally affect their lives as well as society in general; to increase our understanding of the impact of socio-cultural, environmental and proximate variables on adolescent reproductive behavior; and to ascertain the prospects of change in behavior based on their responses. FGD was used in this research because of its ability to provide insights into complex patterns of sexual and reproductive behavior and motivations, perceptions and attitudes of young people within defined rural and urban areas.

Twelve FGDs were carried out in each of the states selected for the study. The groups were formed to be fairly homogenous with respect to residence (rural or urban), sex, marital and fertility status so as to minimize inhibitions in the flow of the discussions. Equal number of FGDs was designed for male and female adolescents because of the need to know independently the gender differences on the issues under consideration. Each FGD comprised six to ten discussants. Therefore, for each state, there were six FGDs in rural and six in urban LGAs. In each residence type (rural and urban), FGDs were conducted among the single (male and female), the married (male and female), and the adolescents of parental status (father and mother). A total of thirty-six (36) FGDs were conducted for this research; eighteen came from urban areas, while the other eighteen were conducted in rural areas. Participants were chosen in a non-probabilistic random fashion from various neighborhoods or settlements to ensure a broad range of experiences within each group.

Focus group discussions were led by trained indigenous moderators and note-takers (males and females depending on the sex of the group); most of whom were university undergraduates of humanity-based disciplines who had received training in focus group methodology. As a prelude to the discussion, the moderator provided a general introduction to the study and the purpose of bringing the participants together. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured, and permission (with explanation) sought for the use of tape recorder.

Discussion outlines with lead questions were prepared by the researcher as a guide for the focus group facilitators. It was translated into Hausa for some groups (especially those in the rural areas) who might feel more comfortable discussing these issues in their indigenous language. The FGD guide organized each group's discussion on the same set of topics and in the same order to facilitate comparison. However, the discussion did not always rigidly proceed in that order; because the participants were free to bring up whatever issues they chose in response to a particular question, the moderators were instructed to maintain sufficient flexibility in introducing the topics to achieve a free-flow of the discussion. The discussions were tape-recorded, and later

transcribed and translated prior to analysis; in both urban and rural settings, the translations were checked by a second person.

Furthermore, sixteen in-depth interviews (IDIs) were carried out in each state. These comprised eight each from rural and urban areas. The selection of key informants was governed by the need to capture certain variables that are considered important, such as marital and fertility status. Essentially, the IDI was intended to serve as a vital data collection tool to gather crucial, in-depth and firsthand knowledge about the motivations for early marriage and childbearing. Therefore, rural and urban respondents comprised four male and four females each of marital and fertility status. On the whole, forty-eight in-depth interviews were conducted for this research.

In-depth interview guide which consisted of topic guides to ensure that important issues were not forgotten during the interview was prepared by the researcher for use by the interviewers. Any relevant issues not included in the guide were introduced in the discussions. The interviews were conducted both in English and Hausa languages depending on the interviewees' choice of language. All the interviews were conducted in a very relaxed, unrushed atmosphere and relevant notes were taken by the interviewers. Overall, 252 focus group participants and 48 key informants were involved in the FGDs and IDIs respectively. Analysis of the data followed two approaches, namely ethnographic summary and a systematic coding via content analysis to accommodate verbatim quotations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Adolescents' perceptions toward marriage and childbearing:** Marriage in Nigeria, as in many other societies, provides the primary social setting in which the biological event of childbearing occurs. It is one important proximate determinant of fertility. Marriage is universal, and most child births among adolescents, particularly in northern Nigeria, occur within its institution. For this study, marriage was defined as any stable union, irrespective of whether the male partner has performed certain traditional rites or not. Thus, both formal and informal unions were taken to mean marriage because of the significant effects both have on childbearing. In any case and within Nigerian cultural contexts, marriage is a union between persons of opposite sexes which involves rights and obligations fixed by law and custom. Age at marriage is crucial factor in women's lives, not only because of its association with overall completed fertility and with the meaning and consequences of adolescent fertility, but also due to its relation with the status of women. Early marriage in fact is favored in different contexts. Legal codes governing family law usually establish the minimum age at first

marriage. In spite of the existing legal minimum ages for marriage however, more often than not these are not enforced, especially in the rural areas. The cultural definitions of acceptability usually have much more force in the resulting outcome, than those imposed by law and removed from the realities of the people to whom they are supposed to apply. In most of these areas, early marriages are usually performed without the informed consent of the girl and often involve important age differences with the spouse, one element of unequal power relations between the spouses and of difficulty for empowerment.

A common perception about teenage marriage and childbearing, particularly among government, development agents, international agencies and NGOs, is that the behavior is a problem and should be discouraged. Against the backdrop of this perception, adolescents were asked if they personally thought that teenage marriage and childbearing was a problem in their communities which should be discouraged. In the focus group discussions, there was no clear consensus on whether teenage marriage and childbearing was a problem and should be discouraged. In more than half of the groups, participants stated that teenage marriage and childbearing was not a problem even though they agreed it was a common practice in their communities, particularly in the rural areas. Two female participants, one rural- and the other urban-based captured the general feelings of the group thus:

I am supporting teenage marriage and childbearing, it is not a problem. Marriage is the pride of a woman and every Muslim and Christian girl is commanded to marry. So you mean if Allah brings a husband to a girl at age 12 years, she should reject the offer? To me, she should go ahead and marry, and if Allah gives her children immediately, alhamdulillah (glory be to God), since it is Allah that brings children. What do you expect from a girl that is not schooling? Since we are discouraged from schooling and what every girl is doing here is to marry early, you have to join them. And when you are married, pregnancy and childbearing should be expected anytime. To me, I feel it is right since our parents did the same and nothing happened to them negatively.

In addition, participants' pronatalist attitudes and opposition to any ideas which they perceived as foreign (or western influence) were clearly exhibited in the discussion, and these also contributed to their support for early marriage and child bearing. For instance, a female participant stressed, apparently with pent-up feeling:

Marriage is of God, whether a girl marries early and gives birth or not if she is destined to face problem she will definitely do so. There are cases of older

women who still have pregnancy and child birth complications, and if God wishes, a girl that marries early can deliver safely without any complications. All these are the wonders of God, so to me teenage marriage is not a serious problem because in another way it helps in maintaining sanity in the society since girls are so corrupt and cannot keep themselves pure these days.

Similarly, another male participant remarked, rather angrily: "We are not going to follow the culture and traditions of the west; any girl who has suitors means that her time has reached to be married. Let's just depend on God as Muslims and Christians knowing that anything that happens to us is his wish."

Generally, although much of the problem of early marriage and childbearing were identified by all the focus groups, a division of priorities was clear. Health risks to the young mother and the infant of a young mother were concerns articulated by a number of participants in the female groups in both urban and rural areas. All but one group of urban-based single girls identified maternal mortality and morbidity, particularly VVF as principal risk or problem associated to teenage marriage and childbearing in their communities. Among male groups, the discussions revealed clearly that the boys were not concerned to any degree with the risks or problems of teenage marriage and childbearing to a young mother or her child. The most passionate discussions relating to the problem of teenage marriage and childbearing came from the females who were currently married and those of fertility status, i.e. females who ever had a child. These groups were concerned not only with the physical implications of teenage marriage and childbearing, but also with educational and the future probable economic hardship that such early marriage and childbearing could lead to.

Girls in rural-based groups named fewer concerns, but notably, not one participant mentioned the impact of early marriage and childbearing on girls' education. This omission may mean either that because they were not currently in school, early marriage and childbearing at this stage would have little implications on this aspect of their lives, or that they had dropped out of school already as a result of marriage and did not interpret their current situation as having been compromised as a direct result of early marriage and childbearing. They did, however discuss death from pregnancy complications, VVF, health implications for young women, and economic hardship as negative outcomes of early marriage and childbearing, commenting that "without love and wherewithal on the part of husband/family one cannot take care both of oneself and the children," and "you will have a hard future."

In essence, female participants perceived a number of concrete physical, social, and economic problems

associated with early marriage and childbearing. Generally, for male participants, the immediate impacts of early marriage and childbearing were not considered with serious concern and consequently, the risks or problem to them were poorly defined and articulated.

**Socio-cultural contexts of adolescents' motivations for marriage and childbearing:** In this study, all the focus group participants and key informants stressed the effects of strong social pressure from within their communities to marry and bear children. Specific family members were reported to be particularly insistent. Far from discouraging early marriage and childbearing, the dominant picture was of familial pressure in favor of it. Girls experienced most pressure from parents and grandparents to marry to avoid 'messaging around' with men and bringing shame and disrespect to the family; and boys, too, were expected to prove to parents and relatives that they were responsible, however pressures on them were not as much as on girls. In particular, the focus group participants generally agreed that parents decide when a girl marries, though some families allow her to choose her husband herself especially if she is educated to at least secondary school level, and insisted on her choice of partner. One currently married female participant explained:

Our culture insists that the first marriage is decided by parents because the girl is very young in most cases and may not know who is good for her; more so if there are many suitors. So in that case, the father and/or his brothers or mother decide when and who she marries.

Generally, in the focus group discussions, the responses buttressed the fact that marriage and childbearing remain central in the lives of men and women in northern Nigeria. Since marriage, among other things, confers status on individuals, those who remain unmarried after their mates have done so are socially alienated and looked down upon. The trend toward arranged marriage (particularly among female adolescents), rather than individual mate selection, received the approval of most discussants and interviewees both in urban and rural areas. The overwhelming majority of the married adolescents (especially females) interviewed reported that their marriages were arranged by parents, and that even in the case of individual mate selection, the approval and blessing of parents were obligatory. Sense of vulnerability and fear clearly exist as a number of participants expressed lack courage to engage or confront appropriate authorities, including their parents with reproductive health issues. An urban-based male adolescent and a currently married female participant provided further insights and summed up the discussants' fear, which was also heard in most of other FGDs:

Even if teenage marriage and child bearing is a problem we can't speak against it openly, because our people use religious rationale to do whatever they are doing; but let us encourage girl-child education, and by so doing early marriage will be discouraged in the long run.

Teenage marriage might not be right, but who are you to stand up against your parents' wishes; they will curse or disown you, and every child in this environment seeks and desires parental blessings in everything, so even if it is displeasing to us to marry at teenage age, we still obey and comply. If we can find our way, our parents should allow us to acquire formal education, and with that we will find something doing to take care of ourselves and our children if the worst comes.

The major motivations the focus group participants and key informants gave for teenage marriage in their communities revolved around "socio-cultural and economic considerations". Generally, the explanation given for girls marrying at 12-15 years was that it is not so much desirable as necessary, to prevent premarital pregnancy. Suspicious of promiscuity are increasing and accompanying the relatively new custom of *talle* (sending young girls out to sell goods for their mothers). The fear of premarital pregnancy is related to the high value which is still placed by a prospective husband on marrying a virgin, and therefore early marriage is in the interest of both the husband and girls family.

Among the Hausa, the most important organizing principle behind female social status is reproductive status. The adolescent Hausa girl is called a *budurwa*, a word which signals the onset of puberty, most noticeably in the formation of breast-buds. Though a *budurwa* has some social freedoms, she is expected to assume a more modest demeanor appropriate for someone approaching womanhood. In this period of her life, she may even engage in innocent (or sometimes not so innocent) sex-play with males, but intercourse is strictly forbidden by social custom, and illegitimate pregnancy remains a rare, but heinous, offense against community standards. In order to ensure proper control and to prevent potential sexual misconduct, marriage usually occurs early for Hausa girls, frequently before menarche. Girls are commonly married between the ages 12 and 14 and sometimes as early as 9 or 10. This practice stems largely from the cultural requirement that female reproductive capacity be under strictly acknowledged and well-defined male control (Wall, 1998).

As corroborated by Schacht (1964) and Hinchcliffe (1976) more than four decades ago, females are repeatedly instructed throughout life that they are inferior to males. This viewpoint codified in Islamic law, according to which women do not receive an equal share

of an inheritance, nor is their legal testimony given the same weight as that of a man. Women are usually excluded from communal Islamic religious activities because of the recurring states of impurity associated with menstruation and childbirth. As a result, females must undertake their religious devotions within their own compounds. They are forbidden to participate in the communal prayers at the village mosque, where a separate area, behind and away from the men, is reserved for older, postmenopausal women who, having lost their reproductive potential, no longer pose any threat to society.

According to Tremearne (1914), in male Hausa eyes, female sexuality is dangerous and disruptive. Women are viewed by Hausa men as inherently licentious and potentially troublesome, a theme that runs throughout Hausa folklore. Control of female sexuality is a constant worry. One Hausa proverb goes so far as to say *Matar mutum kabarinsa* ("A man's wife is his grave"). Women are seen as unreliable, devious, and unpredictable. A cynical Hausa proverb ridicules men who fall in love: *Maso mace wawa; bai san za ta ki shi ba* ("He who loves a woman is a fool, for he never knows if she hates him or not"). The corollary to this view of women's nature is that the primary virtue to which women should aspire is, *kunya*: "modesty", "shame", or "deference." The effect on sexuality is that adolescent female marriage is typically arranged; some being forced to marry older men without the option of refusal.

Again, one ever married female participant revealed another dimension of the groups' feelings about teenage marriage in their communities thus:

Here in our communities it is common to find parents mounts pressure on their daughters to marry older, 'established' men who they think can provide support for them and family. Cases also abound where parents trade their teenage daughters, by marrying them out to an older person known only to them, for their individual self or family interest, which revolves around social ties and wealth acquisition.

Indeed many female key informants both in urban and rural areas bemoaned their marital and fertility status, and blamed it on parents' desire to find alternative escape route from their poverty and social deprivations which were almost taking their life, adding that some of them were married to a 'rich' farmer, 'powerful' community leader and traditional title holder or business man, etc, or their relations, so that they and their families can be catered for.

In this case, the motivations for female teenage marriage were largely economic, mainly to assist with economic survival, increase long-term life chances, and establish connection with wealthy and powerful individuals in their localities who will in turn contribute

to their upkeep. The key informants revealed that under conditions of poverty, deprivations, and boredom, female adolescents are particularly vulnerable to very early marriage to persons they consider capable of giving them decent living. Parents may directly pressure their daughters to marry older, mature, and 'well-off' men because they demand material assistance from their children. This was glaringly echoed in most of the focus group discussions both in urban and rural areas thus:

Parents may actively support and encourage their daughters' marriage at teenage age because it relieves them of their responsibilities of which most of them lack the wherewithal to execute, or think that it is unnecessary investments for female child.

Some parents feel that it is not economical to spend too much money and energy on girl child, after all she will move into another man's house, so they do not hesitate to give them out for marriage early in life.

Some parents believe girls should marry by 15 years or earlier to prevent them from becoming immoral and wayward and bringing shame to the family. You know times have changed and immoral activities are in the increase, but most parents in this community cannot stand and watch their children becoming immoral. Early marriage is one way through which our communities forestall immorality among girls.

However, some of the motivations given for teenage marriage among boys resembled those given by girls, except that parental pressure was less and avoidance of pre-marital sex, the desire to 'catch' early a young beautiful girl with great potential for a wife and deny other existing or prospective suitors the chance, the need to be seen by the community members as conforming to norms, were most commonly cited. The participants thought that any form of parental pressure on boys might be necessitated by the parents' belief that marriage would make them "more responsible, focused, organized and result-oriented". In particular, some boys reported that they were motivated to marry at teenage age out of fear of reproductive risk to themselves or their partners. The perception expressed in some male focus groups as well as by some key informants, point to the fact that as they become more aware of the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS, they increasingly desire, and approve of marrying very early and seek out younger partner, often teenagers, in the belief that they are unlikely to be highly sexually immoral and infected with STDs/AIDS. They also mentioned other motivations, which included domestic help.

Indeed, available qualitative evidence has shown that children are very important in the life of a Muslim Hausa

woman in Nigeria, and she attaches great values to them. This is chiefly because unlike the married women in many other societies within and outside Nigeria whose lives are occupied with many of the diversions outside home, the greater part of her married life is spent inside her husband's compound. Thus, in the absence of children of her own, her life is characterized by sadness and a feeling of worthlessness. Children do not only provide the most important bond between a Hausa man and his wife but also signifies the true expression of his manhood or her womanhood as the case may be. Her short- and long-term life's excitement in the home derives from the children she has, so also the security in her marriage because she has children who will continue her husband's family.

The life-cycle of Hausa females revolves around their reproductive capacity, and some of the most important principles of Hausa social organization are the control of female reproductive capacity by appropriate males. Hausa men are blunt in stating that the purpose of women is to produce children, which they regard as the "profit" (*riba*) obtained in return for the exchange of bride wealth in marriage negotiations. Indeed, Hausa women are not regarded as fully adult until they have produced a child. In the event of divorce, though a woman may (and should) return to the compound of her father or a brother, her children (especially male children) remain the property of her former husband.

A Hausa girl, even a bride, is not considered a woman until she has given birth at least once. Rehan (1984) has accurately described the Hausa as "pronatalist". Children are seen as a gift from God, the desired outcome of marriage, the greatest fulfillment of being a woman. Hausa proverbs express the importance of childbirth in the continuity of life, and thereby stress the important social role played by childbearing women: *haifuwa maganin mutuwa* ("Birth is the medicine for death"). Producing many children is thought to bring respect and honor to the family and to the mother who bears them. Few women have any knowledge of birth control, and most consider "family planning" the moral equivalent of murder (Rehan, 1984). Abortion is something that only an unbeliever would even contemplate. Such attitudes are shared by Hausa men and women alike, and complicate the introduction of even the most basic family planning service to the region (Renne, 1996).

Again, in the absence of other sources or symbols of status, for example education, formal employment and occupation, children give a mother in Hausa land status among other women in the compound and form the focal point of her life within it. Economically, it is her children who make it possible for a Muslim Hausa woman to earn a small income by hawking her goods from house to house. Thus, an infertile woman inevitably feels jealous of her co-wives who have children and may be resentful of them because of marked differences in socio-economic status.

Thus, an effective intervention strategy must be based on an understanding of adolescents' experiences within specific contexts. The cultural survival pressures on adolescents combined with a certain obsession or fear about their personal identities and places in society within and outside of their families are powerful factors that both motivate reproductive behavior and also affect their ability to practice preventive measures. Zabin and Kiragu (1998) had observed in sub-Saharan Africa that public attention tends not to focus on the potential dangers of immediate post pubertal childbearing among young married women, not because the dangers are not known, but because strong cultural, political, and religious barriers exist to acknowledging them openly and, above all, to addressing their root causes. In this study, adolescents clearly reported their powerlessness and lack of levirate to confront appropriate authorities including their parents less they incur the wrath of curse because they desire parental blessings in everything. Many of them were unable or unwilling to negotiate reproductive behavior; ability to negotiate reproductive behavior varies by educational status, but until intervention strategies are undertaken to tackle issues relating to empowerment, and access to resources, improved information and services, the much needed change in adolescent reproductive behavior in northern Nigeria would be a mirage.

### CONCLUSION

By and large, evidence from the study suggests that addressing teenage marriage and childbearing in northern Nigeria may not be simple because it is largely linked to socio-cultural and economic survival. Moreover, social and cultural constructs that define reproductive norms in the area have evolved over generations and have been justified and internalized by both men and women, young and old. For example, in this study, a large number of male and female adolescents did not perceive early marriage and childbearing as a problem since their parents practiced it and were comfortable with it. This is further justified and approved by their religion, strong belief in destiny (or fate), and the crucial need to improve economic condition and be 'accepted' in their communities. For someone who is born and brought up in such an environment, whether male or female, early marriage/childbearing may be accepted as the norm, even if they appear blatantly unjustified to the outside observer. Hence, an external catalyst may be needed to raise awareness and to address the reproductive behavior or norms in the area.

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