Factors Contributing to Early Child Marriage in Gombe Central Area, Gombe State, Nigeria

OSHINEYE ADEOLA[1], AMOS ESTHER[2], OLARINMOYE ABAYOMI T[3], AKIN OYEBADE[4], OKE AISHAT[5]

[1, 2, 3, 4, 5] *Public Health Department, Adeleke University*

Abstract- Child marriage remains a major issue in Nigeria, especially in Gombe State, fuelled by cultural, religious, and economic factors. Despite legal bans, the practice continues, harming girls' health, education, and development. This study aims to identify the factors contributing to early child marriage in Gombe Central Area, Gombe State. The study utilized a descriptive cross-sectional design through structured questionnaires. Multistage sampling was used to determine the sampling technique. The data were entered into SPSS version 29, and descriptive statistics and chi-square tests were used to determine the relationships between cultural and religious factors, sociodemographic variables and socioeconomic factors. Among the 290 respondents, the majority (75%) were between the ages of 25 and 29 years, with a mean age of +5.82 years. As many as 86.7% of the respondents were Muslims. The study revealed a statistically significant association between religious beliefs and early child marriage (p=0.16). Logistic regression revealed that respondents were 28 times more likely to support the claim that girls marry older men for financial reasons, and 10 times more likely to agree that low education is linked to early marriage. Cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors are the primary drivers of early child marriage in this area. The study recommends community-based interventions, dialogue with religious leaders, increased educational opportunities, the enforcement of laws, and economic empowerment programs as vital approaches for reducing the prevalence of early marriage and promoting girls' rights.

Index Terms- Factors, Early, Child Marriage, Gombe

I. INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is defined as a formal marriage or informal union before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2019). There is a global consensus to end girl-child marriage, and Target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to "eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations" by 2030 (UNDP, 2019). In Nigeria, the prevalence of child marriage is alarmingly high, especially in northern regions, where cultural and religious practices strongly influence societal norms and values (UNICEF, 2020).

Forced marriages and early childhood are concepts that overlap and disproportionately harm girls compared to boys (UNICEF, 2023). Gombe State, located in the northeastern part of Nigeria, is one of the regions where child marriage remains deeply rooted, despite efforts to curb this practice (Ibrahim et al., 2018). This phenomenon is driven by a complex interplay of factors, including poverty, cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic challenges (Walker, 2019). In a similar vein, 48% of females in Southern Asia, 42% in Africa, and 29% in Latin America and the Caribbean suffer greatly from early marriages (UNICEF, 2016; Adedini et al., 2020).

Parental perception plays a critical role in the continuation of child marriage (Adeola & Olufemi, 2020). In many communities within the Gombe Central Area, parents view child marriage as a social and economic necessity (Nwosu & Ukoha, 2019). Child marriage is often perceived as a means of securing a girl's future, protecting family honour, and reducing the financial burden on the household (Garba et al., 2019). These perceptions are deeply embedded in the cultural and religious fabric of society, making it difficult to challenge or change the status quo (Solanke, 2018). According to a study by Ibrahim et al. (2018), many parents believe that marrying their daughters at an early age ensures their protection and aligns with cultural expectations of female chastity and modesty.

Cultural norms and religious beliefs are significant factors influencing early child marriage in Gombe. In many parts of the region, marriage is not just a personal affair but a community concern, where the social expectations of the community play a decisive role (Mohamed & Mohammed 2021). Parents often marry their daughters early to align with the community's expectations and avoid the stigma associated with delaying marriage (Ibrahim & Abdalla, 2018). This is particularly true in societies where a girl's chastity is highly valued, and early marriage is seen as a way to prevent premarital sexual relations and associated shame (Olamide & Adesola, 2019). Moreover, religious teachings in predominantly Muslim communities often reinforce the practice of child marriage, according to Abdu and Kabiru (2018). Interpretations of Islamic law in some communities support early marriage as a means of fulfilling religious obligations and protecting family honor.

Economic factors also play crucial roles in sustaining the practice of child marriage in the Gombe Central Area (Ibrahim & Abdalla, 2018). Poverty is a significant driver, as many families in this region are economically disadvantaged and may view early marriage as a strategy to reduce household expenses (Mohamed & Mohammed, 2021). By marrying their daughters, parents can secure a bride price, which is often seen as a necessary financial contribution to the family. Additionally, child marriage reduces the number of dependents within a household, easing the economic strain on poor families (Solanke, 2018). A study by Garba et al. (2019) revealed that economic pressure is one of the primary reasons parents in Gombe State decide to marry their daughters early, viewing it as a practical solution to financial challenges.

The consequences of child marriage are profound and far-reaching (Adebowale et al., 2020). Girls who marry before the age of 18 are more likely to drop out of school, limiting their future employment opportunities and perpetuating the cycle of poverty (Malhotra & Schuler, 2021). Early marriage also exposes girls to significant health risks, including complications during pregnancy and childbirth, which are leading causes of death among adolescent girls in developing countries (UNICEF, 2020).

Furthermore, child marriage often leads to social isolation and restricts girls' participation in community life, further marginalizing them and denying them their rights (Walker, 2019). According to Olamide and Adesola (2019), the educational and health outcomes for girls in child marriages are often dire, with many experiencing lifelong consequences that hinder their personal and social development.

Despite the negative impacts of child marriage, the practice remains deeply entrenched in the social fabric of Gombe Central (Mohammed & Mohammed, 2021). The legal framework in Nigeria, including the Child Rights Act, sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2018). However, enforcement of this law is weak, particularly in regions where traditional and religious practices hold sway. This gap between legal provisions and local practices highlights the challenges in addressing child marriage, particularly in areas where cultural and religious norms are deeply ingrained (Adebowale et al., 2020). Oyeje et al. (2018) reported that the lack of awareness and education among parents regarding the legal and health implications of child marriage further perpetuates the practice. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the factors contributing to early child marriage in the Gombe Central Area of Gombe State, Nigeria.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and participants
This study employs a descriptive cross-sectional design, focusing on a population of individuals who were married before the age of 18 and who reside in the Akko Local Government Area, Gombe State, and who expressed a willingness to participate in the study.

Study location
Gombe State is located in northeastern Nigeria, with a latitude and longitude. Gombe serves as the capital of Gombe state, and it was formed from a part of Bauchi state. The Gombestate had an estimated population of approximately 3.25 million as of 2016. Ethically, the state is inhabited by various ethnic groups, primarily the Fulani people living in the north and center of the state, the Bolewa, Kanuri, and Hausa people. Religiously, between 65% and 70% of

the state's population are Muslims, whereas the Christian minority comprises between 30% and 35%.
Sampling methods

A total of two hundred and ninety (290) respondents were recruited for the study via Leslie Kish's formula (1965) at designated primary healthcare centers. The study used multistage sampling to select respondents. The first stage involved identifying the two LGAs in Gombe Central Area: Akko and Yamaltu-Deba, and randomly selecting one by balloting. In the second stage, the Akko local government area was randomly selected via simple random sampling; the primary healthcare centres were identified and listed as follows: Akko PHC, Bogo PHC, Kalshingi PHC, Kashere PHC, Kumo PHC, Panda PHC, Barambu PHC, Gadawo PHC, Pindiga PHC, Tukulma PHC, Tumu PHC, and seven (7) PHCs were randomly selected via a balloting method. In the third stage, the seven (7) PHCs that were selected were: Akko PHC, Kumo PHC, Kalshingi PHC, Bogo PHC, Tumu PHC, Kashere PHC, and Gadawo PHC. The respondents in each PHC were systematically selected from the register retrieved from the health workers until the desired sample size was achieved.

Ethical Approval
The respondents were provided with full details of the study's goals and objectives, and both oral and written consent were obtained from the respondents before commencement of the study. The respondents were informed that they had the option to exit the study at any time. The study location was visited following the approval of ethics by Gombe State Ministry of Health (MOH/ADM/621/V.1/598) and Gombe State Primary Healthcare Development Agency (GSPHCDA/ADM/S/57/V.1).

Data collection
Data were collected through the use of a self-structured questionnaire, which was administered to respondents on a one-on-one basis, and it was translated into the Hausa language for the respondents to understand. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: Section A: Sociodemographics of the respondents, Section B: Cultural factors influencing early child marriage, Section C: Religious factors influencing early child marriage, and Section D: Socioeconomic factors influencing early child marriage.

Data analysis
The data was properly entered into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 29 for analysis. Percentages and frequencies were used for descriptive statistics, whereas chi-square tests were used to analyze the relationships between cultural and religious factors, as well as sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors influencing early child marriage. Tables and charts were used to summarize and display the findings of the study.

Results

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of The Respondents
Approximately two-fifths, 112 (42.4%), of respondents were between 20 and 24 years. Almost half, 131 (49.6%), of respondents were Hausa. The majority, 229 (86.7%), of respondents practice Islam. More than half, 143 (54.2%), are polygamous. The majority, 224 (84.8%), of the respondents were married. As many as 197 (74.6%) respondents were married between the ages of 15 and 19 years. Approximately two-fifths, 112 (42.4%), of the respondents had no formal education. More than two-fifths, 120 (45.5%), are trading/ doing business (Table 1).

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable		Frequency (n=264)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	Group		
15-19		48	18.2
20-24		112	42.4
25-29		70	26.5
30-34		16	6.1
35-39		10	3.8
40-44		7	2.7
45-48		1	0.4
Mean Age		24.2	± 5.82
Tribe			
Hausa		131	49.6

Yoruba	14	5.3
Igbo	5	1.9
Babuliya	1	.4
Barobare	1	.4
Fulani	90	34.1
Ibira	1	.4
Kanuri	6	2.3
Siyawa	1	.4
Tangale	5	1.9
Tangle	3	1.1
Tera	5	1.9
Waja	1	.4
Religion		
Islam	229	86.7
Christianity	35	13.3
Type of family		
Monogamous	121	45.8
Polygamous	143	54.2
Marital status		
Single	2	.8
Married	224	84.8
Divorced	30	11.4
Separated	5	1.9
living together	3	1.1
Age when married (years)		
Below 15	66	25.0
15-19	197	74.6
25-29	1	.4
Level of education		
No formal education	112	42.4
Primary school completed	45	17.0
Junior secondary completed	36	13.6
Senior secondary completed	38	14.4
Tertiary	33	12.5
Occupation		
Student	23	8.7
Trading/business	120	45.5
Farming	46	17.4
Housewife	74	28.0
Others	1	0.4

Table 2: Sociodemographic characteristics of husbands and parents
Approximately three out of ten respondents, 88 (33.3%) husbands were between 25 and 29 years of age at marriage. More than half, 150 (56.8%), of the respondents' mothers had no formal education. More than two-fifths of the respondents, 111 (42.0%) had no formal education. Approximately two-fifths of the respondents, 107 (40.5%) who were mothers were housewives. Approximately half, 131 (49.6%), of the respondents' fathers are trading/doing business. The majority, 214 (81.1%), of the respondents' parents lived together (Table 2).

Table 2: Sociodemographic characteristics of husbands and parents

Variable	Frequency (n=264)	Percentage (%)
Age of husband when married		
15-19	3	1.1
20-24	43	16.3
25-29	88	33.3
30-34	67	25.4
35-39	46	17.4
40-44	14	5.3
45-48	3	1.1
Mothers level of education		
No schooling	150	56.8
primary school	57	21.6
junior secondary	14	5.3
senior secondary	30	11.4
Tertiary	13	4.9
Fathers level of education		
No schooling	111	42.0
primary school	66	25.0
junior secondary	12	4.5
senior secondary	41	15.5
Tertiary	34	12.9
Mothers occupation		
Trading/business	91	34.5
Civil servant	26	9.8
Farming	40	15.2
House wife	107	40.5
Fathers occupation		
Trading/business	131	49.6
Civil servant	66	25.0
Farming	66	25.0
Others	1	.4
Marital status of parents		

living together	214	81.1
living apart	15	5.7
divorced	9	3.4
father dead	11	4.2
mother dead	14	5.3
both parents dead	1	.4

Table 3: Cultural factors influencing early child marriage

The majority, 41 (91.3%) of the respondents reported that many families believe that girls should marry as soon as they reach puberty to protect their honour and virginity. Half, 132 (50%) of the respondents supported that dowry (bride price) is seen as strengthening social bonds between families, making it difficult for families to reject marriage proposals. Approximately two-fifths, 109 (41.3%) of the respondents supported that purdah (female segregation) is the practice in which women are separated from men and are not allowed to leave their homes without a male escort. More than three-fifths, 173 (65.5%) of the respondents reported that Watta satta (marriage exchange) is a custom in which two families agree to marry each other's sons and daughters. Majority, 223 (84.5%) of the respondents reported that early marriage occurs because parents have prepared a partner for their child. Approximately seven out of ten, 185 (70.1%) of the respondents supported that parents marry their daughters because they are afraid that they will become "old maids" if they are not married for too long. Half, 132 (50%) of the respondents reported that early marriage occurs when peers in the environment are already married, so the individual wants to marry soon. About three-fifths, 180 (68.2%) of the respondents reported that early marriage leads to family bonding. Approximately three-fifths, 163 (61.7%) of the respondents reported that early marriage is one of the signs of urbanization (Table 3).

Table 3: Cultural factors influencing early child marriage

Variable	Frequency (n=264)	Percentage (%)
Many families believe that it is best for girls to get married as soon as they reach puberty to protect their honor and virginity.		
Yes	241	91.3
No	17	6.4
i do not know	6	2.3
Many communities believe that girls are ready for marriage after a certain age, regardless of their actual maturity or ability to consent.		
Yes	185	70.1
No	76	28.8
i do not know	3	1.1
Dowry (bride price) is seen as strengthening social bonds between families, making it difficult for families to reject marriage proposals.		
Yes	132	50.0
No	121	45.8
i do not know	11	4.2
Purdah (female segregation) is the practice in which women are separated from men and are not allowed to leave their homes without a male escort.		
Yes	109	41.3
No	142	53.8
i do not know	13	4.9
Watta satta (marriage exchange) is a custom in which two families agree to marry each other's sons and daughters.		
Yes	173	65.5
No	70	26.5
i do not know	21	8.0
Early marriage occurs because parents have prepared a partner for their child.		
Yes	223	84.5
No	40	15.2
i do not know	1	.4

Parents marry off their daughters because they are afraid that they will become "old maids" if they are not married for too long.		
Yes	185	70.1
No	74	28.0
i do not know	5	1.9
Early marriage occurs when peers in environment are already married, so the individual wants to get married soon		
Yes	132	50.0
No	126	47.7
i do not know	6	2.3
Early marriage leads to family bonding		
Yes	180	68.2
No	80	30.3
i don't know	4	1.5
Early marriage is one of the signs of urbanization	163	61.7
Yes	89	33.7
No	12	4.5
I do not know		

Figure 1: Religious factors influencing early child marriage

Majority, 206 (78%) of the respondents reported that their faith says that the most important role for females is to become a wife and a mother. More than three-fifths, 177 (67%) of the respondents supported that their religion encouraged early child marriage. More than five out of ten, 154 (58.3%) of the respondents supported that their faith says that marriage (unofficial marriage) before the age of 18 is allowed (Figure 1).
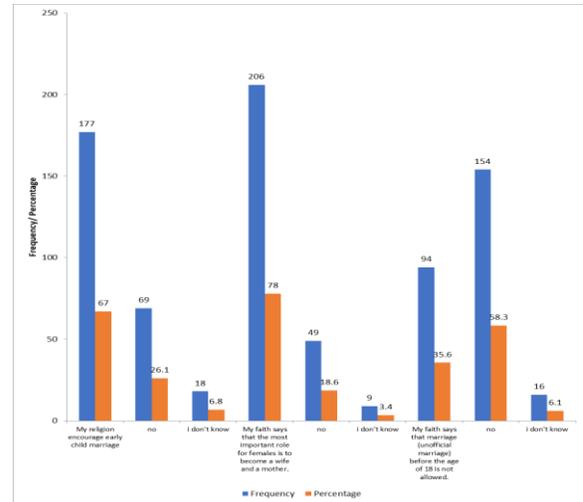

Figure 1: Religious factors influencing early child marriage

Table 4: Socioeconomic factors influencing early child marriage

Majority, 204 (77.3%), reported that girls often marry older men who can financially support their families. Most, 194 (73.5%) reported that early marriage is carried out on a daughter with the hope that the man who will become her husband will be able to support family life. In total, 186 (70.5%) of the respondents reported that girls who marry early often have little education and are financially independent. Approximately three-fifths, 163 (61.7%) of the respondents reported that in some cases, families receive a bride price (dowry) when their daughters marry, which they can use to pay for other family members' expenses. More than half, 148 (56.1%), of the respondents reported that many families marry their daughters early to reduce the number of mouths to feed. Approximately half, 134 (50.8%), of the respondents reported that many girls who marry young become dependent (Table 4).

Table 4: Socioeconomic factors influencing early child marriage

Variables	Frequency (n=264)	Percentage (%)
Many families marry their daughters early to reduce the number of mouths to feed.		
Yes	148	56.1
No	100	37.9

i don't know	16	6.1

Girls often marry older men who can financially support their families.

Yes	204	77.3
No	54	20.5
i don't know	6	2.3

In some cases, families receive a bride price (dowry) when their daughters marry, which they can use to pay for other family members' expenses.

Yes	163	61.7
No	97	36.7
i don't know	4	1.5

Girls who marry early often have little education and are financially independent.

Yes	186	70.5
No	78	29.5

Many girls who marry young become dependent.

Yes	134	50.8
No	125	47.3
i don't know	5	1.9

Early marriage is carried out on a daughter with the hope that the man who will become her husband will be able to support family life.

Yes	194	73.5
No	62	23.5
i don't know	8	3.0

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of cultural, religious and socioeconomic factors
Cultural factor was measured on a scale of 0-10; the actual ranged from 1-10, and the mean score was ±6.52 with a standard deviation of ±2.25. Religious factor was measured on a scale of 0-3, the actual score ranged from 0-3, and the mean score was 1.8, with a standard deviation of ±0.83. Cultural factor was measured on a scale of 0-6, the actual score

ranged from 0-7, and the mean score was 4.51 with a standard deviation of ±1.88 (Table 5).

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of cultural, religious and socioeconomic factors

Variable	N	Scale	Score	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cultural Factor	264	0-10	1-10	6.52	±2.25
Religious Factor	264	0-3	0-3	1.8	±0.83
Socioeconomic Factor	264	0-6	0-6	3.89	±1.57

Table 6: Chi-Square & logistic regression analysis of cultural factors
Chi square and binary logistic regression analysis revealed that respondents are 8 times more likely to support that many families believe that girls should get married as soon as they reach puberty to protect their honor and virginity (p=0.02), 59 times more likely to support that dowry (bride price) is seen as strengthening social bonds between families, making it difficult for families to reject marriage proposals (p=0.00), 8 times more likely to support that purdah (female segregation) is the practice in which women are separated from men and are not allowed to leave their homes without a male escort (p=0.001) and 6

times more likely to support that Watta satta (marriage exchange) is a custom in which two families agree to marry each other's sons and daughters (p=0.00). Additionally, the respondents are 63 times more likely to support that parents marry their daughters because they are afraid that they will become "old maids" if they are not married for too long (p=0.00), 46 times more likely to support that early marriage occurs when peers in the environment are already married, so the individual wants to marry soon (p=0.001), 10 times more likely to support that early marriage leads to family bonding (p=0.02) and 14 times more likely to support that early marriage is one of the signs of urbanization (p=0.00) (Table 6).

Table 6: Chi-square & logistic regression analysis of cultural factors

Variable	Category	Culture		Chi Square	P Value	OR	95% CI	P Value
		Low	High					
Many families believe that it is best for girls to get married as soon as they reach puberty to protect their honor and virginity.	Yes	50	191	26.7	0.00			0.000
	No	12	5			7.64	1.36-42.9	0.02
	I don't know	4	2					0.85
Many communities believe that girls are ready for marriage after a certain age, regardless of their actual maturity or ability to consent.	Yes	35	150	12.2	0.002			0.003
	No	30	46					0.53
	I don't know	1	2					0.83
Dowry (bride price) is seen as strengthening social bonds between families, making it difficult for families to reject marriage proposals.	Yes	19	113	35.4	0.00			0.00
	No	37	84			59.4	7.19-491.6	0.00
	I don't know	10	1			22.7	2.8-183.8	0.003
Purdah (female segregation) is the practice in which women are separated from men and are not allowed to leave their homes without a male escort.	Yes	18	91	14.2	0.001			0.002
	No	40	102			8.08	2.37-27.5	0.001
	I don't know	8	5			4.08	1.25-13.2	0.01
Watta satta (marriage exchange) is a custom in which two families agree to marry each other's sons and daughters.	Yes	19	154	53.7	0.00			0.00
	No	38	32			6.07	2.26-16.3	0.00
	I don't know	9	12			0.63	0.23-1.68	0.36
Early marriage occurs because parents have prepared a partner for their child.	Yes	35	188	69.4	0.00			0.00
	No	31	9					1.000
	I don't know	0	1					1.000
Parents marry off their daughters because they are afraid that they will become "old maids" if they are not married for too long.	Yes	11	174	120	0.00			0.00
	No	51	23			63.2	6.50-615.1	0.00
	I don't know	4	1					0.60
Early marriage occurs when peers in environment are already married, so the individual wants to get married soon	Yes	13	119	38.5	0.00			0.00
	No	48	78			45.7	4.96-422.2	0.001
	I don't know	5	1					0.06
Early marriage leads to family bonding	Yes	16	164	78.5	0.00			0.00
	No	48	32			10.2	1.35-77.7	0.02
	I don't know	2	2					0.69
Early marriage is one of the signs of urbanization	Yes	8	155	93.5	0.00			0.00
	No	53	36			13.8	3.58-	0.00

				53.3			
I don't know	5	7					0.24

Table 7: Chi-Square & logistic regression analysis of religious factors

Chi square and binary logistic regression analysis revealed that respondents supporting that religion encourages early child marriage (p>0.05), most important role for females is to become a wife and a mother (p>0.05) and marriage (unofficial marriage) before the age of 18 years is allowed (p>0.05) are statistically significant (Table 7).

Table 7: Chi-square & logistic regression analysis of religious factors

Variable	Category	Religious Factor		Chi Square	P value	OR	95% CI	P Value
		Low	High					
Does your religion encourage early child marriage?	yes	130	47	28.1	0.00			1.0
	no	69	0					0.99
	i don't know	18	0					1.0
My faith says that the most important role for females is to become a wife and a mother.	yes	159	47	16.0	0.00			1.0
	no	49	0					0.99
	i don't know	9	0					1.0
My faith says that marriage (unofficial marriage) before the age of 18 is not allowed.	yes	47	47	103.4	0.00			1.0
	no	154	0					0.99
	i don't know	16	0					1.00

Table 8: Chi-square & logistic regression analysis of socioeconomic factors

Chi square and binary logistic regression analysis revealed that respondents are 28 times more likely to support that girls often marry older men who can financially support their families (p=0.003), 18 times more likely to support that families receive a bride price (dowry) when their daughters marry, which they can use to pay for other family members' expenses (p=0.014), 10 times more likely to support that girls who marry early often have little education and are financially independent (p=0.00) and 4 times more likely to support that early marriage is carried out on a daughter with the hope that the man who will become her husband will be able to support family life (p=0.00) (Table 8)

Table 8: Chi-square & logistic regression analysis of socioeconomic factors

Variable	Category	Socioeconomic Factors		Chi Square	P Value	OR	95 CI	P Value
		Low	High					
Many families marry their daughters early to reduce the number of mouths to feed.	yes	20	128	43.2	0.00			0.00
	no	52	48			2.13	0.62-7.26	0.22
	i don't know	4	12			0.30	0.09-1.01	0.054
Girls often marry older men who can financially support their	yes	31	173	81.1	0.00			0.00
	no	40	14			27.9	3.15-	0.003

							247.0	
families.								
	i don't know	5	1			1.75	0.18-16.3	0.62
In some cases, families receive a bride price (dowry) when their daughters marry, which they can use to pay for other family members' expenses.	yes	23	140	45.8	0.00			0.00
	no	50	47			18.2	1.82-83.1	0.014
	i don't know	3	1			2.82	0.28-28.0	0.37
Girls who marry early often have little education and are financially independent.	yes	27	159	62.5	0.00	9.95	5.38-18.3	0.00
	no	49	29			0.23	0.13-0.41	0.00
Many girls who marry young become dependent.	yes	17	117	36.0	0.00			0.00
	no	58	67			1.72	0.18-16.3	0.63
	i don't know	1	4			0.28	0.03-2.65	0.27
Early marriage is carried out on a daughter with the hope that the man who will become her husband will be able to support family life.	yes	25	169	90.2	0.00			0.00
	no	45	17			20.2	3.87-106.0	0.00
	i don't know	6	2			1.13	0.20-6.17	0.88

Table 9: Chi-square test of association between cultural and religious factors contributing to early child marriage

The chi-square test revealed an association (p=0.16) between cultural and religious factors contributing to early child marriage (Table 9)

Table 9: Chi-square test of association between cultural and religious factors contributing to early child marriage

Variable	Category	Cultural Factor		Chi Square	P Value
		Low	High		
Religious Factors	Low	58	159	1.94	0.16
	High	8	39		

Table 10: Chi-square test of association between sociodemographic variables and socioeconomic factors contributing to early child marriage

The chi-square test revealed statistically significant associations between socioeconomic factors and religion (p=0.00), type of family (p=0.00), level of education (p=0.00), and Tribe (p=0.001) (Table 10).

Table 10: Chi-square test of association between socio-demographic variables and socioeconomic factors
contributing to early child marriage

Socioeconomic Variable	Category	Socioeconomic Factors		Chi Square	P Value
		Low	High		
Age (years)	15-19	10	38	7.78	0.25
	20-24	28	84		
	25-29	26	44		
	30-34	5	11		
	35-39	4	6		
	40-44	2	5		
	45-48	1	0		
Tribe	Hausa	39	92	3.90	0.27
	Yoruba	2	12		
	Igbo	3	2		
	others	32	82		
Religion	Islam	57	172	12.7	0.00
	Christianity	19	16		
Type of family	Monogamous	21	100	14.2	0.00
	Polygamous	55	88		
Marital status	Single	0	2	1.05	0.90
	Married	65	159		
	Divorced	9	21		
	Separated	1	4		
	Living Together	1	2		
Age when married	Below 15	20	46	0.49	0.78
	15-19	56	141		
	25-29	0	1		
Level of education	No formal education	22	90	30.2	0.00
	Primary school completed	10	35		
	Junior secondary completed	21	15		
	Senior secondary completed	18	20		
	Tertiary	5	28		
Occupation	Student	6	17	5.08	0.27
	Trading/business	38	82		
	Farming	17	29		
	Housewife	15	59		
	Others	0	1		
Ethnicity	Babuliya	0	1	33.5	0.001
	Barobare	0	1		
	Fulani	18	72		
	Hausa	39	92		
	Ibira	0	1		
	Igbo	3	2		
	Kanuri	2	4		
	Siyawa	1	0		
	Tangale	5	0		

Table 4.4: Cultural Factors Influencing Early Child Marriage

Tangle	3	0
Tera	2	3
Waja	1	0
Yoruba	2	12

III. DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic profile of respondents
A total of 264 respondents between 15 and 48 years of age participated in the study, with a mean age of 24.2 years and a standard deviation of +5.82 years. Majority of the respondents, 74.6% were married between the ages of 15 and 19 years. This study is similar to a study conducted by Yulita et al. (2024), with 100% of the respondents also marrying between the ages of 15 and 18 years. A large number, 42.4% of the respondents, had no formal education before marriage. This is because most of their parents still do not believe in Western education. This is in line with a study conducted by Obasanjo et al. (2022), with 84.77% of the respondents below 18 years of age having no educational background.

Cultural factors influencing early child marriage
The belief that girls should marry as soon as they reach puberty to protect their honor and virginity, dowry (bride price) is seen as strengthening social bonds between families, making it difficult for families to reject marriage proposals, and purdah (female segregation) is the practice in which women are separated from men and are not allowed to leave their homes without a male escort, Watta satta (marriage exchange) is a custom in which two families agree to marry each other's sons and daughters, parents marry their daughters because they are afraid that they will become "old maids" if they are not married for too long, early marriage occurs when peers in the environment are already married, so the individual wants to marry soon, early marriage leads to family bonding and early marriage is one of the signs of urbanization that are statistically significant factors influencing early marriage. This is because culture is a very important determinant of marriage in our society, and because parents also passed through the same culture during their marriage, and therefore see no reason for not continuing the culture. This finding is supported by Rose (2023), who reported that a positive correlation was observed between bride price and early child marriage, indicating that higher bride prices increased the likelihood of early marriage by 35.5%.

Religious factors influencing early child marriage
Religion encouraging early child marriage, religious role for females of becoming a wife or a mother, and religion allowing unofficial marriage before the age of 18 years are statistically significant factors influencing early child marriage. This finding is supported by Rashid et al., (2024), who reported a positive association between religion and early marriage.

Socioeconomic factors influencing early child marriage
Marriage of girls to older men for financial support to their families, families receiving bride price (dowry) to pay for other family members' expenses, and early marriage of girls with little education enables them to become financially independent and early marriage so that the husband will be able to support family life are statistically significant socioeconomic factors influencing early child marriage. This may be because of the level of poverty in society, making parents see early marriage as a survival strategy in terms of the payment of dowry and the shifting of responsibility to the husbands. This finding is supported by Scott et al., (2021) who reported that early marriage is much less common among women from richer households than among women from poorer households, Saleheen et al. (2021) who observed that the odds of getting married early were significantly higher among women with no formal education and primary education than women with secondary or higher education and negative association between wealth status and early marriage.
Null hypothesis for association between cultural and religious factors contributing to early child marriage
There was a statistically significant association between cultural and religious factors contributing to early child marriage; therefore, we reject the null hypothesis of association between cultural and religious factors. This means that there is a relationship between cultural and religious factors contributing to early child marriage.

Null Hypothesis for association between socio-demographic variables and socio-economic factors contributing to early child marriage

There was a statistically significant association between socioeconomic factors and religion, type of family, level of education, and tribe. We therefore reject the null hypothesis for the associations between socioeconomic factors and religion, type of family, level of education, and tribe. This means that religion, type of family, level of education, and tribe contribute to early child marriage.

Limitations

The study utilized a cross-sectional design, which means that establishing cause-and-effect relationships is impossible. The study is also prone to subject bias, which makes subjects in a research study act in a way that the researcher wants them to respond to questions.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the factors influencing early child marriage in Gombe Central Area, Gombe State, and tested null hypotheses for the relationships between cultural and religious factors contributing to early child marriage and between sociodemographic variables and socioeconomic factors contributing to early child marriage in Gombe Central Area of Gombe State.

This study revealed that the belief that girls should marry as soon as they reach puberty to protect their honor and virginity, dowry (bride price) is seen as strengthening social bonds between families, making it difficult for families to reject marriage proposals, purdah (female segregation) the practice in which women are separated from men and are not allowed to leave their homes without a male escort, Watta satta (marriage exchange) is a custom in which two families agree to marry each other's sons and daughters, parents marry their daughters because they are afraid that they will become "old maids" if they are not married for too long, early marriage occurs when peers in the environment are already married, so the individual wants to marry soon, early marriage leads to family bonding and early marriage is one of the signs of urbanization which are cultural factors influencing early marriage in Gombe Central Area of Gombe State. The government should intensify efforts to address the factors supporting early marriage through health education to correct cultural and societal norms encouraging early marriage. The government should also put in place mechanisms to increase education, such as compulsory free education, and improve the socioeconomic conditions of young girls through the provision of training and income-generating activities to reduce the level of poverty and therefore the socioeconomic factors leading to early marriage.

REFERENCES

[1] Abdu, Z. I., & Kabiru, S. (2018). Islamic Perspectives on Child Marriage: A study of Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 22*(4), 56-64.

[2] Adebowale, S. A., Fagbamigbe, F. A., Okareh, T. O., & Lawal, G. B. (2020). Survival Analysis of the Timing of First Marriage among Women of Reproductive Age in Nigeria: Regional differences. *BMC Women's Health*, 20(1),s 1-12

[3] Adeola, G. & Olufemi, A. (2020). Cultural and Economic Perspectives on Early Marriage in Northern Nigeria: Implications for Gender Equality. *Journal of Social Development in Africa,* 35(2), 99-117.

[4] Adedini, S. A., Mobolaji, J. W., & Fatusi, A. O. (2020). Ethnicity, religious affiliation and girl child marriage: A cross-sectional study of a nationally representative sample of female adolescents in Nigeria. *BMC Public Health, 20*, Article 1716. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-08714-5

[5] Bolarinwa, O. A., Ahinkorah, B. O., Okyere, J., Seidu, A.-A., & Olagunju, O. S. (2022). A multilevel analysis of prevalence and factors associated with female child marriage in Nigeria using the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey data. BMC Women's Health, 22, 158. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-022-01733-x

[6] Garba, A. M., Usman, Y. K., & Sani, M. B. (2019). Socio-economic Determinants of Early Marriage among Girls in Gombe State, Nigeria. *Journal of African Studies and Development,* 11(6), 111-118.

[7] Ibrahim, A. A., Mohammed, S. I., & Umar, A. G. (2018). Cultural Factors Influencing Early Marriage among Hausa-Fulani Girls in Northern Nigeria. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 23*(2), 45-53

[8] Ibrahim, S., & Abdalla, M. (2018). The Role of Socio-cultural and Economic Factors in the Perpetuation of Child Marriage in Northern Nigeria. *African Population Studies*, 32(1), 1-12.

[9] Malhotra, A., & Schuler, S. R. (2021). Women's Empowerment and the Transformative Role of Education: Evidence from a Study on Early Marriage and Education. *International Journal of Educational Development,* 85, 102452

[10] Mohammed, M. K., & Mohammed, A. I. (2021). Socio-cultural Determinants of Child Marriage in Northeastern Nigeria: A Case of Gombe State. *Journal of Sociology and Social Work*, 9(1), 20-35.

[11] Nwosu, C. O., & Ukoha, C. (2019). Examining Parental Attitudes Towards Early Marriage in Rural Nigeria: A Case Study of Selected Communities in Gombe State. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology,* 11(4), 58-65.

[12] Ogunyemi, T. A., & Adebayo, A. A. (2018). Social and Cultural Factors Influencing Early Marriage in Nigeria: A Case Study of Selected Communities in the North. *African Journal of Social Sciences,* 9(3), 211-223.

[13] Olamide, O., & Adesola, A. (2019). Religious Beliefs and Early Marriage in Northern Nigeria: Implications for Girl-child Education. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(5), 23-30.

[14] Oyeje, A. D., Adewale, T. A., & Ogunleye, K. S. (2018). Legal and Socio-cultural Factors Influencing Child Marriage in Northern Nigeria: A Critical Analysis. *Journal of Law and Society,* 15(3), 31-48

[15] Putri, Y., Ketaren, S. O., Bangun, H. A., Nababan, D., & Manurung, J. (2024). Factors associated with early marriage. J Prima Med Sains, 6(2), 125–130. https://doi.org/10.34012/jpms.v6i2.6277

[16] Rashid, M. M., Siddiqi, M. N. A., Al-Amin, M., Rahman, M. M., Roy, T. K., Rahman, M., ... & Rahman, M. O. (2024). Exploring Determinants of Early Marriage among Women in Bangladesh: A Multilevel Analysis. Plos one, 19(10), e0312755.

[17] Rose, G. K. (2023). Cultural Norms and Early Child Marriage (Doctoral dissertation, Kampala International University).

[18] Saleheen, A. A. S., Afrin, S., Kabir, S., Habib, M. J., Zinnia, M. A., Hossain, M. I., ... & Talukder, A. (2021). Sociodemographic Factors and Early Marriage among Women in Bangladesh, Ghana and Iraq: An Illustration from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. Heliyon, 7(5).

[19] Scott, S., Nguyen, P. H., Neupane, S., Pramanik, P., Nanda, P., Bhutta, Z. A., ... & Menon, P. (2021). Early marriage and Early Childbearing in South Asia: Trends, Inequalities, and Drivers from 2005 to 2018. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1491(1), 60-73.

[20] Solanke, B. L. (2018). Factors Influencing Contraceptive Use and Non-use among Women of Advanced Reproductive Age in Nigeria. *Journal of Health, Population, and Nutrition*, 37(1), 1-11.

[21] UNDP. (2019) Sustainable Development Goals. https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html

[22] UNICEF, (2020). Child Marriage–UNICEF DATA. https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/childmarriage/

[23] UNICEF. (2019). *A profile of Child Marriage and Early Unions in Latin America and the Caribbean*. https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/8256/file/Profile%20of%20Child%20Marriage%20in%20LAC.

[24] UNICEF. (2016). *The effects of traditional and reli-gious practices of child marriage on Africa's socio-economic development: A review of re-search, reports and toolkits from Africa*. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/31018-doc-5465_ccmc_africa_report.pdf

[25] UNICEF. (2023,). *Charting brighter fu-tures for girls: Ending child marriage by 2030*. https://data.unicef.org/data-for-action/charting-brighter-futures-for-girls-ending-child-marriage-by-2030

[26] Walker, J. A. (2019). Early Marriage in Africa– Trends, Harmful effects and interventions. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 23(2), 231-240