SOCIO-CULTURAL DYNAMICS ASSOCIATED WITH EARLY MARRIAGES IN HOMA BAY COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: *Given the high prevalence of early marriage and the corresponding socio-economic and health problems confronting the community, families, the county government and the married adolescents, a detailed understanding of the demographic drivers of early marriages is essential. The study assessed the prevalence of early marriage in Homa Bay County and derived its socio-cultural dynamics. Employing a cross sectional mixed methods research design, the sample constituted of 420 household heads between 20-49 years. Questionnaire and interview schedule were used to collect data. Descriptive statistics including the Pearson's chi-square and inferential statistics including the Logistic Regression Model was used to analyze quantitative data. Of all the 420 household heads, 106(48.6%) of women and 17(8.3%) of men married early. The study uncovered that religion, form of marriage and spousal choice were found to be insignificant in predicting marital timing. Compared to women whose bride wealth was paid, the women are less likely to be ever married (OR=0.369, CI=0.211-0.644) if their bride wealth was not paid. Similarly, among men, where exchange of gifts occurred was associated with increased probability of early marriage compared to where gifts were not exchanged (OR = 0.147, p = 0.012, 95% CI: 0.033-0.659). Higher bride wealth gains for poor households serve as a common incentive to marry off their daughters as young as 14 years. It is recommended that communal cultural education that cultivated a deep respect for sex, discouraged pre-marital sexual relations and consequent pregnancy should be highly emulated and continued.*

Keywords: *socio-cultural dynamics, early marriage, bride wealth, religion, spouse choice, form of marriage*

I. INTRODUCTION

Early marriage, defined as any marriage that involves an individual that is below the age of 18, is a violation of human rights, social justice and compromise adolescent's development and hinder the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (UNICEF, 2016). At present, each year an average of 15 million girls become child brides (UNICEF, 2020). Numerous interventions and initiatives (Loaiza & Wong, 2012; Lee-Rife, Malhotra, Warner & McGonagle, 2012; Kalamar, Lee-Rife & Hindin, 2016) have been initiated to eradicate the practice of early marriages but the rate of change in decline is at a snail pace rate. As per the 2014 KDHS, 23 percent of women and 3 percent of men aged 20-24 years were married before the age of 18, whereas 4.4 percent of women and 0.3 percent of men in the same age group were married before the age of 15 years

(KNBS, 2014). Among the Kenyans aged 20-49 years, 27.4 percent of women and 3.4 percent of men were married before the age of 18 years (KNBS, 2014). However, national averages obscure marked differences on the prevalence rate of early marriages by Kenyan regions (KDHS, 2014).

The KDHS 2014 data confirm the overall impression of high early marriage prevalence rate in Homa Bay County at 40.7 percent compared to other outstanding cases such as Makueni and Elgeyo Marakwet counties with 10 and 7 percent respectively. According to Plan International Kenya (2015), Kilifi had the highest prevalence of early marriages, with 47.4 percent, followed by Homa Bay (38 percent). Moreover, as of 2020, Homa Bay County had the highest proportion of women (76%), of childbearing age (20 – 49 years) who were married when they were below the age of 18 years and had begun motherhood (State of Kenya Population Report, 2020). The foregoing analysis shows that Homa Bay County represents an unusual pattern and runs counter to worldwide trends of marriage postponement. These statistic is definitely a matter of concern necessitating greater attention in a fast modernizing country (WHO, 2011).

A continuing debate in demographic studies concerns the importance of traditional norms and ethnic group identities in reproducing and re-enforcing nuptial patterns, and thereby in influencing family formation processes. Recent empirical research has emphasized the role of traditional norms in the transition to adulthood (Ajwang, 2019), the productive and reproductive roles of young women (Ochieng, 2016). On the other hand, proponents of modernization argue that rapid socio-economic development erodes the influence of culture on family formation processes by altering the goals that traditionally influenced marriage norms previously supported (Othuon et al., 2006). While it has been demonstrated that sub-Saharan African societies often witness marked changes in marriage patterns, the persistence of cultural influences on family formation behavior during times of rapid social change is less well understood. The few studies available on cultural dynamics associated with first nuptial age in Kenya relate to the 1970s and 1980s (Othuon et al., 2006). They cannot then essentially be inferred as reflecting the situation in the contemporary times. The study aimed to fill this gap in knowledge. The specific objective was to determine the socio-cultural dynamics associated with early marriages. The study was guided by a research question: how are the socio-cultural dynamics related to early marriages?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the old days, before the Europeans took over the government of the Kenyan country, the Luo community was influenced by a culture of gendered roles. This is distinct in the pattern of marriage practices and gender relations at the time. The age at first marriage during this era was certain, (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1986) suggest that a man did not normally marry until he was nearer forty than thirty, and girls did not marry until they were nineteen or twenty. Within the confines of cultural boundaries, the Luo youth, at the turn of the 20th Century, had three distinct traditional methods of child-socialization, reinforced by extended family-relatives from the older generations such as aunts, uncles and grandparents, were effective way of transmitting specific information about marriage, family life preparation and sex (Othuon et al., 2006).

The institution *siwindhe, duol and simba* i.e. the grandmother's, grandfather's and the young unmarried man's hut, respectively, provided fora from which the youth learnt lessons about growing up, premarital maturation and sexual maturation. Girls slept at the *siwindhe* and got a lot of information from the grandmother or great grandmother. Boys ate at the *abila (duol)* of the grandfather or father and were given a lot of information about their maturation as boys. Girls would be with their mothers at the mother's house and had a chance to learn whatever lessons there were from their mothers or the women folk in the homestead (Ominde, 1987). This form of education cultivated a deep respect for sex, and protected girls from premarital pregnancy (Ocholla-

Ayayo,1976). However, according to the authors, the traditional institutions that undergirded delayed marriage have almost disappeared with the emergence of other new institutions such as schools, churches and the print and electronic media. The current information flow is uncoordinated, ambiguous and complex for the youth to decipher effectively (Ocholla-Ayayo, 2000).

A man could not marry without his father's permission, for it was only from his father that he could obtain the cattle with which to acquire a bride. In the case of a man this postponement of marriage to a comparatively late age was apparently connected with the defense of the tribe as a warrior, raiding for fresh land or cattle, or an instance of the reluctance of the older men to surrender even a part of their wealth and power to their sons. The term for a man of fighting age was *wuowe,* that for a married man *jaot,* while that for a man who delayed to marry until much later than usual was *musomba.* Traditionally, marriage followed the order of seniority at birth (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1986).

Before marriage, the choice of a bride that often delayed a man's marriage was limited by the fear of incest expressed in the exogamous rule that did not permit unions between relatives, either on his father's or on his mother's side of the family or close neighbors (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1976). A young man travelled long distances, or took time investigating a possible distant relationship before finding a mate not closely related to him. He had to get permission from his father to take her as his wife, and the usual negotiations would be put in hand. However, mostly, a man left the choice of his wife to his father, who would select a suitable maiden with regard only to the mutual advantage of the two families concerned (Ominde, 1987). The rebel against this choice was unusual to avoid his father's deep displeasure and the girl was in the same way at the mercy of her parents.

The two customs, namely payment of bride wealth and marriage by order of seniority in age went together, and to some extent made it possible for parents and kin to delay marriage since every girl had to wait for her turn, which comes only after older sister had been married (Osiemo, 1986). Similarly, younger boys had to wait for their elder brothers to marry before they're allowed to do so. Since wealth, especially cattle, was largely in the hands of elders, they could delay marriage until the right age was reached (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1980).

In most cases the bride-price itself was paid by instalments over a period that varied with the ability of the bridegroom's father to meet his liabilities (Ominde, 1987). Usually some months, a year or two elapsed before the whole number of cattle had been handed over to the girl's father. During this period, it was customary for the girl to pay her future husband a visit from time to time accompanied by one or two girlfriends, and was expected to stay for several days. She slept in the *simba* hut with her betrothed, and intercourse took place. It sometimes, though rarely, happened that the girl conceived on one of these occasions. This was bad luck for the girl's parents, but fortunate for the bridegroom, for it was absolutely necessary that the child should be born in his *dala* (Ominde, 1987)

The colonial period was a time of important change in Kenya's political, legal and socio-economic sectors. It was also a time of religious change (Ocholla-Ayayo, 2000). Colonial rule was more engrossed on economic gains than changing indigenous practices. After Kenya attained independence from British colonial rule in 1963, Kenya has witnessed cultural disruption and unprecedented changes in social life. In the face of these modern rapid social changes, the traditional values and strict taboos that once regulated sexual behaviors among young people could no longer hold, and could contribute to a rapid drop in low age at marriage and a rise in unsystematized marriage. Although an association between first nuptial age and the cultural changes seems reasonable, this has not been systematically tested using empirical data.

Moreover, rarely do surveys include questions that would make possible an investigation of the process of cultural changes. This study therefore, aims at to conduct an empirical assessment to advance understanding of cultural changes in intergenerational relations, marriage process and its timing in contemporary society. Primary dimensions of socio-cultural changes considered here include the decline in arranged marriages, the changing nature of bride wealth with cash payments, marriage markets, non-familial premarital training, role of religion, decreasing polygyny, attitude towards marriage, family size ideals (Casterline, Williams & Macdonald, 1986; Van de Kaa, 2002; Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 2008; Gemignani & Wodon, 2015).

III. METHODOLOGY

The study location is Homa Bay County, Kenya, located in the southwest part of Kenya along Lake Victoria. The County extends approximately from latitude 0º15′ South to 0º52′ South, and from longitudes 34º East to 35º East, and like some other sub-counties in the country, the largest population (90%) live in rural communities (KNBS, 2014) (as indicated in Figure 1).

Homa Bay County is among the counties which has been having persistent high rates of early marriage prevalence in Kenya despite the existing interventions in curbing the problem (KDHS, 2014). Moreover, dichotomy between the marriage patterns of females and those of males has not been researched on and still remains a practical as well as an intellectual gap. In view of this, the selection of Homa Bay County is justified.

Figure 1. Map of Homa Bay County in the Kenyan Context and Showing the sub-Counties
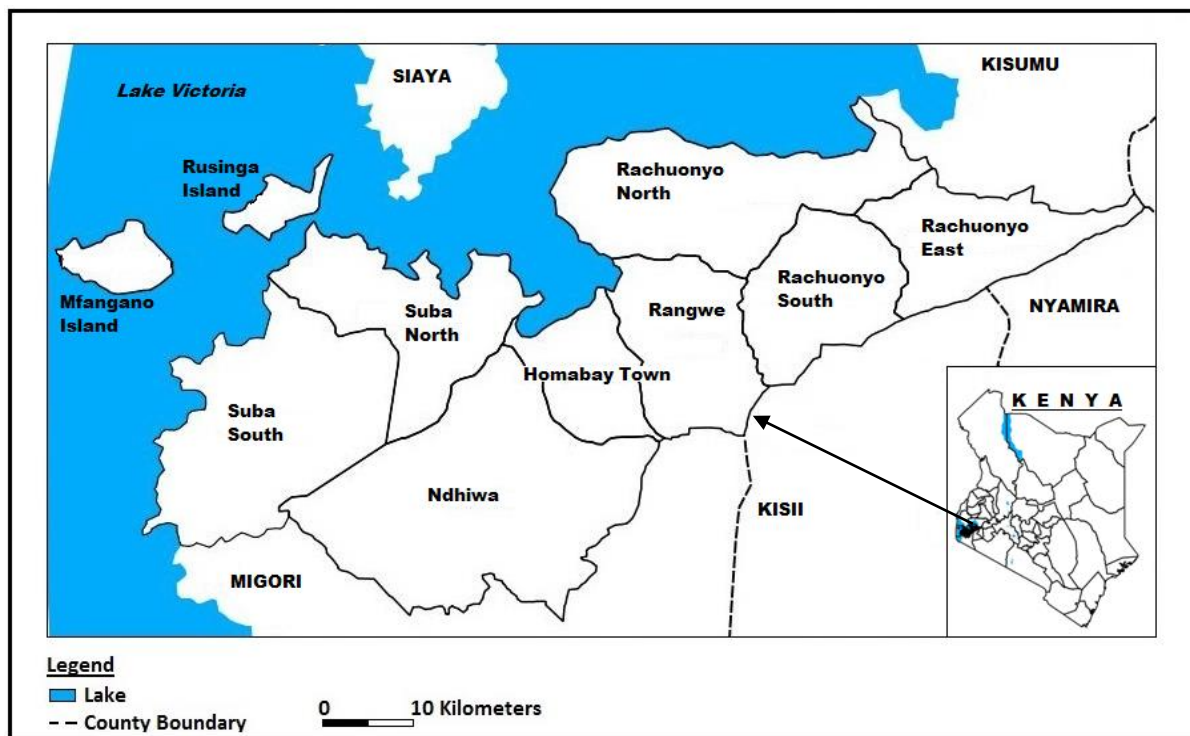
Source: *Homa Bay County Integrated Development Plan (2018-2022)*

Research design and data collection

As the study adopted a cross-sectional retrospective research design, a triangulation of methods, namely questionnaires that comprised variables on a person's bio-demographic factors, history of family formation and births was used to collect quantitative data. Qualitative approach on the other hand adopted a semi-

structured group interview format for FGDs and in-depth interviews to make sure that the same scope was maintained in each group.

Analytical approach: Using the Pearson's Chi-square statistic ($\chi2$), (Equation 1), association between both early marriage and explanatory variables was tested. Nevertheless, at the final models, only independent variables that were statistically significant with age at first marriage (p = p≤0.05) at the Chi-square level of analysis were included in the multivariate levels (Lumley, 2010).

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{k} \sum_{j=1}^{n} \frac{(O_{ij}-E_{ij})^2}{E_{ij}} \tag{1}$$

Where O_{ij} is the number of individuals observed in the ith row and jth column cell;

E_{ij} is the number of individuals expected in the ith row and jth column cell.

Multivariate analysis using binary logistic regression, an analysis effective with dichotomous dependent variable was used to test all predictor variables to assess their predictive ability (Cox, 1970). Dummy variables was created for dependent variable, a dichotomous outcome categorized as ("Yes (1)" = early age at first marriage below 18, "No (0)" =age at first marriage above 18). Multiple classification was likewise used since the explanatory variables are categorical in nature.

The logistic regression model is defined as;

$$log\left[\frac{p_i}{1-p_i}\right] = \alpha_o + \alpha_1 X_{1i} + \alpha_2 X_{2i} + \alpha_3 X_{3i} + \cdots + \alpha_k X_{ki} + \in_{ij} \tag{2}$$

Where p_i is the probability of early marriage, $1-p_i$ is the probability of not marrying early, α_o ... α_k are partial intercept and slope coefficients, X_{1i} ... X_{ki} are explanatory variables and $\in_{ij}$ is the error term (Boyd et al., 1987). Results was presented as the exponential of the Beta coefficient (Exp β) which is the odds ratio (OR) associated with being married. P-values of less than 0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents in addition to other demographic dynamics were treated as the independent variables. The findings are as shown in Table 1. Gender was considered relevant in this study because family formation involves both sexes who determines their first nuptial age (Ajwang, 2019). The response in respect to the gender of the 420 respondents was almost even, 51% females and 49% males depending on the willingness to take part in the study. Nevertheless, the study was able to obtain worthwhile information from both gender represented in the study.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Data of Respondents in Homa Bay County (N =420)

Categories	Number	%	Categories	Number	%
Gender			**Nature of Marriage**		
Female	214	51	Religious	41	9.8
Male	206	49	Civil	64	15.2
Age			Customary	174	41.4
20-24	56	13.3	Consensual unions	141	33.6
25-29	113	26.9	**Form of Marriage**		
30-34	87	20.7	Monogamous	374	89.0
35-39	100	23.8	Polygamous	46	11.0

40-44	47	11.2	**Premarital Place of Residence**		
45-49	17	4	Rural	275	65.5
Mean		32.13	Urban	145	34.5
Below 16 Years	67	16			
16-19 Years	225	53.6	**Main Occupation**		
Above 19 Years	128	30.5	Peasant Farmer	76	18.1
Religious Affiliations			Trading	89	21.2
None	12	2.9	Public Servant	126	30.0
Roman Catholic	84	20	Housewife	24	5.7
SDA	137	32.6	Politician	2	0.5
Pentecostal	117	27.9	Unemployed / Student	14	3.3
Muslim	22	5.2	Self-employment	71	16.9
A. Independent	48	11.4	Fishing	18	4.3
Natal Household Parity			**Monthly Income in Ksh**		
0-2	18	4.3	< 10,000	137	32.6
3-5	186	44.3	10,000-49,999	100	23.8
Above 5	216	51.4	50,000-89,999	159	37.9
Mean		5.6	>90,000	24	5.7
Early Marriage Prevalence			Mean	Ksh.12,464.31	
Men	17	8.3			
Women	104	48.6			

Source: Field Data (Author, 2022)

In terms of current age of the respondent, the least proportion of the sample of respondents (4.0%), was found within the age range of 45-49. Nearly a third of the married men and women (26.9%) were aged 25-29, representing the majority of the population overall. This was followed by 23.8% of the respondents in the age cohort 35-39. Furthermore, approximately a fifth of the respondents (20.7%) were in the age range 30-34. In this study, the data show that the mean age of the respondents was 32.13 years. This implied that all the respondents were aged above 20 years, and hence were amply mature and experienced on the topic under study to provide a near exact reflection of the people in the society (Palamuleni, 2011). The mean age further implies a very large inbuilt momentum for substantive future increase in size in fertility as it contains active people with high reproductive potential (Census, 2019).

The data as shown in Table 1 reveal that variation exists in early marriage prevalence level across gender in Homa Bay County. Females have the highest prevalence of early marriage (48.6%) whereas men have the least (8.3%). This is considerably higher than the rates among females of the same age in the general population (6 % first married before age 15, 26.4 % (one in four) first married before age 18) (KDHS, 2014). The early marriage prevalence level of 42% obtained by KDHS (2014) in the area of study also lends support to the early marriage prevalence rate for each gender found by this study. Such a slow progress in reducing early marriage prevalence in a decade demonstrates how the county is lagging in achieving the integrated global action plan for ending early marriage by 2030 (UNICEF & WHO, 2013).

With respect to the highest level of educational qualification, it is evident from Table 1 that most respondents had attained at least some schooling. Slightly more than a third (35.2%) of the respondents surveyed had a secondary level of education, followed by 32.9% of respondents who had tertiary level of education. The success of the educational sector improvement programme which was adopted, as part of the economic recovery program in the 2000s is evident. The data further show that those with primary level of education made up 28.1% of the population. The lowest proportion of the sample of respondent (3.8%) had no formal education. The improvement in educational attainment will most likely influence marriage patterns in the county.

In this study, the data show that over half of the respondents (53.6%) initiated premarital sexual activity between 16-19 years (Table 1), whereas 16% initiated premarital sexual activity below 16 years. Slightly above a third (30.5%) of the respondents began premarital sexual activity above 19 years of age. Overall, the median age at first sexual debut was 17.5 years. This finding is reflected and comparable with the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS), 2014 which reported that the median age at first sexual debut was 16.88 years. The implication of early sexual initiation is that it reduces protracted periods of singlehood, and in some cases cause relationship instability at younger age (van Roode et al, 2012). This ultimately leads to early marriages.

Religion is yet another predictor variable of fertility and marriage patterns. Fatalistic beliefs and strict adherence to pro-natalistic norms encourage early marriages and early childbearing. Religious groups may use social values to regulate sexual behaviour and ensure fidelity to suit their doctrines and practices (Giyan, 2009). The data shows that a sizeable number (32.6%) of the respondents were followers of Seventh Day Adventist religion, followed by those who belonged to the Pentecostal (27.9%). A fifth of the respondents (20.0%) belonged to Roman Catholic, 11.4% were followers of African Independent religions, 5.2% were Muslim, and the remaining 2.9% were not followers of any religious faith.

The percentage distributions of nature of marriage showed that a sizeable proportion of the respondents (41.4%) had customary marriages (Table 1). It is noteworthy that over a third (33.6%) of the respondents were in consensual unions, colloquially known as "come we stay marriages". During the FGD's, most interviewees reported that consensual unions and customary marriages were common since civic and religious marriages had cost implications. Nevertheless, those who later did religious marriages did so after paying bride wealth and involving relatives and friends in preparation of church wedding. Only 14% of the respondents had civil marriages and a mere 9.8% of the respondents had religious marriages. This further implies that the social approval of marriage that is decided by religion and a source of blessing for successful marriage is slowly disintegrating in the area of study.

Slightly more than half (51.4%) of the respondents were from high parity households (five and over members). A sizeable proportion (44.3%) were from households with three to five members and 4.3% were from zero to two members (Table 1). The findings on household size are comparable (though slightly higher) with the Kenya Demographic Health Survey, (KDHS), 2023 which reported that the average size of a Kenyan household was 3.4 persons (KDHS, 2023). The average household size of 4.3 members in the county obtained by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, KNBS (2019) are also comparable and lends support to the average size of household parity of 5.6 found by this study. Nonetheless, the natal household parity did not significantly influence timing of first marriage in the area of study.

Conspicuously polygynous form of marriages (11.0%) is becoming few and unpopular in the area of study given that in 2014, the levels of polygyny ranged from 9% among the Kikuyus to 33% among the Luos, who, reportedly, had the highest prevalence of polygyny in the country (KDHS, 2014; Hayase & Liaw, 2015). The

latest estimates nationally in Kenya put the levels of polygyny at 13% (KDHS, 2023). A larger number (89.0%) were in monogamous form of marriages. Form of marriage did not directly influence marital timing across gender in the area of study. The increasing participation of women in the labour force was identified as one of the factors leading to the adoption of western values and attitudes towards marriage characterized by a distinguished monogamous marriage system (Caldwell et al., 1982).

Cultural Dynamics Associated with Early Marriage Prevalence

Part of the study analysis involved Chi-square tests that established a definite relationship between the cultural variables and age at first marriage. Table 2 was presented to show the results of the Chi-square tests at 0.05 level of significant association. Overall, the relationship between first nuptial age and any single independent variable only does exist for payment of bride wealth (Table 2). Religion, form of marriage and spousal choice were found to be insignificant in predicting marital timing at 0.05 level or better. These variables were therefore dropped and not included in the subsequent multivariate analyses except for payment of bride wealth. Because individuals take their particular religion as a pervasive force in their lives, marriage norms, customs and traditions vary widely according to religious group (Rampagane, 2016). Religious influence in marital timing was measured using the religion in which the respondents were raised (Table 2). The main focus is on religious affiliation as the determinant of marital timing. The results indicate that religious affiliation had no influence on first nuptial age in the area of study. A plausible explanation for this difference is that this study established that there is a high level of cultural homogeneity in all sub-counties within area of study and this may thus be the key factor accounting for this difference. This could also be so as Kenya may be fully become a secular society causing vast dilution of the once pronatalist religions like the Islam, Roman Catholic and protestant religions (Ikamari, 2005).

Table 2: Chi-square statistic of the relationship between cultural dynamics and early marriages

Cultural Drivers	Females				Males			
	Incidence of early marriage		P-Value	Chi-Square Value	Incidence of early marriage		P-Value	Chi-Square Value
	Yes(%)	No(%)			Yes(%)	No(%)		
Religion								
None	66.7	33.3	0.177	7.641	0.0	100.0	0.216	7.066
Roman Catholic	40.8	59.2			8.6	91.4		
SDA	38.5	61.5			4.7	95.3		
Pentecostal	57.1	42.9			14.9	85.1		
Muslim	41.7	58.3			0.0	100.0		
African Independent	60.7	39.3			15.0	85.0		
Form of Marriage								
Monogamous	48.7	51.3	0.960	0.003	7.5	92.5	0.210	1.57
Polygynous	48.1	51.9			15.8	84.2		
Spousal Choice								
Couple	47.1	52.9	0.306	2.368	7.1	92.9	0.132	4.052

Partly parents / Partly Couple	69.2	30.8			6.5	93.5		
Arranged	48.1	51.9			20.0	80.0		
Bride Wealth								
Yes	38.2	61.8	**0.001***	12.492	2.2	97.8	**0.004***	8.113
No	62.6	37.4			13.2	86.8		

NOTE: * = Significant at p ≤ .05

Source: Field Data (Author, 2022)

The results of analysis where religious affiliation is insignificantly associated with age at first marriage are in sharp contrast to prior studies by Amoo (2017), Haloi & Limbu (2013), and Adebowale et al., (2012). The researchers found that females who are Muslim and Protestant have an increased hazard of entering an early marriage in relation to other religious denominations like Catholic (South, 2001; Rahman, Islam, and Hossain, 2008; Agaba, Atuhaire, and Rutaremwa, 2011). This is mainly because Protestant leaders emphasise marriage and strongly urge their members to enter marital unions and once they have done so, to avoid divorce except for compelling reasons (Wilson & Musick, 1996). In certain Islamic societies, parents imbibe early marriages for fear of their daughters being exposed to pre-marital sexual activities, pregnancy out of wedlock and the only available option could be earlier marriage. Most times, these decisions are often made without the consent of the child and with no recourse to the consequences of the actions (Adebowale et al., 2012).

Table 3: Mean age at marriage (MAM) by main method of spousal choice

Choice of spouse	MAM	Percent (%)	Frequency (N)
Respondent's chose	24.4	48.1	202
Parents / seniors chose	18.2	10.2	43
Partly parents or elders / partly couple	22.2	18.4	77
Friends	21.1	12.7	53
Relative	20.9	10.6	45
Total	**23.6**	**100**	**420**

Source: Field Data (Author, 2022)

Out of the total respondents, 48 per cent of the marriages were mediated by couple themselves and these respondents were married at an average age of 24.3 years which is the highest age at marriage among the different methods of spousal choice or mate selection (Table 3). Though the study findings are insignificant, they nonetheless suggest that, the idea of choosing a spouse has changed from the usual conventional way and embraces the modern values (Musau, 2016). The study results suggest that, while cultural and modern values are not present to the same degree in the people's lives, they coexist among themselves; nonetheless, the trend depicts a faster process of social change from traditional to modern norms and values. For example, most young people today meet each other in either educational institutions or work places, then inform their parents for the other marriage ceremonies to follow. This finding further indicate that although marriage is a family affair, the relationship between potential mates, is uttermost.

Twenty-two percent of the marriages were arranged by elders / parents and these respondents were married at an average age of 18.5 years which is evidently the lowest among the different methods of spousal choice. The spousal choice where partly parents or elders / partly couple was ideal by respondents was because their parents didn't favor very late first nuptial age (25 years and above). This was probably due to fear of childlessness or non-marital pregnancy as both are socially looked down upon in the society (Ochieng, 2016). Moreover, 20%

per cent of all the marriages were semi-arranged (partly parents or seniors / partly couple) and these respondents were married at an average age of 22.1 years (Table 3). This latter type of spousal choice, males or females are at liberty to disagree if they are not satisfied with their elders or parents' choice. First nuptial age is higher in societies where marriage occurs by free choice, and it is lower in in societies where seniors take the entire responsibility to choose for their children a spouse (Goode, 1963; Caldwell, 1982; Botev, 1990).

Historically, elders would arrange marriages for their sons and daughters (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1986). Informants agreed with findings of Ocholla-Ayayo, in the practices of identifying and choosing marriage partners among the traditional Luos. Spousal choice by parents showed the social importance of marriage, especially as it concerned the families and relatives of the couple (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1986). Parents or young men would travel long distances, or took time investigating a possible distant relationship before finding a mate not closely related to him (Ocholla-Ayayo,1976; Ominde, 1987). The surveillance involved: establishing the behavior of the parents of girl; the association of those parents in relation to their neighbors; the socio-economic class of the family and the level of discipline in that household (Osiemo, 1986). The choice of a bride that often delayed a man's marriage was also limited by the fear of incest expressed in the exogamous rule (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1976). The man had to get permission from his father to take her as his wife, and the usual negotiations would be put in hand. However, mostly, a man left the choice of his wife to his father, who would select a suitable maiden with regard only to the mutual advantage of the two families concerned (Ominde, 1987).

The study found that arranged marriages by parents / elders are no longer pronounced (Table 3). This change to modernity reflects a greater disintegration in customs of marriage because traditionally, personal qualities of the potential mate were taken into account and the spouse opinion was not important since it could cause wrong selection. The insignificant association between spousal choice and marital timing is consistent with existing literature (Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 2008; Ochieng, 2016) and can be attributed to increased female participation in education and in labour force activities outside the home that has eroded the universality of early arranged marriages (Tumwine, 2007; Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 2008). Additionally, many parents who reside in the rural areas may know few educated potential mates for their children since it is uncommon for educated people to their counterparts with low level of education as many formal marriages begin with courtship (Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 2008). Education also increase the likelihood of cross marriages between tribes and marriage partners may not necessarily have to be from the same ethnic community as observed from the increase in the number of intermarriages (Othuon et al., 2006; Ajwang, 2019). A wife is as thus meant for the husband and not the whole family as it used to be in the past (Ocholla-Ayayo, 2000). Thus the empirical evidence for this study does lend support to these emerging world views.

In one focus group discussion, a woman who married during her teenage years explained how people have become sensitive to modernization factors that influence their first nuptial age:

"…. *some traditional attitudes and historically held social orientations that affect marriage age such as parents' involvement in choosing marriage partners; parental inheritance as the primary source of wealth; sub-ordination to senior kin or parents; abstinence before marriage; marriage by seniority; surveillance process of mates are in decline. These changes are as a result of modernity through migration, participation in labor force by women, youth independence and personal freedom, formal education and urbanization….".*
FGD female participant

The study found that preparation for marriage was a good practice that is neglected in the contemporary society. The excerpt above showcases a need to emulate the traditional institutions that undergirded postponed marriage despite the emergence of other new institutions such as schools, churches and the modern mass media. There

is need to coordinate the current flow of information about marriage, family life preparation and sex, make it clear and simple for the youth to decipher effectively through the same institutions of *siwindhe, duol and simba* (Ocholla-Ayayo, 2000; Othuon et al., 2006). The traditional education that cultivate a deep respect for sex, discourage pre-marital sex and protect girls from premarital pregnancy should be continued (Othuon et al., 2006). Abstinence is one way of the core teachings in the community in the fight against HIV/AIDs, pre-marital sexual relations and consequent teenage pregnancy that were frowned upon. Furthermore, in order to avoid instances of incest expressed in the exogamous rule that did not permit unions between relatives, avoid spread of hereditary diseases such as sickle cell as well as bad practices such as witchcraft and theft, young people are encouraged to take time and investigate about the families of the intended partners before making pledge to marriage.

The second part of this analysis focuses on binary logistic regression including the explanatory variables that were statistically significant in the first analysis using Chi-square tests. It is hardly surprising to note that the payment of bride wealth is another important cultural and highly significant factor determining the age at first marriage of both gender. Bride wealth involved the exchange of money or traditional physical items (livestock, clothing and food) or other valuable property by the family of the bridegroom to be to the family of his bride to be. Information from the discussants showed that bride wealth bound the marriage covenant, legitimized children born in the relationship as well as giving the bride the right to privileges of a legally married woman. Bride wealth is seen as an equivalent of a marriage certificate that certify as a public pledge, the man's rights over his wife and children and empowered him to be called a man *("jaot")* among men (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1986). The general observation was that bride wealth has been commercialized to include envelopes containing sums of money for many relatives of the woman instead of traditional physical items such as livestock, manufactured food and non-food items and clothing. There was remarkable consensus from the focus group discussants that commercialization of bride wealth should be abolished and the positive cultural values of the marriage system be upheld by those who revere them.

The bivariate logistic results presented in Table 4 show that compared to women whose bride wealth was paid, the women are less likely to be ever married (OR=0.369, CI=0.211-0.644) if their bride wealth was not paid. Similarly, among men, where exchange of gifts occurred was associated with increased probability of early marriage compared to where gifts were not exchanged (OR = 0.147, p = 0.012, 95% CI: 0.033-0.659). This is a hardly surprising outcome considering the fact that literature offers a similar argument suggesting that early marriages are likely to occur among individuals whose bride wealth's were paid in relation to those who did not exchange any gifts or bride wealth in the marriage process. Higher bride wealth gains for poor households serve as a common incentive to marry off their daughters as young as 14 years.

Table 4: Odds ratios of binary regression showing effect of bride wealth on the likelihood of early marriage, by sex

EXPLANATORY VARIABLES	Women		Men	
	LOGIT ODDS RATIOS (P-VALUE)	95% (CIs) FOR ODDS RATIOS (ORs)	LOGIT ODDS RATIOS (P-VALUE)	95% (CIs) FOR ODDS RATIOS (ORs)
Bride wealth Yes No	**RC** .369 (0.001)	0.211-0.645	**RC** .147 (0.012)	0.033-0.659

Source: Field Data (Author, 2022)

This finding is consistent to empirical findings of Lloyd (2005) in Nigeria and Ochieng (2016) in Kenya. They established that the payment of bride wealth or exchange of gifts, paid in exchange for the bride's labour and fertility is an important resource for greater wealth and survival of some family and therefore may induce early arrangements of marriage by parents. This finding also suggest that in the contemporary society, a man or a woman is only considered married only after bride wealth has been settled as it used to be in the past generations. Persons in consensual unions are therefore not likely to report themselves as married. Nonetheless, it is also noteworthy to report that hardly any individual is marrying in birth order contrary to prior observations by Osiemo, (1986) and Ocholla-Ayayo, (1980).   It can thus be argued that the custom of bride wealth creates an economic incentive for some parents on when to marry off their daughters.

This finding is discordant with a study by Lilian (2014) in some sub-Saharan African countries that found that most African countries have become a secular society and therefore has diluted the once so strong traditions that served as a reference point on when and how people formed and maintained marriage. Nonetheless, there are also incidences of some informal nuptial practices like come we stay marriages and lax documentation of marriage rites which blur the lines between legal marriage and illegitimate relationships. In these informal relationships, parents have less influence on their children's choice of when or whom their children would marry, regardless of whether parental consent was obtained. Available evidence suggests that compulsory registration of births, deaths, marriage and divorces is important in safeguarding the lives of young girls from their families' wishes to marry early (UNICEF, 1996; Ajwang, 2019). The compulsory registration of marriage is imperative as there is no law requiring compulsory registration of marriages throughout Kenya. Thus, enforcement of such legal provision is likely to pressurize parents for delaying marriage.

In one IDI interview, an area chief from Ndhiwa indicated how short term consideration of bride wealth and other gifts accruable to the family on marriage perpetuate early marriages:

 ".... at times, the decision by poor families to give their daughters away in marriage early is hinged on the presumption that, where the husband to- be-is richer, a daughter's marriage to him will inure in his extending economic support to the family. At other times, it is the short-term consideration of bride price and other gifts accruable to the family on marriage. Even when families betroth girls to boys who are their peers, usually economic considerations are at the heart of such arrangements....". **IDI Interview**

The excerpt above showcases an urgent need to discourage commercialization of bride wealth to foster better health for women and reduction of poverty.

V. CONCLUSION

Religion, form of marriage and spousal choice were found to be insignificant in predicting marital timing. It is also hardly surprising to note that compared to women whose bride wealth was paid, the women are less likely to be ever married (OR=0.369, p=0.001, CI=0.211-0.644) if their bride wealth was not paid. Similarly, among men, where exchange of gifts occurred was associated with increased probability of early marriage compared to where gifts were never exchanged (OR = 0.147, p = 0.012, 95% CI: 0.033-0.659). It was established that the payment of bride wealth or exchange of gifts is an important resource for greater wealth and survival of some family and therefore may induce early arrangements of marriage by parents. There was remarkable consensus from the focus group discussants that commercialization of bride wealth should be abolished and the positive cultural values of the marriage system be upheld by those who revere them.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that non-familial premarital training that was well coordinated, clear and simple was a good practice that is ignored by the community. It is recommended that communal cultural education that cultivated a deep respect for sex, discouraged pre-marital sexual relations and consequent pregnancy should be highly emulated and continued. Abstinence is a core teaching in Kenya in the fight against teenage pregnancy, curbing early marriage and in the fight against HIV/AIDs and other SRIs. The custom of payment of bride wealth has been commercialized. This should be discouraged to reduce poverty. Contemporary families should agree to take what in-laws can manage to pay for instead of setting for them excessive items and cash money. This is because young women with high level of education are expected to get married to young educated men and both parents / guardians spent money to educate both gender.

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