

Abstract

CHILD MARRIAGE; A CULTURAL HEALTH PHENOMENON

Birechi J.

Child marriage continues to be a challenge worldwide and especially in southern Asia and Africa. While it affects both sexes, girls are more affected as they are the majority of the victims. It is predicted by the UNFPA that worldwide 100 million girls (indicate age of girls)are expected to marry in the next decade (UNICEF 2005). Child marriage causes untold suffering to the victims. It curtails the child's education, affects the general health and puts the affected in a disadvantaged position.

In Africa, child marriage account for 42% (UNICEF 2005).The author of this paper argues that culture continues to perpetuate and entrench the practice of child marriage in most communities. Culture refers to a way of life of members of a society or groups within a society. It includes how they dress, their marriage customs and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits (Giddens , 2001). Culture and health are closely related. All communities are united by the fact that members are organized in structural social relationships according to a unique culture.

The elements of culture such as marriage customs, religion among others are shared by members of a community and allow communication and cooperation to take place. It forms the context in which individuals in a community live their lives. Child marriage remains strong in certain communities as a way of life .The more they try to stop the practice, the more they feel alienated. This paper discusses the cultural factors behind the practice of child marriage such as bride wealth, value of virginity among others.

It will also examine the health implications on the life of the children as well as the strategies being put in place by various stakeholders in order to end the practice.

The paper recommends that the communities should be actively involved in coming up with the ways of ending the practice. A lot of awareness should be created on the negative implications of child marriage on the health of the children and their general wellbeing.

Key words; Child marriage, Culture, Health