EFFECTS OF BETROTHAL AND EARLY MARRIAGE ON ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS IN BASIC SCHOOLS IN GHANA.

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Abstract

This is a multiple case study design which aimed at investigating effects of betrothal and early marriage on academic development and performance of learners in basic schools at Sapeiman in the Ga West Municipality of Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The concurrent mixed method research approach informed this study. Data collected through interviews and questionnaire were descriptively and thematically analysed. Convenience, simple random and judgemental sampling were involved in the selection process. The study revealed poverty, culture, societal recognition among others as reasons behind betrothal and early marriage whereas resultant factors like health problems, intermittent school drop-out, shyness and timidity and marital responsibilities were identified as blockage to academic development and performance. The study recommends a committed collaboration between stakeholders of education like parents, NGOs and government machineries to put an end to this practice not only in the Sapeiman community but beyond the borders of the country as well.

Keywords: *betrothal, early marriage, academic development, academic performance, learners*

1.1 Background to the Study

Birth, marriage and death are the standard threesome key events in the lives of people but only one, 'marriage' appears to be a matter of choice (Agyemang, 2015). The right to exercise this choice was recognized as a principle of law even in Roman times and has long been established in international human rights instruments. Yet, many girls unlike boys enter into marriage without any chance of exercising their right to choose. Some are forced into marriage at a very early age. Others are simply too young to make informed decisions about their marriage partner or about the implications of marriage itself. They may have given what passes for 'consent' in the eyes of custom or the law, but in reality, consent to their binding union has been made by others on their behalf. The assumption is that once a girl is married, she has become a woman irrespective of her age likewise a boy who is also made to marry.

While the age of marriage is generally on the rise, early marriage, which is marriage of children and adolescents below the age of eighteen (18), is still widely practiced. Early marriage before the age

of eighteen (18) is a total violation of a number of international human rights charters and conventions like the 1989 Convention on The Rights of the Child (CRC), 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEFADW), the 1989 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Women and many others. The right to free and full consent to a marriage is recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and in many subsequent human rights instruments; consent that cannot be 'free and full' is when at least one partner is very immature (UNICEF, 2007).

For both girls and boys, early marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts, cutting off educational opportunity and chances of personal growth for girls (Mim, 2017). Eboh (1996), in his attempt to holistically address the impact of betrothal and early marriage, also identified that early marriage and lifetime domestic and sexual subservience over which victims have no control were correlated. Nonetheless, for many young girls in developing countries, especially in northern Ghana, marriage is perceived as a means of securing their future and protection from sexual promiscuity (Agyemang, 2015). Girls are usually forced into marriage by their families while they are still children with the hope that the marriage will benefit them both financially and socially (Groot, Kuunyem & Palermo, 2018) ignoring the impending consequences of this move. Studies on the contrary have shown that betrothal and early marriage violate the rights of children particularly girls often leaving them with more negative consequences to bear especially in the area of schooling and education (Delprato, Akyeampong, Sabates &Hernandez-Fernandez, 2015).

In northern part of Ghana, betrothal and early marriage increased from 26.4% in 2011 to 33.6% in 2014 and decreased in the other regions from 20.9% to 18.5% and from 19.2% to 18.5% in central and southern regions respectively (Groot, Kuunyem & Palermo, 2018). Even though, these statistics show increasing disparities between the North and the rest of the country, several areas in the south are continually faced with the impact of this practice in the domain of education, school and learning hence the study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

A careful observation of learners' performance in basic schools at Sapeiman in the Ga West Municipality of Greater Accra Region of Ghana reveals that low achieving learners are largely composed of those who are matrimonially engaged. Again, a cursory look at these learners unveils that they do not actively get involved in the teaching and learning process. They tend to apportion little or no attention for academic related activities in the classroom. Absent-mindedness as a result of several unknown reasons makes it difficult for them to get along with the instructional process and other academic related activities.

Despite national laws and international agreements forbidding betrothal and early marriage, these phenomena are still widespread in many developing countries with a high prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa, most especially in Ghana, particularly in northern Ghana and some parts of the south. This situation is not far different from the Sapeiman community in the Ga West Municipality of Greater Accra Region of Ghana. It is against this backdrop that the study sought to investigate the effects of betrothal and early marriage on learners in basic schools at Sapeiman in the Ga West Municipality of Greater Accra Region of Ghana from the context of academic development and performance.

1.3 Research Questions
A. What are the reasons behind betrothal and early marriages among the Sapeiman community in the Ga West Municipality, Greater Accra Region, Ghana?
B. How do betrothal and early marriage affect academic development and performance of basic school learners at Sapeiman in the Ga West Municipality, Greater Accra, Ghana?

1.4 Research objectives
A. Explore the reasons behind betrothal and early marriage among the Sapeiman community in the Ga West Municipality, Greater Accra Region, Ghana.
B. Investigate the effects of betrothal and early marriage on academic development and performance of basic school learners at Sapeiman in the Ga West Municipality, Greater Accra, Ghana.

2.0 Review of related literature

2.1 The concept and nature of betrothal and early marriage in Ghana
Both betrothal and early marriage operate within the premise of unionism between two parties who by virtue of some reasons have agreed to live together as couples. According to Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi (2003), the only thin line between these two concepts is the approach in that one (early marriage) may be intentional whereas other (betrothal) may not. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2017) define betrothal as a promise to marry or to be engaged for the purpose of marriage and includes any coerced act that may lead to marriage or results in marriage. These organization view this system of marriage from the human right perspective despite the acknowledgment of one's motive or intention of marrying. Betrothal communicates the assurance or possibility of a marriage being taken place. Paul (2019) also sees betrothal as a promise that a marriage will take place. Betrothal is seen here as a sign that shows that there is an impending matrimony between two parties.

Similarly, early marriage which is unarguably synonymous to betrothal to a very large extent is a customary, religious or legal marriage of anyone below eighteen years (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003 as cited in Agyemang, 2015; Boender & CARE, 2018). Early marriage, which is also often described or tagged as child marriage by some group of writers, includes any legal or customary union involving a boy or girl below the age of eighteen (18) (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA] & United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2017). The practice of betrothal and early marriage is predominant across the globe particularly in Sub-Saharan African and South Asia (Delprato, Akyeampong, Sabates & Hernandez-Fernandez, 2015; Innocenti Digest, 2001). World Fertility Survey Data examined comprehensively trends of early marriage in sub-Saharan regions and concluded that over 40% of young women have entered into marriage or a quasi-married union by the time they reach the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2000). By contrast, in only two countries are more than 10% of boys under 19 married. Betrothal and early marriage is generally more prevalent in some West African countries like Ghana affecting 40% and 49% respectively of girls under 19 compared to 27% in some countries in East Africa and 20% in North and Southern Africa (UNFPA, 2000). Many of these young brides in these sub-Saharan regions are second or third wives in polygamous households (Innocenti Digest, 2001).

Betrothal and early marriage was and has still been presumed to be predominant among less privileged communities and families with challenging socioeconomic backgrounds (Malhotra, 2010) in many Ghanaian societies; nonetheless, other classes of people have also joined the queue. For instance, there are reports claiming that some section of families with high socioeconomic

backgrounds betroth their children whiles others entreat their children to marry early for fear of losing their inheritances, family heirlooms, wealth, dignity, prestige, statuses, among others (International Center for Research on Women [ICRW], 2007).

2.2 Factors promoting betrothal and early marriage in Ghanaian societies
Malhotra (2010) outlines four main causes of betrothal and early marriage; poverty, lack of education and job opportunities, insecurity in the face of war and conflict and the force of custom and tradition.

Poverty: For many poor families, marrying their daughter at an early age essentially is a strategy for economic survival; it means one less person to feed, clothe and educate. UNFPA and UNICEF (2017) report that in African countries including Ghana, the importance of financial transactions at the time of marriage also tends to push families to marry their daughters early. In many cultures in Ghana, parents feel that their burden of paying a dowry at their daughter's marriage will be lower if she is married at a young age.

Limited education and economic options: Little or no schooling strongly correlates with being betrothed or married at a young age. Conversely, attending school and having higher levels of education protect girls from the possibility of early marriage. In many countries where Ghana is no exception, educating girls often is less of a priority than educating boys especially among some section of people. When a woman's most important role is considered to be that of a wife, mother and homemaker, schooling girls and preparing them for the jobs may be given short shrift (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2017).

Insecurity in the face of conflict: When families live in unsafe regions, parents may genuinely believe that marrying their daughters is the best way to protect them from danger. In war-affected and conflict-prone areas in the northern part of Ghana, for example, a girl may be married to a warlord or another authority figure who can ensure that she and her family remain safe.

Tradition and Religion: At its core, betrothal and early marriage are rooted in tradition. An ICRW (2007) study found that no one religious affiliation was associated with the practice. Rather, a variety of religions were associated with a high prevalence of forced child marriage, in a diversity of countries throughout the world. However, customs and traditions do change. In fact, betrothal and early marriage have nearly disappeared in several countries where it used to be an entrenched cultural practice only a generation or two ago.

Effects of betrothal and early marriage (Educational implications)
Education: The consequences of child marriage are devastating and often determine a life's trajectory Malhotra (2010). In the view of Agyemang (2015) and Malhotra (2010), girls who marry young are at a higher risk of dropping out from school. Research shows that young married girls are least likely to benefit from educational and economic policies and programs (Malhotra, 2010). This is to say that when victims of betrothal and early marriage do not benefit directly from educational programmes and policies as a result of this practice, it therefore becomes very difficult to assess their academic performance in the educational setting.

Deprivation of childhood and a future: More than anything else, betrothal and early marriage deprive boys and girls alike of their childhood. They are thrust into the full burden of domestic responsibility, motherhood and sexual relations rather than playing with friends, dreaming about a career or fretting about a school exam. Research shows that young married girls often are isolated and powerless; they are unable to negotiate or obtain support for issues in their own interest (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2017). Complete education can only take place only when the child is ready; however, these factors steal away the readiness and stability of the child to fully go through the process of education thereby hindering their ability to perform well academically in the school setting.

Greater exposure to domestic and sexual violence: Girls who are married early are more likely to be abused sexually, physically and emotionally. An ICRW study in India shows that girls who married before age 18 reported experiencing physical violence twice as often, and sexual violence three times as often as girls who married at a later age (ICRW, 2006). Research have shown that girls who are constantly abused in every way do not perform well in school and are likely to voluntarily drop out from school eventually (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003).

Increased maternal and infant health risks: Girls who marry and give birth before their bodies are fully developed are more at risk of death or terrible injury and illness in childbirth (Malhotra, (2010). The educational implication of these factors are crucial in that the process of education has been designed to carry every child along. Nevertheless, factors like one's ability to physically continue is also key. Often children with series of serious health issues get frustrated in the school setting because of their inability to show up in school as often as they want it to be (Family Health, 2012). This sometimes results in school dropout and poor performance on the part of those who struggle to continue.

Greater exposure to HIV/AIDS: Child brides also are at greater risk of contracting HIV than their counterparts who marry later. A study conducted in Kenya and Zambia in 2004 revealed that married girls aged 15-19 were 75 percent more likely to contract HIV than sexually active, unmarried girls of the same age (UNICEF, 2006 as cited in Malhotra, 2010). The educational implication of this phenomena is found in the area of stigmatization. Severe stigmatization could falter one's academic life in the school setting and consequently prematurely ending their educational dreams totally.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopted a multiple case study design to investigate the effects of betrothal and early marriage on basic school learners' academic development and performance. Basically, multiple case study design tends to investigate more than a single phenomenon at the same time (Creswell, 2011). The concurrent mixed method research approach defined the direction of the study. This involved using a survey method with a relatively large sample so that the researchers can generalize results to the population simultaneously with a qualitative interview for exploratory purposes. Convenient sampling was used to choose the participating district; however, simple random sampling procedure was involved in the selection of the three (3) participating schools. Meanwhile, judgemental sampling was used to select forty-five (45) participants from a pool of two hundred and fifty (250) potential participants. This consisted of thirty-five (35) learners, six (6) parents and four (4) teachers respectively.

An unstructured interview guide and a structured questionnaire were the primary instruments used for the data collection. The questionnaire was administered to learners and teachers only. The researchers, with the help of research assistants, read out the question items to the participants and explained them accordingly. Participants were to indicate their responses using a five-point Likert Scale (strongly agree, agree, indifferent, disagree, strongly disagreement). Similarly, the interview guide was used for parents and some selected teachers. Interview responses were recorded in all formats (audio, video format and audio-visual). Detailed notes were taken in the course of the interview session. Repeated playbacks of recorded responses were done afterwards for voice clarity and transcription purposes. Codes were generated and assigned to data gathered from the interview. Quantitative data were descriptively analysed using simple percentages; however, qualitative data like interview responses were subjected to thematic analyses. In ensuring trustworthiness of the instruments, experts, supervisors, teachers, colleagues and students (participants) were consulted for suggestions, before they were carried out as proposed by Anderson and Morgan (2008).

4.0 Results

Findings from the study were presented in accordance with the data type. Tables were used to discuss quantitative results from survey whereas qualitative results from in-depth interviews were also interpreted thematically. The table below shows participants' demographics:

4.1 Demographic information of participants

Table 1. Sex Distribution

Category	Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Students	Female	30	66.7
	Male	5	11.1
Parents	Female	4	4.4
	Male	2	8.9
Teachers	Female	1	2.2
	Male	3	6.7
Total		**45**	**100**

Source; Field Survey, (2019) **N=45 (n=35 [students]; n=6 [parents]; n=4 [teachers])**

Table 1 presents the sex distribution of participants. From the table, forty-five (45) respondents representing 100% were sampled for the study. This comprised thirty-five (35) students composed of thirty (30) females and five (5) males representing 66.6% and 11.1% respectively. Six (6) parents comprising two (2) males and four (4) females who formed 4.4% and 8.8% respectively were also chosen whereas four (4) teachers constituting three (3) females and a (1) male making 2.2% and 6.7% were as well selected for the study. The study considered more females than males because of their (females') exposure in issues surrounding the phenomena under study.

Table 2. Age Distribution of respondents (students only)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
9 – 12	8	22.9
13 – 16	15	42.9
17 – 19	12	34.2
Total	**35**	**100**

Source: Field Survey (2019) **n=35**

Table 2 shows the age distribution of participants (students) sampled for the study. Out of the total thirty-five (35) respondents sampled, eight (8) respondents forming 22.9% fell between the ages range of nine and twelve (9 – 12); fifteen (15) respondents representing 42.9% were found within the ages of thirteen and sixteen (13 – 16) whiles twelve (12) respondents making 34.2%. The distribution suggests that majority of the respondents fell around the ages of thirteen and sixteen (13 – 16). The age distribution of respondents became necessary because the concept of betrothal and early marriages are age bound.

Table 3: Education level of respondents (learners only)

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	10	28.6
J.H.S.	15	33.3
S.H.S.	10	28.6
Total	**35**	**100**

Source: Field Survey (2019) **n=35**

Table 3 shows the education level distribution of participants (students) selected for the study. Out of the total thirty-five (35) respondents sampled, ten (10) respondents forming 28.6% were chosen from Primary (lower and upper) schools whereas fifteen (15) respondents representing 33.3% were also selected from J.H.S., and another ten (10) respondents forming 28.6% were found to be in S.H.S. The distribution implies that majority of the respondents selected were in J.H.S. The education level distribution of respondents became crucial because there was a need to investigate the stage of education where betrothal and early marriages tend to be common.

Table 4: Betrothal/marital status

Category	Respondents	Responses			Frequency	Percentage (%)
		Yes	No	Don't know		
Primary	Female	0	7	2	9	25.7
	Male	0	1	0	1	2.9
J.H.S.	Female	3	8	2	13	37.1
	Male	0	2	0	2	5.7
S.H.S	Female	2	6	0	8	22.9
	Male	0	2	0	2	5.7
Total		**5**	**26**	**4**	**n = 35**	**100**

Source: Field Survey (2019) **N=35 (n=5[betrothed/married]; n=24 [not betrothed/married]; n=4[status unsure])**

Table 4 shows betrothal/marital statuses of participants (students). Out of the total thirty-five (35) respondents sampled, it was recorded that all ten (10) respondents at the primary school level forming 28.6% were not betrothed/married. At the J.H.S. level, fifteen (15) respondents making 42.8% were sampled. It was found out that three (3) female respondents were betrothed/married or somehow engaged whiles eight (8) were not. Meanwhile, two (2) respondents representing 5.7% claimed they have no idea about their status However, ten (10) respondents representing 28.6% sampled at the SHS level, two (2) females forming 5.7% were betrothed/married whereas six (6) were not. Meanwhile two (2) females were unsure about their status of engagement. The distribution connotes that the number of respondents betrothed/married or engaged is high at the J.H.S. level even though other levels (S.H.S.) have similar records. It also implies that betrothal and early marriages are prevailing among young female adolescents whose ages are relatively above 13 and below 19.

The table below shows participants' responses in relation to research question one (1), "What are the reasons behind betrothal and early marriages among the Sapeiman community in the Ga Municipality?"

Table 5. Reasons/causes of betrothal/early marriages (Learners' views)

Reason (Cause)	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poverty	S.A	19	54.2
	A	12	34.2
	I	3	8.6
	D	1	2.9
	S.D	0	0
Lack of Education	S.A	17	48.6
	A	10	28.6
	I	5	14.2
	D	2	5.8
	S.D	0	0
Culture	S.A	14	40
	A	11	31.4
	I	7	20
	D	2	5.8
	S.D	1	2.9
Societal Recognition	S.A	10	28.6
	A	12	34.2
	I	8	22.9
	D	3	8.6
	S.D	2	5.8
Total		n = 35	n= 100%

Source: Field Survey (2019)

Table 5 shows participants' responses to the reasons/causes of betrothal and early marriages. The rationale behind this measurement was to find out the most prevailing among the causes from the perspective of participants. From the table, participants were presented with listed possible reasons/causes of betrothal and early marriages; poverty/financial challenges, lack of education/ignorance, culture, societal recognition and other reasons.

The responses gathered show that nineteen (19) participants representing 54.2% strongly agreed with twelve (12) participants forming 34.2% agreeing that poverty/financial challenges contribute to the cause of betrothal/early marriages. Meanwhile, three (3) participants forming 8.6% appeared indifferent with regards to their opinion concerning the cause of the phenomena. However, only one (1) participant representing 2.9% disagreed that poverty/financial challenges result in betrothal and early marriage. Lack of education/ignorance was also measured to ascertain their potency of causing betrothal and early marriage. Out of the total thirty-five participants, seventeen (17) participants representing 48.6% strongly agreed with ten (10) participants making 28.6% agreeing that lack of education and ignorance are among the causes of betrothal and early marriages. Five (5) participants constituting 14.2 % neither agreed nor disagreed to the claim whiles two (2) participants representing 5.8% disagreed that lack of education/ignorance breeds betrothal and early marriages.

Furthermore, fourteen (14) participants representing 40% and eleven (11) participants making 31.4% strongly agreed and agreed respectively that culture is the driving force of all betrothal and early marriages. Seven (7) participants representing 20% however were indifferent about the assertion but two (2) participants representing 5.8% and one (1) participant forming 2.9% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that culture is not root cause of betrothal and early marriages. Issues surrounding social/societal recognition was also measured. With this, out of the total thirty-five (35) participants sampled, ten (10) participants representing 28.6% and twelve (12) participants forming 34.2% strongly agreed and agreed respectively that betrothal and early marriages are prevailing as a result of people's quest to gain recognition in their respective societies. Eight (8) participants representing 22.9% neither agreed nor disagreed to the claim that people enter into this system of marriage for the sake of social recognition. Nevertheless, three (3) participants representing 8.6% and two (2) participants constituting 5.8% disagreed and strongly disagreed that quest for societal recognition is the reason people enter into this system of marriage. The responses given indicate that there are factors breeding betrothal and early marriages in our societies especially in the Sapeiman community in the Ga West Municipality. The recorded responses again suggest that some of these factors are of higher degree than others are as far as these social phenomena are concerned. Poverty/financial challenges is by far the most pressing cause among all factors identified followed by lack of education/ignorance, culture and societal recognition respectively.

Table 6. Reasons/causes of betrothal/early marriages (Teachers' views)

Reason (Cause)	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poverty	S.A	3	75
	A	1	25
	I	0	0
	D	0	0
	S.D	0	0
Lack of Education	S.A	4	100
	A	0	0
	I	0	0
	D	0	0
	S.D	0	0
Culture	S.A	3	75
	A	1	25
	I	0	20
	D	0	0
	S.D	0	0
Societal Recognition	S.A	2	50
	A	2	50
	I	0	0
	D	0	0
	S.D	0	0
Total		**n = 4**	**n= 100%**

Source: Field Survey (2019)

Table 6 shows participants' responses to the reasons/causes of betrothal and early marriages. The responses captured in the table represent the views of teachers in relation to the most prevailing causes of betrothal and early marriages. From the table, participants were presented with listed possible reasons/causes of betrothal and early marriages; poverty/financial challenges, lack of education/ignorance, culture, societal recognition and other reasons. The responses gathered show that three (3) participants representing 75% and one (1) participant forming 25% strongly agreed and agreed respectively that poverty is among the causes of betrothal and early marriage in many communities. All four (4) participants representing 100% attributed the major cause of the phenomena to lack of education and ignorance on the part of some of key people. 75% of participants comprising three (3) participants and one (1) participant constituting 25% also pointed fingers at enrooted cultural systems. Furthermore, two (2) participants each representing 50% each claimed that quest for social/societal recognition account for betrothal and early marriage in many societies.

The responses given by this section of participants indicate that there are several factors accounting for the prevailing nature of betrothal and early marriage. However, responses gathered show that lack of education and ignorance tends to be the major factor of the phenomena followed by poverty, culture and societal recognition and other factors respectively. Considering the responses obtained from both sections of participants, one can therefore deduce that poverty, lack of education/ignorance, culture and quest for societal recognition are among the factors contributing to betrothal and early marriages. These responses confirm the positions of UNFPA and UNICEF (2017) and ICRW (2007) who report that tradition/religion (culture), limited education (lack of education), poverty and insecurity are among the causes of betrothal, early and child marriages.

4.2 Analysis of interview

4.2.1 Analysis of teachers' interview

In relation to research question two (2), "How do betrothal and early marriage affect academic development and performance of basic school learners at Sapeiman in the Ga West Municipality, Greater Accra, Ghana?" participants were taken through interview. The interview session was designed for parents and some selected teachers for the purpose of obtaining information to address the research question alongside the formulated objective. All responses were transcribed and thematically analyzed under five major themes: lack of interest, health problems, intermittent school drop-out, timidity and shyness and marital responsibilities.

4.2.1.1 Lack of interest

In the interview, majority of the participants claimed that academic development and performance has everything to do with learners' interest. They said learners' readiness and interests inform their attentiveness. They revealed that betrothal and early marriage do not kindle or rekindle the interest of victims to study either in school or at home. Some section of the participants revealed that victims often sleep in the middle of lesson whiles the focus of others may necessarily not be on the teaching and learning process. These participants singled out fatigue as the reason why victims of such marriages do not show interest in almost all academic activities hence poor dwindled academic development and performance. These are some of the responses:

> *TR1: I have a girl in my class who is engaged. She's always lost in almost every lesson*

> *TR4: Early marriage and schooling, I believe are parallel.*

> *TR3: I think they work too hard. That is they don't pay attention in class*

These responses indicate that learners' academic development and performance heavily relies on their interest level.   Again, the gathered responses show that betrothal and early marriage is adversely stealing away learners' interest in performing all forms of academic activities either inside or outside of the school.

4.2.1.2 Health problems

Majority of participants said health problems associated with this system of marriage affect academic development and performance of victims in so many ways. They answered that some victims miss out school days and other related productive academic instructional periods as a result frequent health review visits. To them, victims develop complications after birth whiles other are living with acute and chronic ailments which obviously inhibit their chances of progressing academically. Sample of responses gathered can be seen below:

> *TR1: The girl in my class is not always punctual. She has always been going to the hospital.*

> *TR4: I know some students who have developed complications after child birth and have to miss class and go for regular reviews.*

> *TR2: You will always meet the absence of students because they are always in the hospital.*

The findings reveal that health related issues associated with this system of marriage often make learners skip instructional hours and productive academic periods for health care service. These responses fall in line with Malhotra (2010) who maintain that victims of child marriage are exposed to health risks.

4.2.1.3 Intermittent school drop-out

Participants claimed intermittent school drop-out does not help in the academic development and performance of learners. They said victims sometimes drop out for a long period of time obviously for health reasons, pregnancy or child birth and then resumes again after a long period of stay at home. Participants revealed that issues of such nature distort the entire learning experiences of the victims because they (victims) often push for a jump so they could be at par with their colleagues. Others also disclosed that some victims sometimes absent themselves from school for an entire term whiles others a year. Below are sample of responses:

> *TR1: This girl could stay at home for about a month or two.*

> *TR4: Some of them plead with us to promote them even after their long absence from school. This affects their progress.*

> *TR2: I have come across a learner who had been away from school for a term, and that same learner, after coming back, left and return after a year time.*

These responses suggest that learners do not enjoy successful continual education as a result of betrothal and early marriage. The responses gathered show that this system of marriage often leave

learners school drop-outs. These findings align with the position of Agyemang (2015) who argues that betrothal and early marriages bring out school drop-out among young females.

4.2.1.4 Shyness and timidity

Majority of participants revealed that academic development and performance jointly takes shape with cooperativeness. They disclosed that there should be teacher-learner and learner-learner relationship if only we wish to develop learners academically. A section of participants asserted that victims do not often open up in the classroom. They feel shy to mingle with other learners to undertake activities in the classroom. Other participants also revealed that some even feel shy to answer or ask questions in the classroom whereas others are extremely timid to approach their teachers for any academic assistance. To them, they believe betrothal and early marriages have resulted in this which eventually has manifested in the classroom. Below are sample responses gathered:

> *TR3: They feel shy to answer or ask questions in class even when they don't understand what you are teaching, they will still be mute.*

> *TR1: This girl won't come to you for help. She also won't mingle with other learners to do any class activity.*

> *TR4: Early marriage and betrothal also affected our relationship with our learners in that, such girls have become timid in front of their teachers and colleagues alike.*

The responses suggest conform to the claims that young married girls often are isolated and powerless; they are unable to negotiate or obtain support for issues in their own interest (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2017).

4.2.1.5 Marital responsibilities

Participants answered that the responsibilities and other related duties as a spouse tends to be too much of a task for victims of such marriages. They revealed that some come to school very tired and as result lose focus of every activities in the classroom. Other section of participants claimed some go to extent of sleeping on academic related tasks/activities in the classroom. Participants again disclosed that spouses/partners of victims sometimes come to the school to invite them (victims) home to attend to a number of marital duties like breastfeeding, cooking, ironing, among others. In the view of these participants, these so-called marital duties eventually take away victims' interest in studies hence poor academic development and achievement. Below are sample responses:

> *TR4: Their husbands sometimes come here or send for them home. I know some go home to breastfeed their babies, cook, iron and for other reasons.*

> *TR2: They are always sleeping in class and always looking tired as though they have been working overnight.*

> *TR1: This girl will always sleep in every group she's assigned to do work with.*

The responses gathered confirm that young married girls are thrust into the full burden of domestic responsibility, motherhood and sexual relations rather than playing with friends, dreaming about a career or fretting about a school exam (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2017).

5.0 Discussion and conclusion

It was realized from the respondents' demographics that quite a number of learners in the community were somehow engaged. These learners were found to be in J.H.S. and S.H.S. whose ages were also found from thirteen and sixteen (13-16) age brackets. In relation to this, the study revealed that females were usually the ones who were betrothed or married or somehow engaged whereas their male counterparts were in no way engaged through any matrimonial means.

The study again showed the reason behind or the cause of betrothal and early marriage in the Sapeiman community in Ga West Municipality of Greater Accra Region of Ghana. It was realized that poverty/financial challenges, lack of education/ignorance, culture, societal recognition and other unforeseen factors lure people into these marriages. It was seen also that some of these factors vary in terms of degree; however, lack of education/ignorance and poverty/financial challenges followed by culture, unforeseen factors and societal recognition respectively were identified in terms of severity. It was realised from the study that there are potential effects of betrothal and early marriage on academic development and performance of basic school learners at Sapeiman in the Ga West Municipality. It was seen that these systems of marriage possess a number of unfriendly components as far as academic development and performance of learners in basic schools are concerned. It was realized that lack of interest in studies, health related problems, intermittent school-drop out, shyness and timidity and marital responsibilities are the factors battling academic development and performance of learners who happen to be victims of betrothal and early marriage at Sapeiman in the Ga West Municipality of Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

From the study, it has been concluded that poverty/financial challenges, lack of education/ignorance, culture, societal recognition and other unforeseen factors are the reasons behind betrothal and early marriage at Sapeiman in the Ga West Municipality. The study concludes that lack of education and poverty/financial challenges are by far the major pressing factors pushing people into such marriages. Lastly, it has been concluded that lack of interest, health related problems and intermittent school drop-out, shyness and timidity and marital responsibilities are the challenging factors facing academic development and performance of basic school learners at Sapeiman in the Ga West Municipality of Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

6.0 Suggestions and recommendations

Academic development has always been the focus of every educational system. Girl-child education recently has become a bone of contention as far as 21st century education is concerned. However, factors such as betrothal, early, child and forced marriage are not making this projection a reality. In light of this, this piece of work puts forward few suggestions and recommendations. First, there should be frequent education to sensitize the population about the prospects of girl-child education. The need to educate the girl-child should be a promising message well-packaged for everyone. People should also be educated to see qualities of the girl beyond what the society perceives. For example, media houses like radio and television stations can come in to propagate this gospel of 'girl-child education'. Again, there should be rules, regulations and related laws to control such system of marriage. The establishment or presence of such legislature will go a long way to control how such practices are being handled in some major societies.

The school also has a huge role to play as far as academic development and performance is concerned of learners are concerned. The school has to ensure that there is an established communication pattern among parents, teachers, the community and herself. For example, schools should have frequent meetings with parents and the community regarding the progress of learners in

the school. Stakeholders like NGOs, Ministry of Health, Ghana Health Service, Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service as well as should help create awareness among personalities across the borders of the country about the dangers of early marriage.

7.0 Future Research

Surprisingly, since it appears betrothal and early marriage are simply inevitable in many parts of the country and still overreaching, its impact are still going to be felt in every aspect of children's lives. Most especially, learners in our basic schools are likely to feel such impact the more as far as their academic performance is concerned. It is against this that the researchers entreat scholars, fellow researchers and stakeholders to also pick up the mantle and research into related areas such as home environment and academic performance of basic school learners in Ghana. This will help learners in our basic schools to identify relationships responsible for their academic development, performance and achievement

Again, the researcher did not control for such variables as sex and professions of respondents. Further research could be also be carried out in these areas. Notwithstanding, future research could also be conducted using more learners, teachers, parents and more schools since this research was carried out on forty-five (45) learners from selected public basic schools only. Future research should also consider a comparative study on betrothal and early marriage levels at urban and rural basic schools (private and public) in Ghana. Furthermore, in this study, views of few parents and teachers were captured. Future research should therefore include a larger number of parents, teachers and non-teaching staff who may have in-depth knowledge in betrothal and early marriage issues vis-à-vis academic development, achievement and performance of learners in basic schools.

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