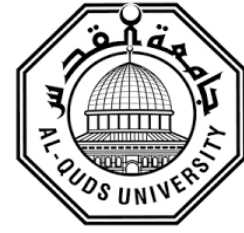


Deanship of Graduate Studies
Al-Quds University



**Child Marriage in the Gaza Strip:
Triggers and Consequences**

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Child Marriage in the Gaza Strip: Triggers and Consequences

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Dedication

To my beloved father, who is the soul of my life, and supported me in each steps in my life.

To the biggest, heart my mother, who works hard for our future and our achievement

To all of my sisters and to my brother Mohammed.

To all those who encouraged, supported and helped me all the way

I dedicate this research for all of them

Samah Taysier Elamassie

Declaration

I certify that this thesis submitted for the degree of master is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis or any of its parts has not been submitted for higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed:

Samah Elamassie

Date:...../...../.....

Acknowledgment

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Sincere thanks to data collectors, who worked hard enough to reach to this result.

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Appreciate thanks, to all of my family, father, mother, sisters and friends.

With respect;

Samah Elamassie

Abstract

Universally, child marriage remains a prominent public health concern with many consequences on married girls and their families particularly their siblings. This study explores the consequences and triggers of child marriage in the Gaza Strip.

The design of this study is methodologically triangulated one. The quantitative component was carried out, through face-to-face household surveyed questionnaire for 406 participants who were married before reaching the age of 18 and currently they are less than 25 years old were selected through random a multistage sampling approach. A mix of self-constructed and standardized tools were used and the response rate was high (99.5%). Quantitative data were analysed using the SPSS software and the qualitative data were analysed using open coded thematic technique.

Findings showed that the median parents (of the early married) family size was 9, their parents have poor education level, 73.6% were receiving social assistance. Regarding education, of the respondents, 74.8% were out of school at marriage time, from them, 44.8% left school after being engaged and only 11.7% of them continued education. After marriage, the socioeconomic conditions did not improve as 64.3% reported that their husbands were not working and 77.6% of them reported receiving social assistance. Nearly half of respondents (45.6%) had been exposed to at least one type of violence, and 18.7% of the respondents were depressed.

The study concluded that the most commonly reported drivers for child marriage were family norms (82.5%), community norms (73.9%), religious beliefs (53%) and consanguinity (52.5%). Less frequently reported triggers include; poor economic conditions (36.2%), having many sisters in the family (34.7%), low school achievement (25.1%) and previous exposure to violence (14.3%).

The mostly frequently reported consequences of child marriage were leaving school (67.5%), increased stress and anxiety level (66.5%), losing privacy (58.6%), and forgone opportunities to work (54.9%). Less frequently reported factors include an increase in family conflict (36.9%), deterioration of health status (12.6%), having divorce thoughts (10.8%) and inability to take care of their children (9.6%).

Only 15.5% of participants never got pregnant, and 39.9% from those who got pregnant complained form pregnancy complications. Additionally, 27.9% of participants reported that their children had chronic diseases and or recurrent hospital admissions, from them; 14.4% had congenital anomalies, 22.2% had low calcium level and 42.2% had gastroenteritis that led to hospital admission.

With regard to the wellbeing assessment, nearly half (54.7%) had an average wellbeing status and (5.9%) had low wellbeing status. Moreover, about one third (32.8%) of participants had notable dissatisfaction on the couple satisfaction index. Regarding agency, most of the participants were not allowed to go outside their households alone, mostly they need permission from their husbands.

The study concludes that child marriage is driven mainly by cultural and family norms and results in catastrophic consequences on education, agency, physical, and psychosocial wellbeing. More multi-sectorial efforts are needed to change community social norms about early marriage and to lobbying for changing the legal age of marriage, in addition to specifically and proactively target and support married girls.

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List of Abbreviations

ACERWC	African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
ACPF	African Child Policy Forum
CSI	Couple Satisfaction index
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GAGE	Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic products
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICRW	The International Center for Research on Women
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
IUD	Intra Uterine Device
IWHC	International Women's Health Coalition
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MOH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
UHWC	Union of Health Work Committees
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
WEMWBS	Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale
WHO	World Health Organization

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Being early-married means one of the couples is younger than 18 years old so before physically, physiologically and psychologically being mature (United Nations Population Fund -UNFPA, 2014b). This means violation of free and full consent. UNFPA defined marriage by *“Choosing when and who to marry, is one of life’s most important decisions. No one else, however, has the right to make that decision on behalf of someone. Decision to marry should be freely made, informed decision that is taken without fear, coercion, or undue pressure. It is an adult decision, and a decision that should be made, when ready, as an adult”* (UNFPA, 2014, p. 1a).

In the same way, being married in a healthy status, in proper age, is a worthwhile goal. Adding to that, marriage is about life long relationship it is about commitment, communication and be a good manager to any conflict.

In contrary, it will be a life killer if it happens before 18 years old, not only because of the health consequences, but also because the interference in the normal life trajectories (World Health Organization-WHO, 2013). Early marriage among girls may reach to 40-50% in many countries as in India; and in Niger, it is as high as 75% (Lemmon & ElHarake, 2014). While early marriage prevalence in Palestine is significantly less, as detailed later.

Because of the negative consequences of early marriage, many organizations are working hard to face this problem such as the African Commission on Human and People Right’s, which put a rule that prohibited marriage prior 18 years old. The Convention on the Rights of the child, which is an international charter that defines the civil, political, economic, and cultural rights of children, it forbids child marriage before their 18 years birthday. This is according to the African Commission on Human and Peoples Right's (ACHPR) and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC).

The result of this hard work was so weak and the prevalence of early marriage is still high especially at developing countries. WHO reports that in 2014 the top 10 countries with high percentage of early marriage as the following Niger75%, Chad and Central African