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Bride Wealth and Delay in Marriage among Youths in the Niger Delta

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Abstract:

Among the Niger Delta People, a young man is duly respected if he is honorably married with all the traditional rites performed. A man is not given his rightful place among his peers if not properly married. However, the consummation of traditional marriage rite has been a problem among youths who are of marriageable age due to the high demands by bride's parents and communal family requirements thereby resulting to delay in the consummation of marriages. The research made use of survey research design and also took cognizance of the functionalist theory to x-ray marriages in the Niger Delta, it was discovered that the high cost of bride wealth constitutes a delay in marriage among the young men in the region thereby increasing the rate of the co-habitation of men and women to make babies and pay some token just to be recognized by the bride's parents. This paper therefore recommends a rethink on the demands on traditional marriage in order to reduce co-habitation and raising children which by the tradition of most Niger Delta communities belongs to the bride's family as they do not have full traditional rites in their communities' due to incomplete payment of bride's wealth by their father. Consequent upon our findings recommendations were made.

Keywords: *Bride wealth and marriage*

1. Introduction

Marriage, the union of two persons as husband and wife is an integral part of African cultural value as well as in the Niger Delta, interest in this union shows that a man has attained maturity and can be called a responsible person. The readiness of young a man to get married expresses the person's commitment to respect and follow the cultural norms/values of the society in which the person belongs to; it also shows the person's believe about family life of not just companionship but also the need to have children for the purpose of continuity. This is because according to African believe system children brings fulfillment to the family both in life on earth and the afterlife. Thus, most young people want to get married early in order to settle down and have children, train them before they grow old. But this has been hampered due to the continual rise of bride wealth which must be met before marriage is consummated and recognized.

Bride wealth plays a very important role in ensuring that a person is properly married. Nevertheless, Bride wealth besides other factors has indeed caused delays in what constitutes a proper marriage among the Niger Delta youths as some young people who are not employed in well paid jobs and cannot afford to pay the bride wealth go ahead to cohabite (in my own language; engage in credit marriage or marry to pay on installment), that is, live together and make children with the intention to pay later not minding the implication that the children produced in the union are not given their right within the Niger Delta Society since they are born out of wedlock.

The implication of the bride wealth notwithstanding is that the bride wealth is still on the increase due to the belief by some parents that the dowry which the daughter will take to the husband's house need to be well-packaged, this belief has continued to cause more problems in the delay in marriage because the Niger Delta region is believed to be an oil rich region with a high presence of several oil companies and multi-nationals which in turn has continually affected the cost of living within the region. Thus, suffice to say that the high cost of living within the region has made some parents to continue to increase the cost of bride wealth in order to distribute certain items to family members since the region run a communal and extended family system. Parents consider the continuous economic hike within the region to influence the bride wealth of their daughters in order to foot the bills of the dowry (properties to escort their daughter to husband's house) thereby increasing the burden on the young man that want to get married. The essence of this research therefore, is to bring to bear the effect of high cost of bride wealth on the marriage of young men in the Niger Delta which constitute the South-south region of Nigeria.

The purpose of this study is to investigate bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage among the youths in the Niger Delta region of southern Nigeria. The study hopes to achieve the following objectives:

- i. Examine the significance of Bride Wealth in marriage,
- ii. Analyze if the cost of bride wealth constitute delay in marriage in the study area,
- iii. Investigate the consequences of non-payment of bride wealth in marriage in the Niger Delta and
- iv. Determine the influence of parents on the bride wealth on their children in the Niger Delta region

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- i. What is the significance of bride wealth in marriage in the Niger Delta?
- ii. Can the cost of bride wealth constitute a delay in marriage in the Niger Delta?
- iii. What are the consequences of non-payment of bride wealth in marriage in the Niger Delta?
- iv. To what extent can the parents influence the bride wealth of their children?

In pursuance of the objectives of the study, three hypotheses are formulated and testable at 0,05 level of significance which guided the study.

- i. There is no significance difference in the perception of the responses of male and female respondents on bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage in the Niger Delta.
- ii. There is no significant difference in the perception of the responses of married and unmarried respondents on bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage in Niger Delta.
- iii. There is no significant variation in the distribution of the four responses of respondents on bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage in the Niger Delta.

2. Bride Wealth

Bride Wealth is an essential element of marriage. However, it varies from family to family, it must be paid because it is an integral part of the cultural norm of the people, hence if it is not paid the marriage will not be recognized in the society as it will be seen as co-habiting. It is an obligatory gift to the parents of the girl to show respect and appreciation to them for their ability to bring up their daughter to a marriageable age. The price depends on the family of the bride as her family determines what should be paid by the groom. (Mbiti 1975)

Although bride wealth can be paid on installment for men who are not buoyant enough but are willing to get married, such marriages are not given their due respect. The bride wealth is a very important aspect of marriage as it ties the bride's family to that of his supposed husband and makes the groom a member of the bride's family. Thus, when there are financial needs, he is called to contribute to the family each time the need arises. He is also expected to continue to see to the welfare of his in-laws as the occasion demands; this implies that bride wealth shows willingness on the part of the man to be a part of his bride's family. More so, the bride being a productive member of her family will be leaving her home thus some compensation need to be paid, as a consequence, the bride's quality and educational level is considered in negotiating the bride wealth. (Waruta 2005)

Bride wealth is not limited to cash alone, it includes other items like salts, animals, drinks, food stuffs, etc which will be shared among the family members because the child is believed to belong to every member of the family. Having done this, the young couple is given the right to live together because the provision of the bride wealth is a seal to the legitimacy of their union and confirms their status as husband and wife which also provides legitimacy for their children and creates a bond between the family of the bride and groom.

3. Theoretical Framework

Two sociological theories will be used in show casing the important role of marriage in the society; they are the Functionalist and the Role theory.

The functionalist theory will be used in this research as it explains the contribution of each institution of the society in meeting the needs of the society. The functionalist maintains that an institution continues to exist because it makes contributions to the proper functioning and stability of the society. This implies that if an institution does not have a role it plays in the functioning of the society it will naturally die. Therefore, marriage having a vital role in building new families should be encouraged because it is an institution that plays a very vital role in the growth and stability of the society.

The second theory that is appropriate for this study is role theory; this is because it explains the interaction between an institution and the society. The role is influenced by the expectation in a particular position. (Thompson 2001) the role is determined by the social position association with social position. Thus, when people attain certain position the expectation that is due for the position influenced the person behavior, this could also be attributed the young men who is of the age of getting married the societal expectation is that such a person should be buoyant enough to meet the responsibility of footing the bills which will consummate his marriage rite. It is this expectation that leads man to go borrowing to meet the expectation of the society. (Barker 1999)

The two theories stated above explain the place and importance of marriage in the society, thus, it is appropriate in analyzing the concept of marriage.

4. The Study Area

The Niger Delta is located approximately on latitudes 4⁰ 3' and 4⁰ 50' N and longitudes 7⁰ 5' and 7⁰ 35' E and covers an area of 70,000 square kilometers (NDDC, 2003 and Oku, 2014). The name of Niger Delta is derived from River Niger which is the largest drainage basin in the West African sub-region. River Niger covers parts of Rivers State, Bayelsa State and Delta State. The major ecological zones of the region include low land area, fresh water swamp, salt water swamp and sand barrier Island (Ashton-Jones, 1998).

The Niger Delta comprises the South-South Geo-political zone of Nigeria which covers six states namely; Rivers, Bayelsa Delta, Edo, Cross Rivers and Akwa-Ibom. The major ethnic groups in the region include Ijaw, Itsekiri, Kalabari, ibani, Efik, Ogoni Urhobo, Isoko, Ibibio, Bini, Ishan, Anang, Ikwerre and Ogba. www.nddc.gov.ng/NGRMP%20CHAPTER201.pdf assessed 15th Sept. 2016.

The Niger Delta region is believed to be rich hub of Nigeria where oil companies and several multinationals are domiciled (...). This perception has affected the economy of the locality so much that it is difficult to make ends meet especially for those who are not

engaged with the oil companies as the cost of living is very high within the region. This is not just limited to living expenses it has affected the cost of bride wealth as parents virtually input the cost of the gifts they will get for their daughter into the bride wealth thereby making it very expensive for prospective suitor.

5. Material and Method

This study made use of survey research design, according to Nworgu (2006) a survey research design is one in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group. The population consisted of adult males and females as well as married and unmarried people in the three states of Niger Delta: Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom and Delta. The sample of the study was two hundred respondents from the above states using proportionate stratified random sampling technique.

A research instrument named "NIGER DELTA MARRIAGE BRIDE WEALTH ASSESMENT SCALE (NDGBWAS) designed by the researcher was used to generate data for the study using four Likert scale rating system of strongly agreed, agreed, disagree and strongly disagreed, weighted 4 points, 3 points, 2 points and 1 point respectively. Based on the weighting, the total score for each respondent was obtained by the summation of scores for all the items on the instruments. The instrument contains sixteen (16) questionnaire items divided into four parts with each part containing four questions based on the study research questions.

The data were subjected to descriptive statistic analysis, student 't' test and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The mean and standard deviation were used to answer the four research questions while 't'-test and ANOVA were used to answer these three hypotheses.

In the application of the Likert's 4-points rating scale in this study, its mean and median is 2.50. Thus, for the purposes of this study an average mean score of 2.50 is an indication of positive response and is accepted as the right explanation on the questionnaire item. Any mean score below 2.50 is rejected. By the nature of this study, thus calculating the mean scores and deciding whether they reached the mean cut off of 2.50 or not is all that is needed to answer the research questions. The results of the study are displayed in table format.

6. Data Analysis and Results

The research was presented in line with the four research questions and three hypotheses below.

- Research Question 1

What is the significance of bride wealth in marriage In the Niger Delta?

The results of the analysis are presented in table 1

s/n	Variable Responses	Mean	Variance	SD	CV	Rank	Remarks
1	Bride wealth shows willingness in marriage	3.35	0.728	0.853	25.5%	1st	Accepted
2	Bride wealth shows responsibility in marriage	1.50	0.650	0.806	53.7%	4th	Rejected
3	Bride wealth gives the man the title of ownership	3.15	1.028	1.014	32.2%	2nd	Accepted
4	Bride wealth gives the woman a pride of place in her husband	3.00	1.150	1.072	35.7%	3rd	Accepted

Table 1: Significance of Bride wealth in Marriage in the Niger Delta

Source: Author Fieldwork (2017)

From the above table, questionnaire items 1,3 and 4 have means (3.35, 3. 15 and 3.00) above the criterion mean scores of 2.50 and hence accepted as forms of significance of bride wealth in marriage n the Niger delta region of Nigeria. Only questionnaire item two (2) with a mean value of 1.50 is rejected as a form of significance of bride wealth in the Niger Delta.

The result of this study shows that bride wealth shows willingness in marriage on the part of the man; it also gives the man title of ownership of the woman and it gives the woman a pride of place in her husband's family as a fully-fledged wife. Thus, out of the four questionnaires, three of them are accepted and one rejected. Base on these findings, we conclude that bride wealth plays a significant role in marriage in the Niger delta region of southern Nigeria.

- Research question 2:

Can the cost of bride wealth constitute a delay in marriage in the Niger delta?

The result of the analysis is presented in table 2.

s/n	Response variables	Means	Variance	SD	CV	Rank	Remark
5	The cost of bride wealth plays major role in the timing of marriage	3.25	0.888	0.92	28.99%	2 nd	Accepted
6	The cost of bride wealth is a major reason for delay in marriage in Niger delta	3.20	0.910	0.954	29.81%	3 rd	Accepted
7	The cost of bride wealth is the main reason for co-habitation in the Niger delta	3.34	0.644	0.806	23.40%	1 st	Accepted
8	The high cost of bride wealth shows the worth and value of the bride	1.75	0.688	0.829	47.38%	4 th	Accepted

Table 2: Cost of Bride Wealth as a Constituent of Delay in Marriage in the Niger Delta

Source: researcher's fieldwork (2017)

The result in table 2 above answered research question two as contained in questionnaire items 5,6,7 and 8. The result analysis reveals that out of the four costs of bride wealth as the cause of the delay in marriage in the Niger delta region.

Three have been accepted (5,6 and 7) while one (8) was rejected. The accepted mean scores are 3.25, 3.20, and 3.43 while the rejected mean is 1.75.

Therefore, this result shows that the cost of bride wealth plays a major role in the delay in marriage in the Niger Delta; the cost of bride wealth is responsible for cohabitation among marriageable people in the Niger Delta region and the cost of bride wealth is a major reason for delay in marriage in the Niger Delta region. On the other hand, only questionnaire 8 with a mean value of 1.75 is rejected.

- Research Question 3:

What are the consequences of non-payment of bride wealth in the Niger Delta?

The results of research question 3 is presented in table 3

S/N	Response variables	Mean	Variance	SD	CV	Rank	Remarks
9	The man cannot claim full ownership of the children resulting from the marriage	3.25	0.687	0.829	25.51%	2nd	Accepted
10	The woman will not be given full right in her husband home	1.50	1.15	1.072	93.25%	4th	Accepted
11	In the event of death the man cannot bury the woman and the woman cannot benefit from the man wealth	2.093	1.9166	1.295	61.87%	3 rd	Accepted
12	The marriage cannot be said to be consummated	3.35	0.546	0.740	22.12%	1st	Accepted

Table 3

Source: Author fieldwork (2017)

With respect to the consequences of non-payment of bride wealth in Niger Delta region, table 3 shows that questionnaire item 9, 11, and 12 with the following mean values 3.25, 2.93 and 3.35 respectively have been accepted while questionnaire item 10 with a mean value of 1.50 was rejected. Therefore, in the Niger Delta it is observed that a man who fails to pay the bride wealth cannot lay claim of the ownership of the children resulting from the marriage; In the event of death the woman will not benefit anything from his wealth and custody the marriage cannot be said to be consummated.

From the above analysis, it reveals that bride wealth is an important factor to be considered when contracting marriage in the Niger Delta. These results are in tandem with the two previous research questions answered. Therefore, bride wealth must be given a special place in marriage in the Niger Delta region.

- Research Question 4:

To what extent can parents influence the bride wealth of their children?

The result of this analysis is presented in table four below

S/N	Response variables	Mean	Variance	SD	CV	Rank	Remark
13	Parents play enormous role in determining children bride wealth	3.16	0.735	0.957	30.31%	2nd	Accepted
14	Parents can decide not to collect bride wealth	1.64	0.731	0.955	56.51%	4th	Rejected
15	Parents can discuss with kinsmen on the scope of the matter	3.20	0.760	0.871	27.24%	1st	Accepted
16	Bride wealth is fixed in most community due to customs	3.06	0.889	0.943	30.82%	3rd	Accepted

Table 4: Parental influence of children's bride wealth

Source: Author fieldwork (2017)

Table 4 result shows that parents can play a critical role in the bride wealth of their children thus out of the four variables were itemized, three were accepted and one was rejected. It can be seen from the result that questionnaire items 13, 14, 15 with the mean score of 3.16, 3.20, and 3.06 were accepted. This implies that parents play a dominant role in the bride wealth of their children, parents can discuss with their kinsmen on the scope of their daughter's marriage since bride wealth is an old age custom and tradition fixed in the respective communities in the Niger Delta region according to the ethnic group in questions. From our result only questionnaire item 4 with a mean value of 1.969 was rejected

6.1. Statistical Analysis: Testing of Hypothesis

To determine if there exist statistical significant differences in the perception of the sex of the respondents on the bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage in the Niger Delta, the data were subjected to student t test analysis. The null and alternate hypotheses are slated below.

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents on bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage in the Niger Delta

Alternate Hypothesis (H_a): There is significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents on Bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage in the Niger Delta.

The result of this analysis is presented in table 5

Sex	Mean	N	Degree of freedom	Test statistic	Critical value	Alpha level	Result
Male	3.20	120	188	0.620	1.980	0.05	Not significant
Female	3.28	80					

Table 5: A summary of students test in the response perception of male and female respondents

Source: Author fieldwork (2017)

From the result of the analysis in table 5 the calculated t- value of male and female respondents is 3.20 while the critical 't' value is 3.28 since the calculated 't' value of 3.20 is less than critical 't' value of 3.28 the null hypothesis is accepted while the alternate hypothesis is rejected. The result shows that there is no significant difference in the perception of response of male and female respondents on bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage in the Niger Delta, this result is not significantly different at 95% probability level of confidence.

To determine if there exists a statistically significant difference in the perception response of married and unmarried respondents on bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage in the Niger Delta, the data were subjected to students test analysis. The null and alternative hypotheses are stated below.

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant difference in the perception response of married and unmarried respondents on bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage in the Niger Delta.

Alternate Hypothesis (H_a): There is significant difference in the perception response of married and unmarried respondents on bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage in Niger Delta

The result of the analysis is presented in table 6

Variable	Mean	SD	N	Degree of freedom	Test 't' statistic	Critical 't' value	Alpha level	Result
Married respondents	3.07	0.471	75	188	2.024	1.960	0.08	Significant
Unmarried respondents	3.24	0.814	125			1.960		

Table 6: A summary of students 't' test on the perception responses of married and unmarried respondents

Source author fieldwork (2017)

On table 6, t- calculated value of 2.024 is greater than the t- value of 1.960 hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

The results show that there is significant difference in the perception of married and unmarried respondents on bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage in the Niger Delta. The result is significant at 0.05 level.

Hypothesis 3: To find out if there exist a statistically significant variation in the distribution of response of respondents on the Likert's four-point scale rating, the data were subjected to the one-way model analysis of variance (ANOVA) using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The null and alternate hypotheses are therefore presented below.

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significance variation in the distribution responses of respondents on the Likert's four-point scale rating on bride wealth as the cause or delay in marriage in the Niger Delta

Alternate Hypothesis (H_a): There is significant variation in the distribution responses of respondents on the Likert's four-point scale rating on bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage in the Niger Delta.

The result of the analysis is presented in table 7.

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F-Ratio	F-table	Alpha level	Result	Decision
Between group	13,406,626	3	4,468.877	4.285	2.758	0.05	Significant	Accepted
Within group	55,574.12	60	926.235					
Total	68,980.75	63						

Table 7

From the result of the analysis in table7, the F-test statistic value is 4.285 and the F-critical value is 2.758, since the calculated F-value of 4.285 is greater than the F-critical value of 2.758. We reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis and conclude that there is significant variation in the distribution responses of respondents on the Likert's four-point scale rating used in the study; what this result show is that the observed mean difference is statistically significant at the 95% probability of confidence.

7. Summary

Sequel to the information gotten from the field and the sociological theories used in this research it is obvious that marriage is a cherished institution that is highly valued in the Niger Delta. Therefore, factors such as high cost of bride wealth which impedes proper marriage should be discouraged. As payment of bride wealth gives the couples express permission to live together as husband and wife. A husband who does not pay the bride price for his wife is not respected by his wife's family, so when a husband completely pays his bride wealth on his wife he commands respect (Shorter 1998). The bride price constitutes a seal to the marriage and gives legitimacy to the union (Busieka, 2004). A completion of bride wealth gives the man the right to bury the wife in the event of death.

The man is seen as a responsible person in the society. Completion of bride wealth enhances commitment to the marriage as it commands respect and love from the wives, more so, the woman will be respected in her husband's family.

Conversely, despite the delay in marriage; the payment of outrageous bride wealth can make a man go borrowing, as some parents make their children look like commodities for sale (Megasa 1997, Sakubu 2003)

8. Discussions of Findings

Our findings show that payment of bride wealth is inevitable if the marriage must take its pride of place in the Niger delta society; but the cost of marriage in contemporary times in the Niger Delta is indeed growing in an alarming rate as youths would have to work assiduously to save enough money in order to be honorably married while some would have to borrow money in order to meet up with the challenge of getting married according to their native law and custom. In order to avoid co-habiting, because co-habiting with a woman by the customs and traditions of the people does not give a sense of fulfillment. This high cost has in no small way affected the time for marriage by the youths of Niger delta as the consequences of co-habiting are daring especially in the inheritance of wealth, taking possession of the children and participating in the burial rite of the demise of any of the partners. More so, respect is also lost. Furthermore, if the woman dies when the marriage is not consummated, the man is made to pay heavily before participating in the burial rite. It is worst if the woman dies with pregnancy or during child birth.

Findings also reveals that parents have a role in deciding the scope of their daughters' marriage by discussing with the kinsmen, since bride wealth is an old tradition which varies from community to community. Consequently, it is very important for individual families to review the cost of giving out their daughters in marriage as expensive marriage does not result to happiness in marriage. Parents should seek for the happiness of their children instead of draining the finance of their prospective in-laws.

Interestingly, our findings also show that there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondent on bride wealth as the cause of delay in marriage.

9. Recommendation

Consequent upon our findings from the research, the following recommendations are made.

Marriage is a viable social institution that plays a vital role in the society, thus it should have encouraged even among our youth. Our daughters should not be placed as commodities for sale through high cost of bride wealth

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