

Summary

Early Marriages from a Psychological Point of View

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Child marriage or early marriage, is any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years, before the child is physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and child-bearing (UNFPA, 2007). In Turkish legal system, the definition of child is not clear and the concept of child marriage changes according to the law. According to the Turkish Civil Code, 17 years of age, according to the Turkish Criminal Code, 15 years of age, according to the Child Protection Law, marriages of people who are not 18 years old are considered child marriage.

Child marriage is very common in developing countries. The proportion of children who are married under the age of 18 in the world varies between 20% and 70%. In Turkey, according to the results of Turkey Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS) in 2013, 41% of women aged 25-49 are married before 20 years of age, 22% before 18 years and 4% before 15 years of age (TNSA, 2013).

Families' level of education appears to be an important factor in girl-child marriages. Families whose children get married in early ages generally have a lower level of education. Uneducated parents lead to early marriage of their children and early marriages are also a big obstacle to the education of the children. The child is taken from the school for marriage and she is expected to devote her time to the new home, husband, child, and child care (Jensen and Thornton, 2003).

The aim of present study is to address various problems caused by early marriage and to evaluate the studies about early marriage in a holistic perspective.

Physical problems caused by early marriage

One of the consequences of early marriage on girls is physical problems. Girls' bodies are not mature enough to overcome pregnancy and birth stress (TBMM, 2010). It is stated that child marriage is a risk factor for a variety of diseases such as sexually transmitted diseases, cervical cancer, malaria, unwanted and high-risk

pregnancy, mother and/or baby's death in pregnancy and birth fistula (Nour, 2006; Prakash et al., 2011; Raj and Boehmer, 2013).

Early marriage causes not only women but also their babies to have various health problems. The miscarriage risk of young mothers is higher than that of adult mothers (Santhya et al., 2010; Prakash et al., 2011). It is stated that infants of early married mothers have a lower birth weight than infants of mothers who give birth in adult years (Thato et al., 2007; Mahavarkar et al., 2008; Santhya, 2011).

Psychological problems caused by early marriage

Early marriage also leads to various psychological problems. Early married children are separated from their peers by giving responsibilities such as family, home, child care. All these responsibilities cause various psychological problems (Nour, 2009). Early marriage does not allow the child to plan her life in matters such as to whom she will marry with or when she will have children, and it also leaves girls vulnerable to issues such as early pregnancy and domestic violence (Kopelman, 2016). Warner (2004) points out that forcing the child to assume an adult role when she is not ready physically and psychologically and the absence of control about their future may be a traumatic experience for children aged 10-18. The loss of adolescence, forced sexual intercourse, the ignorance of personal development and freedom may cause many psychological problems (Mikhail, 2002). Leaving their home and having too much responsibility at an early age can reduce self-esteem and therefore cause depression by causing emotional strain and psychological stress (Kopelman, 2016; UNICEF, 2001; Warner, 2004). In our culture, girls married at an early age have a higher incidence of major depression and adjustment disorder due to responsibilities such as family, home and child, conflicts with spouse and his family, low social support and economic problems (Soylu and Ayaz, 2013). 46% of early married children were diagnosed

with a mental disorder and the most common diagnoses were major depressive disorder and adjustment disorder (Soylu and Ayaz, 2013).

The quality of the relationship of the woman with her husband is influenced by the age of her marriage and the age difference between them. Spouses of early married girls are generally older; more educated and have higher incomes (UNICEF, 2005). Women who marry at an early age may be less capable of asserting themselves and establishing their position in the household. As a result, they may have less power, status, agency and autonomy within the household (Jensen and Thornton, 2003).

When the marriage is forced, young girls frequently have little power in relation to their husbands. These young brides are at high risk for domestic abuse, neglect, and abandonment (McFarlane et al., 2016). According to Blood and Wolfe (1960) individuals who are more dependent on their spouses are considered less powerful. It is stated that the non-dominant and powerless individuals experience more negative emotions than positive emotions. Being powerless in a romantic relationship is associated with more psychological symptoms for women. In various studies it has been reported that being powerless is related to self-esteem and depression (Gallagher et al., 1999, Neff and Suizzo, 2006). Halloran (1998) stated that perceiving less control in marriages led to more learned helplessness and depressive symptoms in women.

Domestic violence

Involving a girl in a marriage without her consent gives a signal to her husband and to society as a whole that her opinion is unimportant (Mikhail, 2002). Men marrying young girls are usually those with traditional masculine gender role ideology, and these men are more likely to abuse their wives (Santana et al., 2006). Likewise, early married women often adopt these thoughts and justify their husbands' violence in some cases (Jensen and Thornton, 2003; UNICEF, 2005; Santhya et al., 2010). This belief increases the risk of being abused (Kidman, 2016).

Studies in many different countries point out that child marriage is a risk factor for domestic violence (Nasrullah et al., 2014; Oshiro et al., 2011; Speizer and Pearson 2011; Yount et al., 2016). In a study evaluating early married girls in our country, 14.6% of married children reported physical violence and 27% reported emotional violence (Soylu and Ayaz, 2013). It is reported that, in India and Ethiopia early married girls have a higher likelihood of experiencing domestic violence (Erulkar, 2013; Santhya et al., 2010). Similar results have been stated in various countries such as Colombia, Kenya, Peru, South America and Zambia (UNICEF, 2005).

Marriage at an early age is risk factor not only for physical violence but also sexual violence. Sexual relationships in early marriages usually occur without the child's consent (Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 2003; Kidman, 2016). In a study conducted in our country, it is stated that women married at an early age are forced sexual intercourse more than the control group in the first night of marriage (Güneş et al., 2016). Several studies have shown that women who marry in childhood are more likely to report sexual violence in the last year (Kidman, 2016; UNICEF, 2005). In many societies women are forced to maintain sexual intercourse even if they have had vaginal problems related to birth (UNICEF, 2001).

The physical, psychological and sexual violence in marriage is associated with many psychological problems. Combination of physical and sexual violence cause most serious effect on women (Coker et al., 2000). Krahé, Bieneck, and Möller (2005) reported that women who were exposed to physical and sexual abuse had more psychosomatic and depressive symptoms than women who did not. In a study conducted in our country, women who applied to the psychiatry outpatient clinic were examined and it was found that 62% of the women experienced violence at least once in their marriage, 73.9% of the women who experienced physical violence had depression and 6.5% of them had anxiety disorders (Vahip and Doğanavşargil, 2006). Marriage in childhood increases the risk of suffering domestic violence which causes various psychological problems in adulthood.

Child marriages are the physical, sexual and psychological abuse of children. Women exposed to sexual, physical, or emotional abuse in childhood have more psychological and interpersonal problems and sexual difficulties in adulthood (Mullen et al., 1996).

Intergenerational effects of childhood pregnancies

As a result of early marriages, children are raised by children and this situation puts both the mother and the child's well-being in danger. The child of a young mother who is inexperienced and uneducated in childrearing carries the risk of malnutrition and unhealthiness (World Vision, 2008).

Maternal education has an important influence on the health and development of the child. Child marriage negatively affects early childhood development by reducing maternal education. Early married children may experience more domestic violence and feel lonely which may cause depression, and depression of mother may affect children. Stress reactions of mother may be a serious threat to the health of the child (Wodon, 2016). Babies exposed to violence during pregnancy were found to have worse health and higher mortality rates when they born (Aizer, 2011).

In addition to the problems experienced in early childhood, babies may face various problems when they grow up. Almost all women who experience violence report that their children are also suffering from violence or witnessing violence (Rudo, Powell and Dunlap, 1998).

Children who grow up in a violent environment witness physical violence, and this situation negatively affects the child's emotional and mental health and future relationships (Holt and Whelan, 2008). Children who witness violence have problems with PTSD, depression, anxiety, as well as social problems, low self-esteem and guilt (Haj-Yahia and Abdo- Kaloti, 2008; Little and Kantor, 2002). Given that early married women experience more violence than women married in adult years, their children are more likely to experience similar problems.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Early marriages strengthen the unequal position of women in society. By imprisoning women for poverty, lack of education and economic dependence on men, it prevents women from both enjoying and contributing to social life (Aydemir, 2011). Early marriages continue to exist as a psychological threat. Being a wife of an older man, responsibility for home, home affairs and child-bearing pressure often leads to a variety of psychological problems for these women. Early married women are often exposed to domestic violence. Violence not only affects girls who marry at an early age but also their children, and the cycle of neglect and abuse continues.

Eliminating the existing discrepancy in the law and ensuring the functioning of laws is an important and effective step that can be taken by the state in preventing child marriage. It is important to keep statistics about early marriages. Besides, promoting of helping centers to which women can apply if they are forced to marry early will be an important step in preventing early marriage (Düzen and Atalay, 2014).

Studies have shown that early marriage rates are decreasing as girls' education levels rise. Providing economic support and scholarship for girls and their families, supporting educational expenses, and facilitating children's access to school can be effective steps in education. It is also important to include gender equality education in school programs and inform girls about their rights. Establishing special relationships with parents unwilling to send their daughters to the school and raising their awareness about the possible damage of early marriage may be an important step that will enable girls to complete their education and prevent them from early marriages (Düzen and Atalay, 2014).

In regions where early marriage is common, it may be an effective step to raise awareness of relevant public

institutions and professionals such as teachers and doctors, especially religion (imam) and local authority figures (muhtar) who are influential in villages and towns. Child marriage is a multidimensional problem, and a multiple effort is needed to overcome it.