



International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS)

A Peer-Reviewed Monthly Research Journal

ISSN: 2394-7969 (Online), ISSN: 2394-7950 (Print)

Volume-II, Issue-VIII, September 2016, Page No. 57-66

Published by: Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.irjims.com>

Early Marriage: Cause of Wastage & Stagnation at Secondary School in Meghalaya

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Abstract:

The wastage and stagnation event at secondary school level has been a major academic problem in rural Meghalaya and it is extremely difficult to classify the causes of dropout. This investigation tries to draw out reasons of secondary school dropout amongst students between 14 to 17 years of age.

Total of 100 students, 10 Principals and 40 Teachers were selected and the data collection was carried out in 10 schools (Govt and Pvt School) of Mawkyrwat, South West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. Scheduled interviews and questionnaires were used to collect information on social variables and to evaluate the reasons for wastage and stagnation and school dropout.

A total of 150 respondents participated in the investigation. The highest dropout rate, wastage and stagnation at secondary school were observed in students amongst 14 – 17 years of age. The main reasons of early marriage that lead to wastage and stagnation were relationship between boys and girls (80%), courtship (90%), ceasing (77.5%) and early marriage as the main cause (100%).

Wastage and stagnation and highest drop-out rate at secondary school level was observed among students of 14 – 17 years of age and the main reason were early marriage in the form of relationship between boys and girls, ceasing, courtship and others. There is a need to encourage the society concerning the importance of education and measures should be taken to address early marriage and its consequences.

Keywords: Education, Secondary Schools, Wastage and Stagnation, Early Marriage, Dropouts

1.1. Introduction: Marriage is the formal union between man and a woman, by which they become husband and wife. It can be also termed as a social institution that unites people in a special form of mutual dependence for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family.

As a social practice entered into through a public act, religious or traditional ceremony, it reflects the purposes, character, and customs of the society in which it is found. Societies around the world have norms and standards that limit the age of young girls to enter into marriage, but in some cases the age limit does not take into consideration their physiological readiness for childbearing. *Ababa Addis* (2006) stated that marriage often takes place at ages much earlier than the legally ratified minimum age. Therefore, early marriage is the marriage of children and adolescents before the legal age.

Early marriage brings an end to adolescents' education and their hopes of an independent income. It may take different forms and has various causes, one issue is paramount, whether it happens to a girl or a boy, it is a violation of human rights. *UNICEF* (2001) stated that, early marriage for both boys and girls has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts, cutting off educational opportunity.

1.2. The Issues: The concern of this article is an investigation on early marriage as one of the cause of wastage and stagnation at Secondary School level in the Khasi-Jaintia society of Meghalaya. Though there are several factors that lead to wastage and stagnation at secondary school level, but early marriage emerged as one of the major factor in the rural areas of Meghalaya that brought about school dropouts, especially among girls.

The main objective of this investigation is to understand the concept of marriage within the Khasi-Jaintia society; to investigate the various factors leading to early marriage in the Khasi-Jaintia society and their effects, relating to educational drop out; to analyze that early marriage is one of the responsible factors of wastage and stagnation at secondary school level and to suggest solutions for preventing early marriage which hampers the development of education at secondary school level.

Early marriage amongst the teenagers between 14 to 17 years is one of the major factors of wastage and stagnation at Secondary school level.

1.3. Methodology: The present investigation is assessed by employing a descriptive survey method to know the reasons for wastage and stagnation at secondary schools in rural areas of Meghalaya. The population of the research investigation constitutes of 10 secondary schools of Mawkyrwat area. A representative sample of 40 teachers, 10 principals, and 100 students of secondary school had been taken for the study.

This investigation is limited to Mawkyrwat area of the South West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. It is also being conducted amongst students between 14 to 17 years of age.

The research investigation is based on data collected from the field in the form of scheduled interviews and questionnaires to collect information on social variables and to evaluate the reasons for wastage and stagnation at secondary school and school dropout.

These were administered to the teachers, secondary students and Principals of the secondary schools under the sample. In analyzing the data collected from both primary and secondary sources will be tabulated and analyzed in terms of percentage (%).

Table – A
***List of Secondary Schools of Mawkyrwat Area of**
South West Khasi Hills District which forms the actual sample of the study

Sl. No.	Name of Secondary School	Location	Status
01.	Little Star Secondary School	Mawkyrwat, South West Khasi Hills	Private School
02.	J.K.R.P Secondary School	Mawkyrwat, South West Khasi Hills	Private School
03.	Maharam Govt. Secondary School	Mawkyrwat, South West Khasi Hills	Government School
04.	Mawkyrwat Presbyterian Secondary School	Laitlawsang, Jakrem, South West Khasi Hills	Private School
05.	Eleven Secondary School	Mawten, South West Khasi Hills	Private School
06.	Tyllilang Secondary School	Marshillong, , South West Khasi Hills	Private School
07.	Nativity Higher Secondary School	Mawkyrwat, South West Khasi Hills	Private School
08.	Balang Mawlangwir Higher Secondary School	Mawlangwir, South West Khasi Hills	Private School
09.	Sain Jingtup Multipurpose Secondary School	Mawlangwir, South West Khasi Hills	Private School
10.	Phlorosy Dew Secondary School	Nonglang, South West Khasi Hills	Private School

***Source: Office of Deputy Inspector of Schools, South West Khasi Hills District.**

1.4. Significance of the Study: Secondary School Education has a vital role to play in any program of education for the community as it prepares pupils for colleges, universities and other institutions of Higher Education. Besides, it is the stage which in all countries marks the completion of education for the vast majority. Even the minority which goes for higher education cannot take full advantage of the under opportunities offered by the universities unless they have received their grounding in a system of sound secondary education.

Development of Secondary Education in Meghalaya is still below average due to wastage and stagnation. Early marriage is one of the causes of wastage and stagnation at secondary school level in the Khasi-Jaintia society. But no systematic studies have been made with regard to this problem. Hence, it is very important to investigate the problems and causes of early marriage in the society which ultimately lead to wastage and stagnation and thereby suggesting some valuable measures to eradicate the problem.

Every locality in the society had their own respective schools, but in spite of all these privileges, pupils are still lagging behind and the problem of dropouts and failures are increasing at a great speed. Therefore, keeping in view of the above mentioned issues and reasons, it is high time to undertake an in-depth study of the factors operating in the early marriage of the youngsters which usually lead to wastage and stagnation.

1.5. Indian Constitutional Age for Marriage: The rules on the legal age for marriage are an important indicator of general plan about marriage and the roles and duties within marital relationship. These rules, for instance, define the conditions for entering into a marriage. Presently in India, the legal age for marriage is set at twenty-one for men and eighteen for women for all communities. This law provides that all marriages under this age can be considered '*child marriages*' and this uniform legislation in an effort to discourage child marriage under personal laws.

1.6. Marriage in the Khasi-Jaintia Society: The Khasi and Jaintia Hills district is situated between 25^o 1' and 26^o 5' North latitude, and between 90^o 47' and 92^o 52' East longitude (*Gurdon, 1975*). According to the census report of 2011 the total area of the State was 22,429 square kilometer with a population of 23,06,069 (*DIPR, 1991*). The area is bounded on the North by the Kamrup and Nowgong district of Assam, on the East by Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar hills in the Assam, on the South by Sylhet district of Bangladesh and on the West by the East Garo hills. The Khasi is a general name given to the various tribes and sub-tribes that inhabit the Khasi and Jaintia Hills namely the *Khyrniam*, the *Jaintias*, the *War*, the *Amwi* and the *Bhoi*.

The Khasis-Jaintias are for the most part, monogamous. Their social organization does not favor other form of marriage; therefore, deviation from this norm is quite rare. The Khasi and Jaintia people are matrilineal and follow the matrilocal form of residence where the house of the mother remains as the pivot of all activities of the lineage.

Family life is organized around the mother's house, which is lead by parents who lives with their unmarried daughters, the youngest daughter (even if she is married), and youngest daughter's children. Additionally, her unmarried, divorced, or widowed brothers and sons reside in the home. The youngest daughter never leaves and eventually becomes the head of the household; older daughters usually form separate households adjacent to their mother's household. Marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited, it is considered to be a most heinous crime and it is strictly followed even today. In a Khasi-Jaintia marriage, it is usual for the husband to live with his wife in his mother-in-law's house and does not take his wife home as it's customary in other communities.

1.7. Early Marriage: The Responsible Factors of Wastage and Stagnation: Education is an important social objective of any society. The role it plays and its possible contribution to the intellectual growth and development of the society have become points of common concern in both developed and developing countries.

Education enables individuals and the society to make an all-round participation in the development process by acquiring knowledge, abilities and skills. Education also plays a role in promoting respect for human rights and democratic values, creating the condition for equality, mutual understanding and cooperation among people.

In Meghalaya, there has been a steady growth in the number of secondary schools. Wastage and stagnation is increasing at a high rate. The crisis behind wastage and stagnation at secondary school level in Meghalaya is due to early marriage of young boys and girls.

Secondary students which falls between 15 to 17 years of age who had attained the period of adolescence and this is the period where most of the students becomes victims of love and romance which ultimately leads to early marriage. For both boys and girls, early marriage implies no freedom of choice regarding their future. Early marriage continues to be a reality for many around the globe, because of a variety of factors. Factors that lead to early marriage in the Khasi-Jaintia society of Meghalaya are discussed as follows:-

(a) Poverty: Poverty is the main factors for dropout at all the level of school education irrespective of the locality. Child labour arises from the severe poverty of the family, and this problem lead children to engage in work in order to support and sustain the family. Illiteracy, deficiency, poverty, inadequate earnings and poor living conditions of parents force children not only to withdraw from schools but also engage them in various types of works.

Schedule Caste/Tribe parents, especially in rural areas are unable to send their children to 'free' schools because of costs other than the tuition fee and of forgone income from the children's work (*Chanana, 1996*). In the Khasi-Jaintia society, if poverty is serious; a young girl may be regarded as an economic burden where one less daughter is one less mouth to feed.

(b) Degradation of Social and Moral Values: The moral deterioration of youth in Meghalaya is at present a blazing issue. The expression of this sort of degradation is being reflected in different undesirable aspects of the society. Social and moral values among Khasi-Jaintia are really degrading, the cause for this are many. These days' youngsters spend more time on social activities like meeting their friends, on technologies like internet chatting, gaming, smses, rather than having a friendly sharing with their parents or elders, which can guide and teach them good moral values.

(c) Belief in Superstitious: In the Khasi-Jaintia society, there is also still an old traditional belief concerning that a young boy or a young girl will become too old for marriage, which represent a failure on the part of the parents to teach their children about the facts of marriage and its responsibilities. Anju Malhotra stated that:

In many societies, parents are under pressure to marry off their daughters as early as possible in an effort to prevent her from becoming sexually active before marriage; a woman who does so brings dishonour to her family and community. Because marriage often determines a woman's status in many societies, parents also worry that if they don't marry their daughters according to social expectations, they will not be able to marry them at all. (Malhotra, 2010)

(d) Broken Families: Children of broken families are more likely engage in early marriage than those from intact families. For most youngsters, arguments at home often lead them to seek and establish intimate relationships outside the family, seeking the warmth and support they lack at home.

(e) Negligence of Parents: This is another factor especially in this 21st Century where people are running after time. Time is running fast, competition is on the high, everything has become expensive, etc, parents are force to leave their young children on their own so that they could meet their basic demands at home. Young adults especially teenagers needed proper guidance for their life and careers and parents has an important role to play during this time which is often neglected by them. Therefore leaving them on their own at this stage, usually lead them to delinquency and misbehavior. Therefore, Parents should be particularly cautious regarding their children's academic performance by identifying the warning signs quickly which is important to early and effective intervention.

(f) Alcohol and Drugs: The using of intoxicating substance like alcohol, drugs and other illicit substances has a considerable effect on school performance in young adolescences. Not only do marks suffer due to poor attention, lack of concentration and energy, and effort, but students also lose interest in social and extra-curricular activities. Ultimately, drug and alcohol can lead to truancy and dropping out of school.

Various types of drugs are prevalent on secondary school campuses, and each type unfavorably disturbs some facet of school performance. Alcohol and drugs is a serious factor that can cause major problems for young adolescence in schools which ultimately cause anger and emotional problems, as well as a variety of negative physical intimacy that may also leads to early marriage.

Alcohol and drugs abuse has the greatest negative impact on school performance. It is tied to lower marks, poor truancy, increases school drop-out rates and even early marriage among teens. Therefore, early intercession and action is necessary to prevent problems, and continuing education is crucial to educate young people about the problems, drug and alcohol use and abuse can cause.

(g) Peer Group Pressure: The peer group is the main factor in adolescent development and has some bearing on teenagers' decisions about their wants and interests. Pressure to engage in relationship increases during adolescence that ultimately leads to early marriage.

Peer group attitudes about love and romance; influence the attitudes and behaviors of teenagers.

(h) Influence of Western Culture through Media: Media plays a very important role in every society giving information of what happen around the world. Though it has many advantages yet there are disadvantages that mislead many people especially young adolescence. Influence of media through television, mobile phone, computer, etc displaying foreign culture and behaviors in terms of lifestyle, fashion, affairs and so on affect the life of young adolescence and often mislead them in the wrong direction.

(i) Being an Agrarian Society: The Khasi-Jaintia society of Meghalaya is basically an agrarian society where around 80% of the population depends primarily on agriculture for their livelihood, especially in the rural areas. Families and parents mostly in rural areas were in need of helpers to help them in their agricultural activities and as a consequence, force them to marry off their children, particularly girls at a very young age. This problem hindered the progress of education in the rural areas and even leads children to dropout from school so as to help their parents in agricultural activities.

However, early marriage inevitably denies children of their school age, their right to education they need for their personal development, their preparation for adulthood, and their effective contribution to the future well being of their family and society.

1.8. Analysis and Interpretation of Data Collection

Table – I

Problems regarding Romantic Relationship between boys and girls in the schools

Problems of Romantic Relationship between boys and girls in the school	No. of Response	Percentage (%)
Yes	142	80
No	8	20

Table I – revealed that 80% of the respondents stated that that there is problem regarding the relationship between boys and girls in the schools where as only 20% have no problem.

Table – II

The Affect of Love and Romance Relationship for the Studies

Affect of Love and Romance Relationship for the studies	No. of Response	Percentage (%)
Yes	146	90
No	4	10

Table II – revealed that 90% of the respondents stated there is effect for the studies if one engaged in love and romance relationship while studying whereas only 10% of the respondents stated that there is no effect.

Table – III
Dropping Out Studies due to Early Marriage

Ceasing Studies due to Early Marriage	No. of Response	Percentage (%)
Yes	139	77.5
No	11	27.5

Table III – revealed that 72.5% of the respondents stated that there is ceasing of education due to early marriage whereas 27.5 of the respondents stated that there is no ceasing of education due to early marriage.

Table – IV
Early Marriage as one main
Cause of Wastage and Stagnation at Secondary School

Early Marriage as one cause of Wastage and Stagnation in Schools	No. of Response	Percentage (%)
Yes	150	100
No	0	0

Table IV – indicates that majority i.e. 100% of the respondents were stated that early marriage is one of the main causes of wastage and stagnation at secondary school level.

1.9. Results: The key observation and careful analysis based on the collected data from the field shows that -

- a) In table I it was found that 80% of the teachers stated that there is problem relating the romantic relationship between boys and girls of secondary school level.
- b) In table II it was found that 90% of the respondents states that love and romance relationship affect the studies of the students.
- c) In table III it was found that 77.5% of the teachers states that students ceased education due to early marriage.
- d) In table IV it was found that majority (100%) of the respondents' states that early marriage is one of the causes of wastage and stagnation at secondary school level.

1.10. Suggestion to Reduce Early Marriage: It is empirically established that early marriage is one of the major factor relating to wastage and stagnation at secondary school level in Meghalaya, especially in the rural areas that leads to school dropouts. As researchers, the above concern regarding early marriage, highlighting few suggestions and guidelines to encounter the problem of early marriage in the society, which is as follows -

- a) Efforts to improve the access of people to economic resources should focus on expanding employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Micro credit programs will provide people with the basic economic opportunities they often lack and a social support network that promotes changes in attitudes and behavior.
- b) There should be special provisions from government/NGOs for support needed of education such as free books, uniforms, scholarship and so on.
- c) Prohibition and proper awareness programme relating the issues of using alcohol, drugs etc., is very important for the society.
- d) There should be special awareness program conducting in the community regarding the affects of early marriage.
- e) Traditional superstitious belief should be eradicated from the society.
- f) Parents should not leave young children on their own; they should also often have a discussion with their children about early marriage and its effects.

1.11. Conclusion: School dropout is considered as complex social dilemmas that bring about a huge waste of resources of the country as well as the individual. Society must be made conscious & motivated concerning the significance of education. This investigation tried to understand the various factors associated with early marriage and school dropouts at secondary school level in the Mawkyrwat area of Meghalaya. Early marriage of girls and boys weaken the realization and enjoyment of virtually every one of their rights. The imposition of a marriage partner on children or adolescents who are in no way ready for married life, and whose marriage will deprive them of freedom, opportunity for personal development, and other rights including health and well-being, education, and participation in civic life, cancel out the meaning core protections for those concerned. To improve the situation relating to secondary school level, it is necessary to make renovations in the educational and social spheres and unless measures are taken to address early marriage, it will continue to be a major stumbling block to the achievement of human rights and complete education.

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