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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EFFECTS OF EARLY MARRIAGE AMONG MUSLIMS IN TAWI-TAWI, PHILIPPINES: AN ISLAMIC CIVILIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT ON ITS CORE UNIT

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Abstract

Tawi-Tawi is the cradle of Islamic civilization in the Philippines. This study looked at marriage practices in the province as one of the important pillars of civilization. Specifically, it aimed at early marriage practices and its effect on their socio-economic and religious lives as Muslims. Using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses collected from among 195 research participants, this study found that the spiritual obligations of the participants were not significantly affected by the fact that they married early but the same cannot be concluded in the case of their socio-economic lives. One-sample T-Test result revealed that couples who married early earned significantly lower than the poverty threshold of the province. Regression analysis results revealed that only independent variable 'husband Islamic educational attainment' was found to have a positive and statistically significant influence on the likelihood that they will finish their studies. This study concludes that as marriage is considered as the building block that makes or breaks civilizations, early marriage is shaking its structural integrity.

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Introduction:-

Marriage is not only a desirable institution for societies; it's the bedrock of civilization (Tucker, 2014). One of the contributory factors, therefore, to the rise and fall of civilizations especially in the case of the Greeks and Romans, is the strength and stability of marriage (Zimmerman, 2014). In Islam, one of the significant reasons that befall civilizations is rejection and conscious transgression of boundaries of ethics and morality (Ali & Muhsin, 2014) and definitely, marriage is one of the central concerns of Islamic ethics and morality (Ahmad, 2018).

In the Philippines however, at least 12 million girls have married before 18 years old annually (Nortajuddin, 2020). Although this type of marriage practice is prevalent in many societies, the underlying differences however, in the Philippines especially among Mindanaons in the south, early marriages are mostly caused by elopement rather than the usual one (Keifer&Effenberger, 1967; Miralao et al., n.d.). Couples who were married early especially those who did it without the prior consent of their parents and/or family members were sometimes outcasted by the later creating an unhealthy social environment between members of the affected clan in the society. This fuels hostility and hatred and at some points, early marriage led to a clash of clans within and or among societies. In this case, most

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couples are left alone on their own. With severed family ties from their in-laws and families, the young couples had to stand on their own feet and take care of their households by themselves at early age.

Due to early exposure to complexity of the nature and consequences of marriage, studies have shown that early marriage is associated with depression risk (Fakhari et al., 2020) caused by emerging financial problems (Burgoyne et al., 2007), health issues (Delprato & Akyeampong, 2017; Harris et al., 2010) and, unable to go to school anymore (Delprato et al., 2017).

This study looked into how early marriage affected the socio-economic and religious lives of the couple as members of the society.

Materials and Methods:-

This study utilized a quantitative research method as it employs analysis of the data gathered from 195 participants who were married early. They were selected randomly in the community within the province of Tawi-Tawi – the southernmost part of the Philippines. The province of Tawi-Tawi has a total population of 389,731 scattered all over the 106 islands of the province of whom 96.78 per cent are Muslims (“Muslim Population in Mindanao”, 2017). This study utilized a researcher-made survey questionnaire which was composed of two parts. Part 1 contained the demographic profile of the participants. Part 2 consisted of questions relating to the effects of early marriage on the socio-economic and religious lives of the participants. The research instrument was subjected to internal consistency and reliability test. With Cronbach Alpha, 0.924, it suggested that such instrument was 92.4% consistent and reliable (Connelly, 2011). This study also used the Mean Score Distribution of the response (Pepe et al., 1994), a One-sample T-Test for a test of significant differences between the mean response and hypotheses values used in this study (Kvamme, 1990), as well as Ordinal Least Regression analysis for a test of association of the participants’ demographic profile to their responses (Liu, 2009).

Results and Discussion:-

Table no. 1:- Distribution of participants response on the socio-economic implications of early marriage.

Perception statements	Mean	Interpretation
1. We have no problem with eating three times a day, every day.	3.31	Undecided
2. We are still sending our children to school/college.	2.96	Undecided
3. We can still buy any dress we want.	3.14	Undecided
4. We experienced difficulties in finding home to settle at because we got married early.	3.42	Agree
5. Even though we got married early, I was able to finish college.	1.89	Disagree
6. Even though we got married early, we are still healthy.	4.02	Agree
7. Couple who were married early easily hesitate against one another in the long run.	2.71	Undecided
8. In our community, lots were having hard times to land a job for not finishing their studies due to early marriage.	4.08	Agree
9. In our community, lots of family are in a state of hostility toward one another for having a family member/s who got divorced out of marrying early.	4.6	Strongly Agree
Overall mean score	3.34	Undecided

Table no. 1 shows that the participants were ‘undecided’ on the perception statements: “We have no problem with eating three times a day, every day.”; “We are still sending our children to school/college.”; “I can buy any dress I want.” and “Couple who were married early easily, tends to hesitate against one another in the long run.” With mean score of 3.31; 2.96; 3.14; and 2.71 respectively. The uncertainty to finance their food, studies of their own children and other basic necessities due to early marriage coincides with the findings of Kerckhoff & Parrow, (1979); Kyari & Ayodele, (2014); Sarkar, (2007); and, Wodon, (2017).

With a weighted mean score of 1.89, they ‘disagree’ on the perception statement: “Even though we got married early, I was able to finish college.” This plainly indicates that they are very much certain that they will not be able to finish college and the direct reason they pointed out was early marriage. The likelihood that early marriage decreases the chance of finishing college is consistent with the findings of Boahen & Yamauchi, (2018); Delprato & Akyeampong, (2017); and, Gilbert & Bayisenge, n.d.

The respondents 'agreed' with a mean score of 4.08 on the statement: "In our community, lots were having a hard time to get a job for not finishing their studies due to early marriage" this coincides with Alemu (2008) who found that: "early marriage is one of the most harmful practices as it usually denies girls educational opportunities, leads to poverty and economic insecurity and has a serious negative impact on their health and decision-making capacities" and a mean score of 3.42 corresponds to also 'agree' on: "We experienced difficulties in finding home to settle at because we got married early"; and also 'agree', 4.02, on: "Even though we got married early, we are still healthy". It contradicts with the findings of Prakash et al., (2011); and, Santhya, (2011).

They 'strongly agree' with the statement: "In our community, lots of families are in a state of hostility toward one another for having a family member/s who got divorced out of marrying early" with a mean of 4.6. The increasing risk of getting divorced among couples who married early is also found by Moore & Waite, (1981); Tilson & Larsen, (2000); and, Widyastari et al., (2020).

Table no. 2:- Religious Implications of Early Marriage.

Perception statement	Mean	Interpretation
1. Even though we got married early, I can still perform my prayers (salah).	4.05	Agree
2. Due to early marriage, we got lots of children thus I can not attend to all of my religious obligations.	4.13	Agree
3. I can still fast during the month of Ramadhan even though we were married early.	3.41	Agree
4. I see to it that my family income comes from halal sources	4.81	Strongly Agree
5. Due to early marriage, I got to learn early my duties and responsibilities to my family.	3.94	Agree
6. I encourage my sons and/or daughter to get married later than 18 years of age.	5.00	Strongly Agree
7. Islam obliged us to marry early.	1.81	Disagree
Overall mean	3.87	Agree

Table no. 2 shows that the participants 'agree' with the perception statement: "Even though we got married early, I have no issues with performing my prayers (salah)." "I can still fast during the month of Ramadhan even though we were married early."; "Due to early marriage, I got to learn early my duties and responsibilities to my family" with corresponding mean scores, 4.05, 4.13, and 3.94 respectively. This implies that early marriage did not negatively affect their religious obligations much as it did on their socio-economic lives.

They 'strongly agree' with the statement: "I see to it that my family income comes from halal sources" and "I encourage my sons and/or daughters to get married later than 18 years of age." With corresponding 4.81 and 5.00 mean scores respectively. This suggested that financial challenges they experienced due to early marriage was never enough reason to distort their moral compass – they maintained 'halal only' source of income to sustain their families.

Lastly, they 'disagree', 1.81, on: "Islam obliged us to marry early." This implies that the participants of the study understood Islam did not command Muslims to marry early. Although there was an instance that the Holy Prophet Muhammad s.w.t seemed to marry Aisha at early age but the authenticity of the hadith narrating it is challenged by prominent scholars who argued that Aisha must have been 18 years old when married and about 21 when their marriage was consummated in consistent with the historical facts during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet s.w.t (Child Marriage in Islam, 2019) and thefatwa that Muslims must not marry below 18 years old (Mamadiev, 2020).

Table no. 3.1:- Hypothesis Testing Result for Poverty Threshold ($H_0 = \text{P}7,337.64$).

Income	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
	195	₱3,633.33	3295

This study utilized a one-sample T-test for hypothesis testing to determine whether the average income of the participants is significantly different from the normal poverty threshold of ₱7,337 as estimated by the Philippine Statistics Authority (Bersales 2019).

The test result shows that the research participants' mean poverty threshold score ($M = 3,634$, $SD = 3295$) was lower than the normal poverty threshold in the country. This implies couples who married early lives below the poverty line than the rest of the population in the country.

Table no. 3.2:- One-Sample Test.

Income	Test value	t	df	p-value	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
	₱7,337.00	-12.03	194	.000	₱-3,798	2914.33	4161

A one-sample t-test was run to determine whether the poverty threshold amount among the respondents in Tawi-Tawi was significantly different from normal (₱7,337.00) as defined by the Philippine Statistics Authority. The poverty threshold was normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$) and there was no outlier in the data. The mean poverty threshold score ($M = ₱3,634$, $SD = 3295$) was lower than the 'normal' poverty threshold score of ₱7,337.00. A statistically significant mean difference of ₱-3,798, 95% CI [2914.33 to 4161], $t(194) = -12.03$, $p = .00$. It means that there was enough evidence to suggest that the normal poverty line compared to the actual poverty threshold found among Muslim couples who were married early in Tawi-Tawi is statistically significantly different. It suggested that that early marriage causes poverty this result is in accordance with the findings of Kyari & Ayodele, (2014); Sarkar, (2007); and, Wodon, (2017).

Table no. 4:- Ordinal Regression Analysis for statistical association of respondents profile to their response on finishing college.

Model	Dependent Variable: Finish.College					95.0% Conf. Interval	
	β	Std. Error	Exp(β)	t	p-value	Lower	Upper
(Constant)	-2.353	8.2		-.285	.779		
Husband age	.11	.11	1.11	.11	.34	-.11	.34
His Sec Educ'l At	.13	.20	1.14	.11	.52	-.24	.54
His Islamic Educ'l At	.71	.12	2.05	.72	.00	.47	.96
Income	-.00	.00	.99	-.001	.59	-.00	.00
No. of children	-.01	.05	.98	-.01	.71	-.12	.08
Wife Sec Educ'l At	-.45	.30	.63	-.45	.13	-1.06	.14
Her Islamic Educ'l At	-.09	.28	.91	-.09	.74	-.66	.47
Wife age married	-.20	.13	.81	-.20	.14	-.47	.07
<p>a. $R^2 = .566$ b. $F = 2.897$ c. ANOVA = .023 d. Significant at 0.05 p-value and below.</p>							

An Ordinal Regression was run to predict the likelihood that the participants will be able to finish college even though they were already married. The independent variables were; husband age, age at the time of marriage, his secular educational attainment, Islamic educational attainment, number of children, income, age of the wife, age at the time of her marriage, her secular educational attainment, and Islamic educational attainment. These independent variables significantly predicted the dependent variable Finish. College. With $F(9,185) = 2.89$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 56.6$.

The result shows that only variable 'husband's Islamic educational attainment, coded "His Islamic Educ'l At", is found to have positive, $\beta = .71$, and statistically significant influence with $p < .001$, with the dependent variable coded as 'Finish.College'. The result indicates that for every unit increase in the Islamic educational level of the participants, it is associated with 2.05 times increase in likelihood that they will be able to finish college. It implies that Islamic education increases their sense of moral responsibility towards their family. The higher their Islamic education attainment is, the more they feel the pressure that they need to finish college to sustain their family temporal needs.

Table no. 5.1:- Hypothesis Testing Result of effect of Early Marriage on the Religious Practices of the Participants.

Spiritual obligation	N	Test value	Mean	Std. Deviation
	195		2.19	3.53

Table 5.1 shows the initial test result for the hypothesized mean score ($M = 3.53$, $SD = .43$) was found higher than the hypothesized mean score 2.19 corresponding to “disagree”.

Table no. 5.2:- One-Sample Test.

Spiritual obligations	t	df	p-value	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
	42.48	194	.000	1.33	3.45	3.58

A one-sample t-test was run to identify whether the performance of the participants' religious duties was statistically significantly different with the hypothesized mean range from 1.80 - 2.59 (Disagree). The mean response of the participants was normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$) and there was no outlier in the data, as assessed by inspection of a boxplot. The mean performance of religious duties score was ($M = 3.53$, $SD = .43$) was higher than the hypothesized mean score of 2.19. A statistically significant mean difference of 1.33 at 95% CI [3.45 to 3.58], $t(194) = 42.48$, $p = .00$) was found between the hypothesized value and the actual mean score of the participants in Tawi-Tawi.

This implies that the Muslim couples who married early were still able to perform their spiritual duties and obligation in Islam and was not affected by the fact that they married early. It suggested that although marriage is ideally for matured persons who have the physical and psycho-social capabilities to handle its nature and consequences, in this study, it appeared that the participants' personal experiences in marrying early have molded them made them matured persons to handle the physical and psycho-social challenges that the consequences of early marriage can possibly ask of them.

Conclusion:-

The core fundamental element of civilization is the people that constitute it which progress and development depends on the quality and consequences of their married life. If marriage is the bedrock of civilizations, then civilization is as strong only as marriage and family-ties within its realm. While the strength and stability of marriage institution can be attributed to many factors, this study aimed at the practice of early in a given society that makes up the building block of civilizations. This study finds that while early marriage did not negatively affect the spiritual obligations of the couples; it negatively affected their socio-economic lives. They earned below the poverty line threshold; they did not finish their studies and even lost their interest to pursue college. Cases of family feud triggered by a family of a divorced couple who were married early were also found in this study. On the other hand, Increasing Islamic educational attainment is associated with increasing pressure to finish college to sustain their family needs. Lastly, Islamic civilization in both historical and *shariah* perspective did not encourage marriage under the age of 18 years old.

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