

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS IN EGGON TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE RITES AND THE DESIRE FOR MARRIAGE IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This paper examines the Socio-Economic factors in Eggon traditional marriage rites in Nasarawa state. A sample size of four hundred (400) was drawn using the Taro Yamane formula (1967). This is because the people of the study area are known through the National Population Commission's estimated population figure of 2023. Data was collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary source was obtained from the respondents through questionnaires and interviews. Secondary data was sourced through journals, textbooks and periodicals. Descriptive statistics and Chi-square were used to analyse the data collected. Recommendations will be advanced based on the findings from the study. The aim was to establish the effect of the high bride price of Eggon people's traditional marriage on the desire for marriage. The study found that high bride price payment has a negative effect on the desire for marriage in the Eggon land of Nasarawa state and vice versa. The researchers therefore recommend that the bride price and other marriage ceremony items (food, drinks and other payments) should be moderately fixed in order to improve the desire for marriage in Eggon land of Nasarawa state.

Key words: Traditional marriage, Bride Price and Desire for marriage.

Introduction

Globally, there are no generally acceptable traditional marriage rites as each nation or society has its own unique traditional marriage rites. In Africa, we have different countries with different cultures, customs and different traditional marriage rites (Burabari, 2020). In Nigeria, like most African countries, marriage is more than just the union of two individuals, it is the union of families and their ancestors. This is why you are likely to find similarities in the marriage customs of many tribes. For instance, in Nigeria, the culture and traditional marriage rites among the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa being the major tribes in Nigeria vary but are similar in terms of courtship, bride price payment etc (Onyima, 2014). In these tribes listed above, the union between a man and a woman begins with courtship followed by the family's introduction and bride price payment even though the approaches differ (Onyima, 2014).

The Yoruba people believe that marriage begins with courtship, where a man identifies a woman, he's interested in and seeks an "alarina" to represent him. Once mutual interest is established, they inform their parents about their intention to marry, who then visit the bride's parents to obtain her consent and set a date.

The Igbo traditional marriage rites begin with an inquiry called "Iku aka" or "Iju ese," where the groom, accompanied by his father, visits the bride's family to announce his intention to marry her. The bride's parents then ask her if she knows her suitor and if she wants to marry him if she affirmatively responds. (Ushe, 2015).

In the Hausa marriage custom, physical contact and prolonged courting are discouraged. When a man decides to marry a woman, he visits her family with his friends and family, often in an all-men affair. The groom informs his prospective in-laws about something he likes in the bride's family, known as "na gani, ina so," meaning "I have seen something that I admire." If the proposal is approved by the bride to be's family, it is known as Gaisuwa. It is only then that the bargain for the bride price begins (Yiro, 2017).

The bride price in Hausa starts at 'Rubu Dinar', meaning 'quarter kilogram of gold piece', and is typically the highest the groom can afford. It is preferred to be as low as possible, as it is believed to bring blessings to the marriage. The payment is known as Sadaki. The wedding date is set during the visit, and the wedding day is called Fatihah. Husbands provide housing, while the bride's family are responsible for furnishing the house. (Ukaegbu, 2015).

Sibomana (1985), pointed out that in Eggon nation of Nasarawa State, marriage is such a dynamic event that changes with time. These dynamics have over the years created social vices (Sibomana, 1985). Before the 20th century, in the Eggon nation, girls were immediately betrothed to a man, usually initiated by midwives and consented by the girl's parents. The man marked the girl's forehead and presented gifts to her parents, indicating their commitment to the boy's family and their unwavering commitment to her. This process continues until the girl is ten years old, and then a formal introduction is done (Maku 2003). The groom's family prepares a traditional marriage rite, including cooked white kidney beans, goat, life big pig, and native wine, as each nation or society has its unique customs. In Africa, we have different countries with different cultures, customs and different traditional marriage rites (Burabari, 2020). Nigeria's marriage customs, like many African countries, involve the union of families and ancestors, resulting in similarities across various tribes. The Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa major tribes in Nigeria share similar courtship and bride price payment rites. etc. (Onyima, 2014). In these tribes listed above, the union between a man and a woman begins with courtship followed by the family's introduction and bride price payment even though the approaches differ (Onyima, 2014).

The decadence of cultural norms and values is devastating next to nothing (Aku 2021). Eggon marriage was mostly upheld as a sacred socio-cultural institution in the Eggon society. Its sacred status in the classical era through the modern era was upheld, practiced, transmitted, and sustained (Tarbo, 1980). This was partly because married women have had more respect, recognition, and several other rights over single women. A mature single man or woman was often seen as a naughty or dismayed personality in Eggon nation of Nasarawa state (Akiga, 1939). Marriage for subsequent procreation was a dire necessity clamoured for by every parent in Eggon nation of Nasarawa state (Robert & Gotau, 2015).

Ahmed's (2019) study in this direction, established that rising bride prices, wealth, and parental demands contribute to youths' delay in marriage in Idoma Land. This highlights the impact of socio-economic variables on the desire for legitimate relationships among young people. The findings may not apply to Eggon in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the effect of Socio-Economic factors of Eggon traditional marriage rites on the desire to marry among the people of Eggon, Nasarawa State, Nigeria, with the view of bringing out ways to help reduce or possibly modify this cultural practice in Eggon land.

Literature Review

Anyacho (2010) noted that before marriage is finally contracted in Eggon nation, many preliminary activities ranging from proposal, inquiry, acceptance and official engagement or courtship and payment of bride price must have been completed.

Ushe, (2015). maintained that the intrusion of globalization has dismembered marriage as in the situation in Eggon nation. Parents rarely play the role of choosing a wife or husband for their son or daughter because they are told that to do so is anticivilization. Many of them no longer carry out proper investigations to determine the status of who their son or daughter is to marry as they (intending couples) are now allowed to choose for themselves. This has created a lot of problems such as divorce, abortion and infidelity in most marriages in Eggon society because families no longer care whom their daughter or son marries and the tradition that guides the marriage institution in Eggon society has been abandoned because of civilization (Aku 2019).

Traditional marriage in Eggon is replaced by church or Christian marriage, with couples issuing marriage certificates after the wedding, replacing polygamy with monopoly. This trend is causing abuse of traditional marriage institutions, as young men and women cohabit and produce children without proper traditional marriage. Globalization is accelerating this trend, making it more accepted in Eggon. (Dauda, 2015).

Sara and Nathan. (2017) examined the effect of the requirement for the bride price to be paid back, upon divorce in the Republic of Congo. Their study reveals that high bride price payment is believed to be associated with stability in marriages as measured by less or absence of domestic violence, couple engagement in positive activities for family advancement, and the general happiness of the family. They concluded that bride price has no relationship with the well-being of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Blessing (2018). Researched on Marriage ceremony: the clash between Traditional marriage rites and Western marriage. The study examines the impact of Christianity on traditional marriage beliefs in Africa. It was found that the clash between traditional and Western marriage is unnecessary, and that individual choice should prevail. Some Pentecostal Christian churches reject the idea of sexual consummation immediately after traditional marriage rites, resulting in the conclusion that traditional marriage rites should be compulsory.

Falana (2019) examined Bride Price Syndrome and Dominance in Marriage: An Expository Analysis. The study explores Bride Price Syndrome and Dominance in Marriage, highlighting its cultural significance as a symbol of sincerity and inter-family bond. It also highlights the serious gender issue of bride price payment, causing gender dominance and inequality in marriages. The researcher recommends that both families of the intending couple should dialogue and mutually fund the necessary bills according to native law and custom.

According to Aku (2019) “before the 20th century, a girl was betrothed to her affianced husband's parents, who would comment freely on her first appearance. If young, she would continue annual visits to her in-laws, who would guard her. The girl became the wife without her consent. Morals were not rigid, but she had to not have an intimate relationship with another man before the first visit. Marriage rites were performed by the two families, often requiring customary gifts to the bride's parents. The bride was traditionally handed over to the groom in public. However, the marriage institution in the Eggon nation changed in the 20th century due to civilization, modernization, or advancement.”

However, according to Aku, (2021) in an oral interview supported by Kagbu, (2021), in recent years (21st century) this practice changed due to modernisation and globalisation that have gradually overshadowed Eggon culture and tradition. Now the union between a man and woman begins with courtship. First, a man identifies a woman he is interested in and approaches her for her hand in marriage called “Oklo” meaning love and once mutual interest and love have been established the girl informs her mother of their intention to get married, the mother now will, in turn, tell the girl’s father. At this point the son-in-law to be, will be invited for a familiarization visit called “e`shko” meaning greeting. The groom accompanied by his friends visits the bride’s family with a gift “igmo`ami” meaning a drink of any kind as a token of appreciation to the bride’s family. The bride to be is then called out by her parents and asked if she knows her suitor and would want to marry him and they would not proceed to the next stage except the girl affirms that she knows her suitor and would want to marry him (Aku, 2021) and (Kagbu, 2021).

The next meeting will be between the groom’s family and the bride’s extended family popularly “known as Fa’algo ata” bride price payment where the groom’s people restate their interest in marrying from the bride to be family in the presence of her direct and extended family with family elders and once consent has been secured, the groom’s family can now proceed with the bride price negotiation and payment known traditionally as “Fa’algo ata” (Aku, 2021) supported by (Kagbu, 2021).

In the Eggon nation of Nasarawa state, the high cost of marriage is attributed to the traditional practice of giving goats, a pig, Ebekpem, and alcohol instead of native drinks (ajege). According to (Aku, 2021) this practice has led to a lack of traditional marriage services. This stage often witnesses a lot of back and forth between both families until a set amount is reached. The money paid for the bride’s price significantly varies across Eggon families and clans. (Maku, 2003).

Conceptual Review

Marriage rites

Every human community celebrates significant changes or transformations called passage through rites of passage, such as marriage. These rites are religious ceremonies that involve a series of rituals and ceremonies, ensuring that the community's people are prepared for the transition from one stage to another. (Omafodezi, 2011).

Ezenweke (2012) stated that a marriage rite is a significant initiation rite, representing the union of two individuals, their life missions, families, and lineages. It serves as an institution for both husbands and wives to fulfill their life objectives and is an elaborate issue with symbolic rites and rituals with deep meanings and significance.

Traditional marriage

Traditional marriage is a contract involving two families of equal economic status who have agreed to live together for life and to share certain things in common. It is also the coming together of two mature individuals from the opposite sex to undertake lifelong responsibilities and duties that go with being a man or woman. It is an institution that bestows on its participants exclusive rights and privileges of cohabitation and procreation Nmah (2012).

Bride-price

Bride-price (marriage payment) is a payment made by a groom or his kin to the kin of the bride in order to ratify a marriage. In such cultures, a marriage is not reckoned to have ended until the return of bride price has been acknowledged signifying divorce. Formal presentation of the bride price at an engagement ceremony in Eggon nation of Nasarawa state is called traditional marriage (Aku 2019).

The bride price payment is a social, symbolic, and economic reciprocity between intermarrying families. It consolidates friendly relations, pledges well-treatment for the woman and her children, symbolizes her community worth, and compensates her biological family for the loss of labor and company. (Ushe, (2015).

Theoretical Review

Functionalism

Functionalism was propounded by Emile Durkheim in 1858-1917. According to this theory, individual behaviour is not the same as collective behaviour and studying collective behaviour is quite different from studying an individual action. Emile Durkheim called the communal beliefs morals and attitudes of a society the collective conscience. He also believed that social integration or the strength of ties that people have to their social groups was a key factor in social life. Following the ideas of Comte and Spencer, Durkheim likened society to that of a living organism in which each organ plays its role in keeping the being alive.

When considering the role of family in society, functionalists uphold the notion that families are an important social institution and that they play a key role in stabilizing society. They also note that family members take on status roles in a marriage or family. The family and its members perform certain functions that facilitate the prosperity and development of society.

The family outlet gives way to reproduction, which is a necessary part of ensuring the survival of society. Once children are produced, the family plays a vital role in training them for adult life. As the primary agent of socialization and enculturation, the family teaches young children the ways of thinking and behaving that follow social and cultural norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes. Parents teach their children manners and civility. A well-mannered child reflects a well-mannered parent.

Parents also teach children gender roles. Gender roles are an important part of the economic function of a family. In each family, there is a division of labour that consists of instrumental and expressive roles. Men tend to assume instrumental roles in the family, which typically involve work outside of the family that provides financial support and establishes family status. Women tend to assume expressive roles, which typically involve work inside of the family which provides emotional support and physical care for children. Durkheim argues that gender roles are crucial for maintaining family balance and coordination. When family

members move outside these roles, the family must re-align to function properly. For instance, if a father takes on an expressive role, the mother must take on an instrumental role. Functionalist theory has faced criticism for downplaying individual actions and failing to account for social change. Critics argue that society and its institutions are the primary unit of analysis and that functionalism tends to attribute needs to society, as society is only alive as living individuals, and downplaying individual actions may hinder understanding of social institutions.

The Eggon tribe may face extinction if young people, responsible for marriage and family formation, avoid this due to the high cost of marriage in their society. To ensure continuity, Eggon people must encourage marriage and shape their social world, rather than being influenced by Nasarawa state's desire for improved marriage.

Methodology

This study employs a survey research design to enable the researchers to collect data and test the hypothesis quantitatively. The data for the research was gathered through the use of questionnaires administered during the fieldwork. The questionnaire comprises both structured questions with fixed responses to help the researcher confirm specific known facts about the study.

Though 400 copies of the research questionnaires were distributed only 320 (80%) of them were returned. While 80 (20%) questionnaires were not returned. Therefore, the 320 returned questionnaires were used as the final sample size for data analysis. The percentage of the returned questionnaires is considered sufficient for any realistic study based on Sekaran (2005), who argued that a 30 percent response rate is suitable for any good survey. The sample size of the study was determined using Yamanne (1967) sample determination formula and a Simple Random Sampling was employed in the selection of the sample size from the three major clans (Anzo, Eholo and Eggon Erro) within Nasarawa Eggon Local Government area of Nasarawa State. The population for this study is 367,100 which is the estimated population for 2023 (NPC 2023).

Using: Taro Yamane formula (1967).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where,

n = Sample size

N = Population of study (367,100)

e = Tolerable error (5%) i.e. (0.05)

$$n = \frac{367,100}{1 + 367,100(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{367,100}{918.75}$$

$$n = 399.56 \approx 400$$

Chi-square (χ^2) is employed as the analytical statistical tool to test the hypotheses at 95% level of confidence to determine the relationship between traditional marriage rites requirements and the desire for marriage in Eggon Land of Nassarawa Eggon local government area, Nasarawa State.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents Biodata

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	210	67.19
Female	110	32.81
Age		
18 - 27 years	75	23.44
28 - 37 years	100	31.25
38 - 47 years	60	18.75
48 - 57 years	45	14.06
58 - 67 years	25	7.81
68 and above	15	4.69
Marital Status		
Single	75	23.43
Married	150	46.88
Divorced	65	20.31
Widow	30	9.38

Source: Field Survey 2025

It can be observed from table 1 above that the majority of the respondents are between the age of 28 and 37, constituting 31%. This was followed by 23% of 18 to 27 years. The table also revealed that a large number of respondents (150) are married, 75 are single, 65 are divorced and 30 are widows.

Table 2: do you agree that high bride price demand in Eggon traditional marriage affects the desire to marry?

	Responses	Frequency
a.	Strongly agree	86
b.	Agree	75
c.	Disagree	55
d.	Strongly disagree	54
e.	Undecided	50
	Total	320

Source: Authors' computation 2025

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where:

χ^2 = chi-square

O = Observed value

E = Expected value

D.F = Degree of freedom

Here:

$$O = 320$$

$$E = \frac{320}{5} = 64$$

Degree of freedom (D.F) = 5-1 = 4

Table 3: Chi-Square Calculation

O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² /E
86	64	22	484	7.56
75	64	11	121	1.89
55	64	-9	81	1.26
54	64	-10	100	1.56
50	64	-14	196	3.06
Total				15.33

Source: Authors' computation 2025

From the table $\chi^2_{0.5,4} = 11.07$

Calculated $\chi^2 = 15.33$

Decision:

Since the calculated $\chi^2 = 15.33$ is greater than the tabulated 11.07 and it falls into the critical region, we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that "high pride price has a significant effect on the desire for marriage in Eggon land".

Table 4: High cost of feeding guests in Eggon traditional rites affects the desire for marriage.

	Responses	Frequency
a.	Strongly agree	85
b.	Agree	78
c.	Disagree	55
d.	Strongly disagree	54
e.	Undecided	40
	Total	320

Source: Field Survey 2025

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where:

χ^2 = chi-square

O = Observed value

E = Expected value

D.F = Degree of freedom

Here:

$$O = 320$$

$$E = \frac{320}{5} = 64$$

Degree of freedom (D.F) = 5-1 = 4

Table 5: Chi-Square Calculation

O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² /E
85	64	21	441	6.89
78	64	14	196	3.06
55	64	-9	81	1.26
54	64	-8	64	1.00
48	64	-16	256	4.00
Total				16.21

Source: Authors' computation 2025

From the table $\chi^2_{0.5,4} = 11.07$

Calculated $\chi^2 = 16.21$

Decision:

Since the calculated $\chi^2 = 16.21$ is greater than the tabulated 11.07 and it falls into the critical region, we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that “high costs of feeding the wedding guests have a significant effect on the desire for marriage in Eggon land”.

What can be done in order to improve the desire for marriage in Eggon?

Findings from the respondents revealed that the following suggestions should be taken into consideration in order to improve the desire for marriage in Eggon land:

1. The researcher therefore recommends that the bride price and bridal wealth payment should be moderately fixed.
2. Celebrants should not be given lists of the type of food to be cooked. They should be allowed to offer anything affordable to their well-wishers at the marriage ceremony.

Discussion of findings.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the socio-economic effects of Eggon traditional marriage rites on the desire for marriage. The study finds that imposing high bride prices for marriage ceremonies has resulted in an increasing number of unmarried young men and ladies. In another development, costs of feeding guests during the marriage ceremony which may in some instances be bigger than the bride price is also negatively affecting the desire to marry in Eggon land of Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations.

Bridal wealth payment harms the desire for marriage in Nasarawa state as viewed by 161 (50.31%) of the respondents. Food and drink payments harm the desire to marry in Nasarawa state as opted by 163 (50.935%) respondents. The cost of feeding well-wishers harms the desire to marry in Eggon land as supported by 163 (50.935%) respondents.

The researcher therefore recommends that bride price, Bridal wealth payment and Food /drinks payment should be moderately fixed in order to improve the desire for marriage in Nasarawa state.

Celebrants should not be bothered to feed well-wishers even though feeding does not have a negative effect on the desire for marriage. Celebrants should be given a space to offer anything affordable to their well-wishers at the marriage ceremony.

Celebrants should be allowed to offer anything they can afford, 159 (51.3%) testified that if Celebrants should be allowed to do Marriage without feeding well-wishers to improve the desire for marriage in Nasarawa state.

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