

## EARLY MARRIAGE AS A HUGE PROBLEM AGAINST EDUCATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

**Melano Beridze<sup>1</sup>, & Nano Patchkoria<sup>2</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Social and Political Sciences,  
Master's Program of Public Policy & Administration (Georgia)*

*<sup>2</sup>Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences,  
Master's Program of Education Sciences (Georgia)*

### Abstract

Early marriage is an official or unofficial union between two people, at least one of whom has not yet reached the age of 18. It is a complex phenomenon and many factors influence it, for example: financial situation, traditions, gender inequality, sense of insecurity and others. In Georgia, early marriage reduces access to education - therefore reducing employment opportunities. In the parliamentary report of 2012, we read that in 2011-2012, approximately 7,370 girls stopped receiving education before completing the basic level, one of the reasons for which is early marriage. It should be noted that a lot of time has passed since 2012 and the results are almost the same: in 2017, one of the non-governmental, research organizations in Georgia (Safar) conducted a study on "prevention of early marriage in Kvemo Kartli". During the prevention, it was revealed that there is an information vacuum in the villages about the defense mechanisms against early marriage, moreover, within the framework of this project, it was revealed that parents and students did not have information about the age of the majority, they did not know that early marriage is punishable by law, and many did not know who to contact in a critical situation. The target group of our research is the Georgian population. Specifically, those regions of Georgia, where the aforementioned is the most problematic. Within the framework of the study, we focus on the possibility of education and career advancement as a result of early marriage. The selection, methodology, and relevance of the issue increase the value of this research to society and inform us that it is necessary to focus on early marriage as an acute problem that opposes education and career development. The aim of our research is to study the impact of early marriage on education and career development. The research task is to determine: · What is the attitude of young Georgians who are in early marriage towards getting an education; · What attitudes, beliefs, social norms and practices exist in the community itself around early/childhood marriage and how does it affect their education? · What risks and protection factors exist in the country regarding this type of social practice?. One of the methods of qualitative sociological research - A biographical-narrative interview- will be used to obtain primary sociological data. More specifically, by using a Biographical-narrative interview, direct interaction with respondents, it will be possible to observe non-verbal communication, clarify respondents' answers and ask additional questions.

**Keywords:** *Early marriage, education, career development, social norms, risks.*

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### 1. Introduction

Early marriage is a formal or informal union between two people, at least one of whom has not yet reached the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2017). Marriage under the age of 18 may be forced or the result of the child's immature consent. In any case, early marriage is a fundamental violation of human rights, because at this age the child does not have informed consent to the marriage.

According to psychologists and reproductive medicine specialists, early marriage violates a child's right to health, education, equality, and living in an environment free from violence and exploitation. First of all, early marriage should be considered in terms of gender. It should be noted that early marriage affects girls and boys differently.

The number of boys in early marriage is much less than that of girls. Worldwide, 1 in 5 women in the age group of 20-24 years are married before adulthood, and in the case of men - 1 in 30. (UNICEF, 2019). In addition, girls in early marriage may become victims of family violence and sexual pressure, as well as face health problems. Like boys, girls are forced to stop receiving education at school. Early

marriage is a pressing issue all over the world, as recent data from the United Nations Children's Fund makes clear.

Early marriage is a complex phenomenon influenced by many factors. Among them are: economic factors, traditions, religion, gender inequality, feelings of insecurity, and others. These factors influence the decision of adolescents to marry early. On the other hand, early marriage also affects the child's development.

It should be noted that early marriage is one of the barriers to access to education and success for children. In one of the research reports we read that, "The younger the age at the time of marriage, the lower the probability that girls will have acquired critical skills and developed their capacity to manage adverse situations that may affect their overall welfare and economic well-being" (FMRWG, 2003).

The harmful practice of early/childhood marriage is not uncommon in Georgia. According to the Civil Code of Georgia, the age of marriage is 18. According to this code, a couple cannot officially register their marriage until they reach the age of 18.

As for the principle of legal regulation of early marriage in Georgia, according to Article 140 of the Criminal Code of Georgia (sexual penetration into the body of a person under the age of 16), sexual intercourse with a person under the age of 16 is punishable by imprisonment for 7 to 9 years.

Forced marriage is also punished according to Article 150 of the Criminal Code. It should also be noted that there are exceptions and inconsistencies in the legislation of Georgia, which makes the legal regulation of early marriage more problematic, for example, if a teenager wants to start a family at the age of 16, based on the consent of the partner. Based on the existing practice of legal regulation, the person cannot be held criminally liable.

Several studies have been conducted in Georgia to study early marriage. UNICEF 2020 data reveals that 17% of women living in Georgia were married before the age of 18. With this indicator, Georgia occupies one of the leading positions in the world.

It should also be noted that the available data are not complete, because early marriages are not officially registered, therefore, accurate information about registered early marriages and their practice of continuing education is insufficient to reveal certain trends.

In Georgia, the practice of early marriage is found almost everywhere, although its causes differ according to region, where ethnic and religious minorities live, the rate of child marriage is much higher. This fact is explained by the traditions, patriarchal values, and unwritten laws here. Also, the stereotypes and social stigmas that exist here, which refer to the control of women's sexuality and the prohibition of sexual intercourse before marriage, often become provoking factors of early marriage. (UNFPA, 2014).

In addition to the fact that there are serious challenges at the legislative level of Georgia, it is important to be interested in this issue from the point of view of compliance with global goals. The issue addresses the UN Sustainable Development Goals - quality education, reduced inequality, and good health/well-being as global priorities.

Thus, appropriate policy actions should be developed around the social inequalities, developmental delays, health challenges and demographic impacts resulting from early marriage practices in Georgia. Therefore, the issue remains an actual problem for Georgia, because Georgia is actively working towards the introduction of European standards in terms of economic, human rights and sustainable development.

## **2. Objectives**

The study aims to determine the impact of early marriage on education and career development. The following tasks were developed to realize the goal:

To investigate what is the attitude of the respondents who are in early marriage towards receiving education;

To explore what attitudes, beliefs, social norms and practices exist in the community itself about early/childhood marriage and how this affects their education.

To outline what risks and protective factors exist in the country regarding this type of social practice.

## **3. Design**

According to the Civil Law of Georgia, early marriage is official Or an informal relationship between two people, at least one of whom is not reached the age of 18, that the person is considered a child. Accordingly, the object of our research is those individuals who created a family before adulthood.

The subject of the research is to study the life experiences of the respondents and their evaluations of early marriage.

As for the selection of the study and the description of the selection model, it involves the determination of the group participating in our study directly from the target group of the study. Since we are conducting qualitative sociological research, where research units are selected sequentially, we use the dominant form of sampling - purposive non-probability sampling.

It is based on the reflections/views/assessments, and life experiences of the purposefully selected respondents, individuals in early marriage. The selection criteria were also taken into account in the research.

1. The respondent must have been in an early marriage (one who started a family before the age of 18)
2. The respondent should have had at least 10 years of early marriage experience

#### 4. Methods

A qualitative sociological research method - biographical-narrative interview - was used to collect research data. Through this method, we were able to investigate the existing problem in depth based on the life experiences of the respondents. As part of the biographical-narrative interview, the respondents told personal stories/narratives from their lives that played a turning role in their lives.

In this case, the interviewer focused on the narrative strategies that the respondents described in their experiences. The main reason for using this method to investigate early marriage as an important challenge to education and career development is that this problem has long been important in the experience of individuals and this issue is very sensitive for them.

At the initial stage of data analysis, data obtained based on biographical narrative interviews were grouped, then these data were coded, and later each code was combined into appropriate categories. After data coding-categorization, the categories were compared to each other and existing studies. Finally, we formulated a theoretical model of the research problem.

As part of the research, a biographical-narrative interview were conducted with 15 respondents and primary empirical data were analyzed.

#### 5. Discussion

As a result of the study, biographical-narrative interviews were conducted with 15 respondents who were married at the age of 18 and who had at least 10 years of early marriage experience.

During the Biographical-narrative interview the majority of the respondents outlined their practices related to early marriage such as: expectations related to marriage, reasons for early marriage, the issue of integration with the new environment, challenges in cohabitation after early marriage for both men and women, social consequences of early marriage.

The majority of respondents singled out the lack of opportunity to continue education after marriage as a negative result of early marriage. Most of the respondents participating in the research did not have the opportunity to continue their education after getting married.

The reason for this was the increased responsibilities in the family, which meant taking care of the spouse and children; Lack of time, and unwillingness to continue studying. Because most of the respondents could not continue their studies, they could not arrange a career.

*"Actually, when you create a family, you don't think about getting an education and realizing it. I am a mother and it is my duty to take care of my child, raise him and give him a proper education. It turns out that you can't create your own "me" anymore and you can't establish yourself in society". (Female, 29 years old, married, Batumi, 233-236).*

*"No, I did not continue studying." When I got married, more responsibilities were added to me. To be honest, I didn't even think about continuing my studies. I created a family, then I had children, so I didn't think about studying anymore. When I let them grow up, I realized that I needed to study, but it was too late." (Female, 33 years old, married, village, 1572-1575)*

According to the respondents, early marriage brings more negative social consequences for the couple than positive ones. As negative consequences, they mentioned physical and mental health problems, premature pregnancy in girls and related risks, financial problems, violence in the family, termination of education and others. Based on the purpose of the research, the focus was mainly on the issue of the termination of education as a negative result of the practice of early marriage.

It should be noted that the majority of the respondents participating in the study created their families in the 90s of the last century. The difficult socio-economic situation at that time had a great impact on the lives of most of the respondents participating in the study. After graduation, due to the difficult social situation in the family, they could not continue their education and that is why they decided to get married.

The research also revealed that for a small part of the respondents (3 respondents) early marriage was not a barrier to their education and career creation. At the same time as they got married, they were able to continue their studies and get higher education, in which they received moral and financial support from their parents.

Some of the respondents managed to continue their studies and get higher education. One of the respondents even got a job, although according to her estimation, after getting married early, she faced barriers in her career path in the sense that what she could have achieved much earlier, she managed relatively late. Despite this, the respondent does not regret his decision to get married at an early age.

## 6. Conclusions

The evaluations of the majority of the respondents participating in the research are in agreement with each other regarding getting education, career development and employment after marriage. According to them, the inability to continue studying after marriage was due to the following reasons:

After getting married, with increased responsibilities in the family, difficult social and economic situation, and because of all this, the lack of desire to continue studying. According to some of the respondents, early marriage was not a barrier to getting an education or creating a career.

Despite their early marriage, they managed to graduate from university. According to their assessment, they were able to combine studies and family responsibilities through the active help of parents, which is manifested in the fact that they left their children with their parents while the respondents were studying.

The respondents' evaluations also agree in the aspect where they note that at that time employment and providing for the family independently was impossible without the help of parents. Thus, the respondents' evaluations regarding the availability of education and the possibility of employment after marriage are uniform.

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