

Effects of the Transformation of Bride Wealth on Stability in Marriage among the Bukusu

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Abstract- *This study examines the effects of bride wealth transformation on marital stability among the Bukusu community in western Kenya. Bride wealth, a traditional practice involving the transfer of gifts from the groom's family to the bride's family, has undergone significant changes due to factors such as modernization, urbanization, and changing socio-economic conditions. The commercialization of bride wealth, characterized by high financial demands and a focus on material goods, has raised concerns about its impact on marital relationships. Utilizing a descriptive survey research design, this study aims to investigate the consequences of bride wealth transformation on various aspects of marital stability, including the occurrence of separation and divorce, domestic violence, women's reproductive and property ownership rights, and the prevalence of cohabitation. The study employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions, to gather data from a sample of 200 married individuals in Bungoma County. The findings indicate that the commercialization of bride wealth has contributed to financial strain, marital conflicts, and power imbalances within marriages. The study reveals a significant relationship between bride wealth transformation and increased instances of separation, divorce, and domestic violence. Furthermore, women's reproductive and property ownership rights have been compromised, limiting their autonomy and well-being. The study also highlights the declining marriage rates and increased cohabitation among the Bukusu, with potential implications for family stability and child well-being. The findings underscore the need for community sensitization, policy interventions, economic empowerment programs, and support services to address the negative consequences of bride wealth transformation and promote healthy, equitable marriages among the Bukusu community.*

Indexed Terms- *Bride Wealth, Marital Stability, Bukusu Community*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bukusu, a sub-group of the Luhya community in western Kenya, have a rich cultural heritage that includes the practice of bride wealth, known as "khufunja" or "khukhwaula." Bride wealth is a traditional custom in which the groom's family provides gifts, such as livestock or money, to the bride's family as a symbol of appreciation and to establish a bond between the two families (Wafula, 2012). This practice has been an integral part of the Bukusu marriage system for generations, serving to validate marriages, provide security for women, and ensure the continuity of family lineages (Barasa, 2012).

However, in recent times, the practice of bride wealth among the Bukusu has undergone significant transformations due to various factors such as modernization, urbanization, and changing socio-economic conditions (Wangila, 2017). These changes have raised concerns about the impact of bride wealth transformation on the stability of marriages within the Bukusu community. It is crucial to examine how the evolving nature of bride wealth affects marital relationships, as stable marriages are essential for the well-being of individuals, families, and the community as a whole.

Studying the effects of bride wealth transformation on marital stability among the Bukusu is important for several reasons. First, it contributes to the understanding of how traditional cultural practices adapt and influence modern-day marriages. Second, it sheds light on the potential challenges and conflicts that may arise due to changes in bride wealth practices, such as commercialization, which can strain marital relationships. Third, the findings of this study can inform policy decisions and interventions aimed at promoting healthy marriages and family well-being within the Bukusu community and other societies that practice bride wealth.

The objectives of this research are: 1) To examine the effects of bride wealth transformation, such as commercialization, on marital stability among the Bukusu; 2) To investigate the relationship between bride wealth transformation and the occurrence of separation and divorce; 3) To explore the link between bride wealth transformation and domestic violence in marriages; 4) To assess the impact of bride wealth transformation on women's reproductive and property ownership rights within marriage; and 5) To analyze the effects of bride wealth transformation on marriage rates and cohabitation among the Bukusu.

The research questions guiding this study are: 1) How does the commercialization of bride wealth affect marital stability among the Bukusu?; 2) To what extent does bride wealth transformation contribute to the incidence of separation and divorce?; 3) What is the relationship between bride wealth transformation and domestic violence in Bukusu marriages?; 4) How does bride wealth transformation impact women's reproductive and property ownership rights within marriage?; and 5) What are the effects of bride wealth transformation on marriage rates and cohabitation among the Bukusu?

By addressing these objectives and questions, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between bride wealth transformation and marital stability among the Bukusu community, contributing to the broader discourse on cultural practices and their influence on marriage and family life.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bride wealth, a cultural practice common in many African societies, has been the subject of numerous studies examining its effects on marriage and family life. Hague et al. (2011) noted that bride wealth serves as a symbol of appreciation and establishes a bond between the groom's and bride's families. However, they also observed that the practice could lead to the commodification of women and contribute to domestic violence. Muthegheki et al. (2012) found that high bride wealth demands could strain marital relationships and increase the likelihood of separation and divorce.

In the context of the Bukusu community, several factors have contributed to the transformation of bride wealth. Wangila (2017) identified modernization, urbanization, and changing socio-economic conditions as key drivers of change. The introduction of a cash economy and Western education has altered the traditional understanding and practice of bride wealth (Chege & Sifuna, 2006). Consequently, bride wealth has become increasingly commercialized, with demands for higher amounts of money and material goods (Mbaye, 2013).

The transformation of bride wealth among the Bukusu has significant implications for marital stability. Khasakhala-Mwenesi et al. (2004) found that high bride wealth demands could lead to marital conflicts and domestic violence, as men may feel entitled to control their wives due to the high price paid. Additionally, women may feel pressured to stay in abusive marriages to avoid the shame and financial burden of returning the bride wealth (Eryenyu, 2014). To understand the impact of bride wealth transformation on marital stability, various theoretical frameworks can be applied. The social exchange theory, proposed by Homans (1958), suggests that human relationships are based on a cost-benefit analysis. In the context of bride wealth, this theory posits that if the costs of marriage (e.g., high bride wealth) outweigh the benefits, it may lead to marital instability (Bloch & Rao, 2002). The feminist theory, on the other hand, argues that bride wealth perpetuates gender inequality and the subordination of women (Tamale, 2004). This inequality can manifest in various forms, such as domestic violence and the violation of women's reproductive and property rights, ultimately undermining marital stability.

The theory of marriage markets, developed by Becker (1974), can also be applied to understand the effects of bride wealth transformation. This theory suggests that the value placed on women in the marriage market is determined by factors such as education, beauty, and family background. As bride wealth becomes commercialized, it may lead to a distortion of the marriage market, with women being valued primarily for their potential to attract high bride wealth (Arunachalam & Logan, 2016).

In conclusion, the existing literature on bride wealth and its effects on marriage provides a foundation for understanding the impact of bride wealth transformation on marital stability among the Bukusu. The factors contributing to this transformation, such as modernization and changing socio-economic conditions, have been identified. Various theoretical frameworks, including the social exchange theory, feminist theory, and the theory of marriage markets, offer insights into the complex relationship between bride wealth transformation and marital stability. This study aims to build upon this existing knowledge and contribute to the understanding of the specific effects of bride wealth transformation on marital stability within the Bukusu community

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine the effects of bride wealth transformation on marital stability among the Bukusu community. Descriptive surveys are useful for gathering data on attitudes, opinions, and experiences of a specific population (Creswell, 2014). This design allowed for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

The study area was Bungoma County in western Kenya, which is predominantly inhabited by the Bukusu community. The target population consisted of married individuals, both men and women, who had experienced the process of bride wealth payment. The inclusion criteria for participants were: (a) being married for at least one year, (b) having participated in the bride wealth process, and (c) residing in Bungoma County.

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques was used to select study participants. Purposive sampling allowed for the selection of information-rich cases that could provide valuable insights into the research problem (Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling, on the other hand, involved the identification of initial participants who then referred the researcher to other potential participants (Creswell, 2014). This technique was particularly useful when studying sensitive topics or hard-to-reach populations. A sample size of 200 married individuals (100 men

and 100 women) was selected for the study, ensuring adequate representation of the target population.

Data were collected using a combination of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions, covering topics such as the experience of bride wealth payment, perceptions of bride wealth transformation, and its effects on marital stability. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of the sample (20 men and 20 women) to gain deeper insights into their experiences and opinions. Focus group discussions were held with groups of 6-8 participants, separated by gender, to explore collective views and experiences related to bride wealth transformation and marital stability.

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and chi-square tests, to examine the relationships between variables. Qualitative data from the open-ended questions, interviews, and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. The analysis was guided by the research objectives and theoretical frameworks discussed in the literature review.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Commercialization of Bride Wealth

The study findings reveal that the commercialization of bride wealth has a significant impact on marital stability among the Bukusu. A majority of the participants (85%) reported that the emphasis on monetary value and material goods in bride wealth negotiations has shifted the focus away from the symbolic and cultural significance of the practice. This commercialization has led to increased financial strain on couples, with 78% of male participants expressing difficulty in meeting the high bride wealth demands. Consequently, 62% of the participants indicated that financial pressures related to bride wealth contribute to marital conflicts and instability.

The commercialization of bride wealth has implications for the perceived value and respect for women in marriage. Participants in focus group discussions observed that high bride wealth payments could lead to a sense of entitlement among men, who may view their wives as commodities. This perception can undermine the equality and mutual respect between spouses, leading to a power imbalance in the relationship. Additionally, the financial burden of bride wealth may cause resentment and strain on marital relationships, particularly when couples struggle to meet other financial obligations.

4.2 Separation and Divorce

The study found a significant relationship between bride wealth transformation and the occurrence of separation and divorce among the Bukusu. In the survey, 45% of participants reported knowing couples who had separated or divorced due to issues related to bride wealth. Interviews with key informants revealed that the inability to pay the agreed-upon bride wealth or the failure to meet additional financial demands from in-laws could trigger marital breakdowns.

Changes in bride wealth practices, such as the inflation of bride wealth amounts and the introduction of new elements like expensive gifts and lavish ceremonies, have contributed to marital instability. These changes place a significant financial strain on couples, leading to constant negotiations and renegotiations of bride wealth, which can erode trust and respect in the marriage. Moreover, the social stigma attached to the non-payment or incomplete payment of bride wealth can put pressure on couples to separate or divorce, as it may be seen as a sign of disrespect to the bride's family.

4.3 Domestic Violence

The study reveals a link between bride wealth transformation and domestic violence in Bukusu marriages. In the survey, 58% of female participants reported experiencing or knowing someone who had experienced domestic violence related to bride wealth issues. Interviews with survivors of domestic violence highlighted that disputes over bride wealth payment, such as the timing or amount of payment, could trigger violent episodes.

The commercialization of bride wealth has contributed to a sense of ownership and entitlement among some men, who may resort to violence to assert control over their wives. Focus group discussions revealed that the high value placed on bride wealth could lead to the perception that women are bought and owned by their husbands, thus justifying abusive behavior. Additionally, the financial stress associated with meeting bride wealth obligations can exacerbate tensions within the household, increasing the risk of domestic violence.

4.4 Violation of Female Reproductive and Property Ownership Rights

The study findings indicate that bride wealth transformation has significant consequences for women's reproductive and property ownership rights in Bukusu marriages. In the survey, 72% of female participants reported limited decision-making power regarding their reproductive choices, with husbands and in-laws often dictating the number and spacing of children. Interviews revealed that the payment of high bride wealth could lead to the expectation that women should bear many children to justify the investment made in them.

Regarding property ownership, 65% of female participants reported challenges in asserting their rights to marital property, particularly in cases of separation or divorce. The payment of bride wealth was often used to justify men's control over marital assets, with women being viewed as property themselves. Focus group discussions highlighted that the commercialization of bride wealth had exacerbated this problem, as men may feel entitled to a larger share of marital property based on the amount of bride wealth paid.

The violation of women's reproductive and property ownership rights has significant implications for their autonomy and well-being within marriage. Limited control over reproductive choices can lead to negative health outcomes and strain marital relationships. The inability to assert property rights can leave women vulnerable to economic insecurity and exploitation, particularly in the event of marital breakdown.

4.5 Declining Marriage and Cohabitation

The study reveals that bride wealth transformation has contributed to declining marriage rates and increased cohabitation among the Bukusu. In the survey, 68% of participants observed a trend towards delayed or foregone marriage, with young couples opting to cohabit instead. Interviews with young adults highlighted the financial pressures associated with high bride wealth demands as a key factor in their decision to avoid or postpone marriage.

Focus group discussions revealed that the commercialization of bride wealth had created a perception that marriage is a financial transaction rather than a sacred union. This perception has led to changing attitudes towards marriage, with some individuals viewing it as a burden rather than a desirable life goal. Cohabitation has become an attractive alternative, allowing couples to share living expenses and build intimacy without the financial and social pressures of bride wealth.

The decline in marriage rates and the rise in cohabitation have implications for family stability and child well-being. Participants expressed concerns about the lack of legal and social recognition for cohabiting couples, which could leave partners and children vulnerable in the event of relationship breakdowns. Additionally, the absence of the traditional support systems associated with formalized marriages could impact the overall well-being and security of families.

In conclusion, the study findings demonstrate that the transformation of bride wealth has significant effects on marital stability among the Bukusu. The commercialization of bride wealth, characterized by high financial demands and a focus on material goods, has contributed to marital conflicts, separation, divorce, and domestic violence. Women's reproductive and property ownership rights have been compromised, limiting their autonomy and well-being within marriage. Furthermore, the financial pressures associated with bride wealth have led to declining marriage rates and increased cohabitation, with potential implications for family stability and child well-being. These findings highlight the need for community dialogues, policy interventions, and support systems to address the negative consequences

of bride wealth transformation and promote healthy, equitable marriages among the Bukusu

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to examine the effects of bride wealth transformation on marital stability among the Bukusu community in western Kenya. The findings reveal that the commercialization of bride wealth, characterized by high financial demands and a focus on material goods, has had significant negative impacts on marital relationships. The main findings of the study are:

1. Commercialization of bride wealth has shifted the focus away from the symbolic and cultural significance of the practice, leading to financial strain and marital conflicts.
2. Bride wealth transformation has contributed to increased instances of separation and divorce, as couples struggle to meet the financial obligations and social expectations associated with the practice.
3. High bride wealth payments have been linked to domestic violence, as some men assert control and ownership over their wives based on the amount paid.
4. Women's reproductive and property ownership rights have been compromised due to the transformation of bride wealth, limiting their autonomy and well-being within marriage.
5. Bride wealth transformation has led to declining marriage rates and increased cohabitation among the Bukusu, with potential implications for family stability and child well-being.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to address the negative effects of bride wealth transformation and promote marital stability among the Bukusu:

1. Engage the Bukusu community in dialogues and educational programs to raise awareness about the negative consequences of bride wealth commercialization and promote a return to the traditional cultural values associated with the practice.
2. Collaborate with local authorities and policymakers to develop guidelines and regulations that discourage the inflation of bride wealth and protect the rights of women in

marriage. This may include setting reasonable limits on bride wealth amounts and establishing mechanisms for dispute resolution.

3. Implement economic empowerment initiatives, particularly targeting young couples, to alleviate the financial pressures associated with bride wealth payments. These programs could include entrepreneurship training, financial literacy education, and access to micro-credit facilities.
4. Offer premarital counseling and support services to couples, focusing on communication, conflict resolution, and financial management skills. These services can help couples navigate the challenges associated with bride wealth and build strong, equitable relationships.

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