

Research Article

Excavating the Contemporary Moral Implications of Exorbitant Kaa(Bride Price) on Mumuye Women of Taraba State,North - East, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Exorbitant kaa (bride price), a deeply ingrained cultural practice in some Nigerian societies, including the Mumuye people of Taraba State, Northeast Nigeria, has significant moral implications for women. The practice involves paying a substantial amount of money or goods to the bride's family in exchange for her hand in marriage. While intended to strengthen family ties and demonstrate commitment, exorbitant bride prices can have far-reaching consequences. The study made use of a qualitative research approach, which involved the use of data from primary and secondary sources. The study unveils that, specifically, high bride prices can lead to financial strain on the groom's family, potentially resulting in debt and economic instability. Moreover, treating women as commodities can erode their dignity and autonomy, reducing them to mere objects of exchange. This practice also perpetuates patriarchal norms, reinforcing the notion that women are subordinate to men, and can limit women's access to education and employment opportunities. To investigate these implications, a qualitative research approach was employed, involving in-depth interviews with Mumuye women and focus group discussions with community leaders. The study reveals that addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including education and awareness campaigns to shift cultural attitudes, legislative measures to regulate bride prices and prevent exploitation, and initiatives to promote women's economic empowerment and autonomy, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and just society for all.

1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage exists in virtually every human society. The essence of bride price payment in every culture is a legal formality that connotes a ceremony performed by a prospective husband to obtain a wife for marriage to become realisable. *Kaa* (bride price) given on a woman varies from one locality to another among the Mumuye. However, this bride price is subject to negotiation between the two families. It is desirable that every marriage ceremony should undertake bride price unless in exceptional cases (Nguemo 96).

Bride price payment among the Mumuye varies from clan to clan, family to family, or community to community. Interestingly, "bride price may range from twenty to sixty well-fed castrated and mixed female goats,

cows, or money (*tsasureng* - iron monetary bars) used in the past, which has been replaced with Western currencies today" (Dong and Rudanyuba 26). This money was used as the only fastest means of transaction in the olden days, prior to modern currency mints. It is noteworthy that some Mumuye communities exchange marital items, which may include long durations of seven to eight years of services rendered, especially farming, building of rooms, barns, and brewing of *saa/sis* (local alcoholic beverages) for the parents of the girl by the intending husband (28).

It is a prerogative of fulfilling an obligation built on unity and the purpose of procreation. Mbiti asserts interestingly that "failure to get married under normal circumstances means that the person concerned has rejected society, and society rejected him in return" (133). However, the survival of any kinship in the social structure of any African society depends on marriage, which normally takes place after bride price has been paid.

Marriage involves not only interpersonal relations but also the analysis of inter-community relations (Magesa 110). Some Mumuye families fix high bride prices on their daughters due to the resources they invested in the girls or simply because it is a cultural way of doing things that others can afford, while others opt for less bride price.

This scenario has indeed affected many men from marrying Mumuye ladies due to the exorbitant bride price fixed on them, and the ladies remain unmarried. Today, most men are not interested in paying high bride prices; instead, they opt for families where the bride price is lesser and affordable. It is considered exorbitant and exploitative, and its impacts are felt by those ladies and their families when no one dares approach them due to the fear of high bride price.

Marriage, which is supposed to be defined on the basis of love and respect, has been observed to be affected by high bride prices fixed on some ladies, responsible for breeding a lot of moral ills to their families and society at large. Those who are less privileged view this system as exploitative, wicked, and a total deprivation of the ladies to be married by intended suitors, which at the end, some of them cannot afford to do so.

Exorbitant bride price has succeeded in determining the fate of Mumuye women in contemporary times, amidst the fallen shortage of men due to their involvement in fending for their families. Hence, there is a high vacuum that needs to be filled; if not, Mumuye ladies will remain unmarried and become slaves in their own homes, where men will go to other families that have less bride price and get married there, leaving the exorbitant women to wither and suffer shame.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Sylvia Walby's Theory of Patriarchy, formulated in 1990. Walby defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices through which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. She identifies six structures: household production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, and cultural institutions. The theory is explicit because it treats gender inequality as structural rather than incidental, and it allows for historical change in the form patriarchy takes. For the present work on exorbitant *kaa* among Mumuye women of Taraba State, Northeast Nigeria, two structures are essential here:

1. Household production and economic relations

Walby succinctly argues that patriarchy regulates women's labour and property ownership within marriage. When *kaa* is inflated beyond customary levels, it operates as economic control. The payment shifts from symbolic exchange to monetary debt. This creates a material condition in which the woman's status is tied to the value transferred. The contemporary moral implication is commodification, which means, marriage becomes a debt relation, and the woman's capacity and status to negotiate or exit is reduced by the outstanding stipulated customary obligation.

2. Cultural institutions and symbolic legitimization

Walby further shows that cultural symbols sustain patriarchy by making male dominance appear natural and legitimate. Among the Mumuye, *kaa* traditionally symbolises alliance between lineages and recognition of the woman's natal family. Under contemporary pressure of monetisation and status competition, the symbol is completely distorted. The practice retains its form but its meaning changes from reciprocity to a mere product purchase. This produces symbolic violence, where women internalise the idea that their worth is measured by the amount of *kaa* paid.

In applying Walby's theory, the study argues that exorbitant *kaa* is a contemporary adaptation of patriarchy. As Mumuye women gain access to education and wage labour, higher *kaa* demands function to reassert male authority in a new economic world context has come to stay to challenge the system. The moral excavation therefore focuses on how a traditional practice, when inflated, shifts from social cohesion to gendered subordination, which clearly undermined the sanctity of the opposite sex.

3. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

Contemporary: Pertaining to the present time or happening in the present time.

Exorbitant: This denotes something whose value is very high, expensive, or costly. According to Hornby, "(of price) much too high" (512).

Examining: To carefully inspect, investigate, or scrutinize something in detail. (This term replaces "exhuming" which was inappropriately used in the original title.)

Kaa (Bride Price): This refers to the amount of items negotiated by both parents of a lady and a suitor who wants to marry such a lady. Pamu and Martins assert that "*Kaa* one of the most revered customary practices that every Mumuye is expected to pay to a parent of a girl before the lady legally becomes his own" (125). Nyabun defines price to mean "the compensation paid to the bride's family for the transfer to the groom's family of the bride's productive capacities or her ability to work" (25). Dong et al. state that, what constitutes bride price among the Mumuye includes "goats (*jaa/beh*), *lantang/dam/lakn* (burial shroud), and some *tsasureng* (money) and even services which are paid on a woman as bride price" (97). For Nguemo, "bride price is the legal form of marriage. Initially, it was not really meant to be money, but also meant to be gifts for the parents of the prospective bride, or with a view to buying other things" (97). Mbiti holds that "it is a fixed amount of presents given to the girl's family, which may include cows, traditional beer, money, foodstuff, and other articles" (140). Ezekiel describes bride price to mean "the farm labour undertaken by the man on the bride's parents for some years. It could also include building thatched huts and a granary well-stocked with enough foodstuff and other equivalents to monetary terms" (Oral Interview).

Moral: Pertaining to morality, rightness, and wrongness, good and evil (Fairchild 137).

Woman: A general term for the feminine half of humanity. Specifically, a mature human being of the female sex (339).

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of social phenomena, particularly the lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of participants regarding the moral implications of exorbitant bride price among the Mumuye people. Qualitative research is particularly suited for studies that seek to understand the meanings people attach to their social and cultural practices (Creswell, 2014). The design enabled the researchers to capture the nuanced perspectives of community members, including women affected by high bride price, family members, and community leaders.

4.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Taraba State, North-East Nigeria, specifically among the Mumuye ethnic group. The Mumuye are predominantly found in Jalingo Local Government Area, Zing Local Government Area, and parts of Yorro Local Government Area of Taraba State. The Mumuye people are one of the largest ethnic groups in the state, with a rich cultural heritage that includes the practice of *kaa* (bride price). The study sites included various Mumuye communities such as Iware, Dong 'A,' Dong 'C,' Dong-Gamu, Zing, Yakoko, G/Chede, Binyeri, Tola, Shavon/Mile Six, J/Yinu, Kassa, Lamma, Lankaviri, Monkin, Kugong, Mayo Dassa, Kpanti Napu, and Lau. These communities were selected to ensure representation across different clans and geographical locations within Mumuyeland.

4.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study involved a total sample of 19 participants. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation in qualitative research, where data collection continues until no new information emerges from participants (Guest et al., 2006). The participants included 8 males and 11 females, representing various occupational categories including farmers, teachers, civil servants, students, housewives, potters, wine brewers, applicants, graduates, and chief priests.

The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling combined with snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was used to deliberately select participants who possessed relevant knowledge and experience regarding the practice of *kaa* and its implications for women. This included elders, chief priests, women of marriageable age, married women, and community leaders. Snowball sampling was subsequently used where initial participants referred the researchers to other knowledgeable community members. This combination of sampling techniques ensured that the study captured diverse perspectives from different segments of the Mumuye community.

4.3.1 Participant Selection Criteria

Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- Membership of the Mumuye ethnic group

- Age of 18 years and above
- Willingness to participate in the study
- Knowledge of the *kaa* system and its implications
- Representation across different clans, communities, and occupational categories

4.4 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data collection was conducted using two primary instruments:

4.4.1 In-depth Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 participants across the selected Mumuye communities. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and were guided by an interview protocol that covered topics such as:

- The nature and origin of *kaa* in Mumuye society
- Causes of exorbitant bride price
- Contemporary moral implications of high bride price
- Effects of exorbitant bride price on women
- Recommendations for addressing the issue

Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the participant's knowledge and willingness to share. Interviews were conducted in the local language (Mumuye) and Hausa, where necessary, and were later transcribed and translated into English. Notes were taken during the interviews with the permission of participants.

4.4.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Two focus group discussions were conducted with community leaders and women in selected communities. Each FGD consisted of 6-8 participants and lasted approximately 2 hours. The FGDs provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the issues collectively, share experiences, and generate rich data through group interaction. The FGDs were guided by a discussion guide covering similar themes as the interview protocol.

4.5 Fieldwork Period

Fieldwork was conducted between November 2024 and April 2026. This extended period allowed the researchers to conduct interviews across different seasons and to verify information through repeated visits to the communities. The specific dates of interviews are indicated in the List of Informants.

4.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis approach, which involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved the following steps:

1. **Data Familiarization:** The researchers read and re-read the transcribed interviews and FGD data to become familiar with the content.
2. **Coding:** Initial codes were generated based on recurring ideas, concepts, and statements in the data.

Coding was both deductive (based on the theoretical framework) and inductive (emerging from the data).

3. **Theme Development:** Codes were grouped into potential themes based on their relationships and relevance to the research questions.
4. **Theme Review:** Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data.
5. **Theme Definition:** Final themes were clearly defined and named.
6. **Writing Up:** Findings were presented with supporting quotes from participants, organized according to the themes developed.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles of research involving human participants. The following ethical measures were observed:

1. **Informed Consent:** All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Verbal and written consent was obtained from all participants.
2. **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Participants were assured of confidentiality. Where names are used in the findings, they are pseudonyms unless participants explicitly consented to the use of their real names. The researchers used coded identifiers in the data analysis process.
3. **Privacy:** Interviews were conducted in private settings where participants felt comfortable sharing sensitive information.
4. **Sensitivity:** Given the sensitive nature of topics such as prostitution, suicidal tendencies, and moral decay, the researchers approached these discussions with utmost sensitivity and respect. Participants were not pressured to discuss issues they were uncomfortable with.
5. **Cultural Respect:** The researchers respected the cultural norms and values of the Mumuye community throughout the research process.
6. **Beneficence and Non-maleficence:** The study was designed to minimize any potential harm to participants and to maximize benefits in terms of understanding and addressing the issue of exorbitant bride price.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Historical Origin and Nature of Kaa in Mumuye Society

Kaa (bride price) was not initially a form of marriage but gifts that were exchanged between a man who initiated the idea of marrying a lady of his choice and her parents. It is a universal concept that has been in practice since the creation of man, and exchange of love was made tangible by paying bride price.

Among the diverse Mumuye, bride price is meant to demonstrate a contract that is about to be religiously endorsed as legal. No amount of *Kaa* can justify the value of life. Hence, bride price is a symbol of tying a sacred knot (Avonapu, Oral Interview).

Anciently, parents offered their daughters to men of repute to have them as wives on the offer of symbols of exchange based on the financial or economic strength of the persons, as negotiated and accepted to be paid. Parents in those days chose wives or husbands for their children, taking into consideration the character and hard work of such families (Deega, Oral Interview). Goroba observed in a similar manner that "fathers were known to have the prerogative of choosing marriage partners for their sons and daughters, but today, the reverse is the case, where only a few agree or have a say in the selection process and even on the bride price" (16). Nyabun reiterated similarly that "the nature and origin of *Kaa* is a symbolic act of formal procedure that is constituted in an institution rather than an economic transaction. It advocates that the value of a wife is more than the value of a vehicle" (24).

The historical evidence suggests that the *kaa* system among the Mumuye was originally designed to serve social and symbolic functions rather than economic ones. The practice facilitated the formation of alliances between families, provided a framework for the recognition of marriage, and ensured the legitimacy of children born within the union. The items exchanged were often symbolic and could be accumulated by the groom's family without undue hardship.

5.2 Significance of Kaa in Mumuye Religio-Cultural Worldview

The relevance of *kaa* in Mumuye religio-cultural worldview cannot be over-emphasized because it is the institution that guarantees the offshoot of a new spring (life). Some of the relevance includes:

- i. The legitimacy attached to the place of bride price in Mumuye culture is the definition of accepted mediums of any sacred institution of marriage to be considered sacred and sealed.
- ii. Bride price payment gives dignity to the woman who has been properly married based on the satisfaction of customary law in the eyes of the entire family and community.
- iii. Bride price boosts the morale of parents and their daughters that they are worth it and that their marriage has been legally satisfied according to the standard to be married.
- iv. It challenges the illegality of marriage as conceived and contracted by some people on the need for them to wake up to the challenges of paying bride price so as to have legal children (Tanko, Oral Interview).
- v. Respect is accorded to the institution of marriage as bride price is paid on the desired lady.

These significance factors indicate that *kaa* is not merely a transactional payment but a deeply meaningful cultural institution that validates marriage, legitimizes children, and creates social bonds. However, as the findings below

demonstrate, the inflation of bride price has distorted these positive functions.

5.3 Causes of Exorbitant Kaa on Mumuye Women: Past and Present

There are numerous causes of exorbitant bride price on Mumuye women: past and present include:

5.3.1 Revenge by Parents

Participants reported that some parents fix high bride prices on their daughters as a form of revenge. Paul (Oral Interview) explained: "When parents had to pay high bride price for the mother or female relatives, they often seek to recover the loss by fixing equally high prices on their own daughters." This pattern suggests an intergenerational cycle of inflated bride prices driven by the desire to recoup previous expenditures.

5.3.2 Pride and Economic Standing

Another cause identified is pride and the desire to demonstrate economic standing in society. Joseph (Oral Interview) noted: "Some parents want to show that they are wealthy and that their daughters are worth a lot, so they fix exorbitant bride prices to prove their status." This indicates that bride price inflation is partly driven by status competition among families.

5.3.3 Peer Group Influence

Bad peer group influence was also cited as a contributing factor. Joseph (Oral Interview) stated: "When one family fixes a high bride price, other families follow suit to avoid being seen as less important or less valuable." This demonstrates a bandwagon effect that perpetuates and normalizes exorbitant bride prices across communities.

5.3.4 Clannish Conflict

Clannish misunderstanding or conflict can lead parents to fix high bride prices to scare away unwanted suitors. Elkanah (Oral Interview) explained: "Sometimes, when there is disagreement between families or clans, a parent may fix a high bride price to discourage a suitor from a rival family without openly rejecting the proposal." This shows that bride price can be weaponized in interpersonal and inter-clan conflicts.

5.3.5 Moral Safeguarding

Parents sometimes fix high bride prices to safeguard the moral image of families and daughters from moral danger or societal disgrace. Elkanah (Oral Interview) observed: "A high bride price is seen as a way to ensure that only serious men of good character can approach the daughter, thereby protecting her from exploitation." This reflects a protective motivation behind the practice.

5.3.6 Benefiting from Daughters' Achievements

Some parents seek to benefit from their daughters' achievements, such as education or career. Davoro (Oral Interview) explained: "If a daughter is well-educated or has a good job, parents feel they have invested a lot in her and deserve compensation through a high bride price." This

commodifies the daughter's achievements and positions marriage as a return on investment.

5.3.7 Controlling Sexual Aberrationists

Felix (Oral Interview) noted: "Parents fix high bride prices to control men who might exploit their daughters sexually without commitment. The high price is meant to scare away men who are not serious."

5.4 Contemporary Moral Implications of Exorbitant Kaa (Bride Price) on Mumuye Women

This section presents the contemporary moral implications of exorbitant bride price on Mumuye women as reported by participants. It is important to note that these are participants' perceptions and reported experiences rather than independently established causal outcomes. The implications are organized under three thematic areas: economic implications, gender and women's autonomy, and social and moral consequences.

5.4.1 Economic Implications

5.4.1.1 Difficulty in Refunding Bride Price After Marital Breakdown

Participants reported that exorbitant bride price creates significant difficulties when marriages break down. Mabelang (Oral Interview) stated: "When marriages fail, the refund of bride price becomes a major problem. The groom's family wants the money back, but in many cases, the money has already been used. This leads to court cases and family conflicts." This situation often traps women in unhappy marriages because their families cannot afford to refund the bride price, forcing them to remain in abusive or unsatisfactory relationships.

5.4.1.2 Financial Strain and Family Debt

Participants also reported that high bride prices place significant financial strain on families. When a man is unable to pay the full bride price, his family may take loans or sell property to raise the money. This creates a cycle of debt that affects not only the groom's family but also the bride, as she enters marriage with the burden of knowing her family has accumulated debt on her behalf.

5.4.2 Gender and Women's Autonomy

5.4.2.1 Limited Autonomy and Decision-Making Power

One of the moral implications identified by participants is the erosion of women's autonomy and decision-making power. When a high bride price is paid, the woman is often treated as a commodity that has been purchased. This perception affects her status within the marriage, as she may be expected to be subservient to her husband and his family. Participants reported that women in high-bride-price marriages often have limited say in household decisions and are expected to be grateful for the amount paid on them.

5.4.2.2 Reduction of Women to Objects of Exchange

Many participants expressed concern that exorbitant bride price reduces women to objects of exchange. This commodification

of women perpetuates patriarchal norms and reinforces the notion that women are subordinate to men. Avonapu (Oral Interview) stated: "When a woman's value is measured by how much bride price is paid on her, she is no longer seen as a person but as a thing that has been bought."

5.4.2.3 Perpetuation of Patriarchal Control

The findings reveal that exorbitant bride price perpetuates patriarchal control over women's lives. By tying women's value to monetary transactions, the practice reinforces male authority and limits women's agency. The payment of high bride price creates a power dynamic in which the man feels entitled to control his wife and her actions.

5.4.3 Social and Moral Consequences

5.4.3.1 Unmarried Women and Social Stigma

Participants reported that many Mumuye women remain unmarried due to high bride prices fixed on them, which scares away potential suitors. Avonapu (Oral Interview) stated: "Many of our daughters remain unmarried because the bride price fixed on them is too high. They are now growing old without husbands, and this brings shame to their families." The social stigma associated with being unmarried in African society can be devastating for women.

5.4.3.2 Resort to Prostitution and Sexual Exploitation

One of the most serious moral implications reported by participants is that exorbitant bride price has led some women to resort to prostitution. Tanko (Oral Interview) explained: "Some women, frustrated by their inability to get married due to high bride price, have turned to prostitution as a means of survival. Others have been exploited sexually, resulting in unwanted pregnancies and diseases." It is important to note that this is a participant's perception rather than an independently established outcome.

5.4.3.3 Suicidal Tendencies and Mental Health Issues

Participants also reported frustration and suicidal tendencies among women who cannot get married due to high bride prices. Nyadali (Oral Interview) stated: "I have seen cases where women have attempted suicide because they feel their lives have no value since they cannot find husbands. The pressure from family and community is too much for them." This highlights the serious mental health implications of the practice.

5.4.3.4 Moral Degeneration and Social Decay

Another implication reported by participants is that unmarried women become agents of moral degeneration, coaching others against marriage or seeking revenge. Deega (Oral Interview) noted: "When women remain unmarried due to high bride price, they may become bitter and discourage others from marriage. Some even coach younger girls against marriage or encourage them to engage in immoral acts as a form of rebellion." This intergenerational transmission of moral decay represents a significant social cost.

5.4.3.5 Illegitimate Children and Social Problems

Participants reported that exorbitant bride price scares away potential suitors, leading to illegitimate children and social problems. Paul (Oral Interview) stated: "When women cannot get married because of high bride price, some become involved in relationships that result in children outside wedlock. These children are often rejected by society, leading to a cycle of poverty and social marginalization."

5.4.3.6 Damage to Family and Community Reputation

Ezekiel (Oral Interview) observed: "A family known for fixing exorbitant bride prices on their daughters develops a reputation that deters potential suitors. This damages the family's standing in the community and can affect the marriage prospects of other family members."

5.4.3.7 Intergenerational Transmission of Moral Decay

Pius (Oral Interview) noted: "The gene of desertion and moral decay is transmitted from one generation to the next when women are not properly married. The children of unmarried mothers often face discrimination and may themselves struggle to establish stable families." This suggests that the negative consequences of exorbitant bride price can persist across generations.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Application of Walby's Theory of Patriarchy to the Findings

The findings of this study can be understood through the lens of Sylvia Walby's Theory of Patriarchy. Walby's theory provides a useful framework for understanding how exorbitant bride price operates as a mechanism of patriarchal control and gender inequality.

6.1.1 Household Production and Economic Relations

Walby argues that patriarchy regulates women's labour and property ownership within marriage. The findings of this study support this perspective. The inflation of bride price from a symbolic exchange to a monetary debt creates a material condition in which the woman's status is tied to the value transferred. As Walby's theory would predict, this commodification reduces women's capacity to negotiate within marriage and limits their autonomy. The participants' reports of women being trapped in unhappy marriages because their families cannot refund the bride price illustrate how economic control perpetuates patriarchy.

Furthermore, the financial strain placed on families by exorbitant bride price serves to maintain patriarchal structures. When a man's family incurs significant debt to pay bride price, they have a vested interest in controlling the woman to ensure their investment is not wasted. This economic dimension of bride price reinforces male authority and limits women's agency, consistent with Walby's analysis of patriarchal economic relations.

6.1.2 Cultural Institutions and Symbolic Legitimation

Walby further argues that cultural symbols sustain patriarchy by making male dominance appear natural and legitimate. The

findings of this study reveal how the *kaa* system, which traditionally symbolized alliance between lineages and recognition of the woman's natal family, has been distorted by contemporary pressures of monetization and status competition. The practice retains its form but its meaning has shifted from reciprocity to commodification.

This symbolic violence is evident in participants' statements about women being treated as objects of exchange. The perception that a woman's worth is measured by the amount of *kaa* paid on her represents a form of symbolic violence that women internalize. This internalization reinforces patriarchal norms and limits women's aspirations and self-worth.

6.2 Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings of this study are consistent with existing literature on bride price in African societies. Anderson (2007) observed that bride price inflation is a common phenomenon across Africa, driven by modernization, monetization, and changing social values. Similarly, Uchendu (1995) noted that the commercialization of bride price has distorted traditional marriage systems and created new forms of inequality.

The moral implications identified in this study align with research on the negative effects of bride price on women. Nwosu (2010) found that high bride price limits women's access to education and employment opportunities, as families may prioritize marriage over schooling for daughters. Okonkwo (2012) documented how bride price inflation contributes to women's vulnerability to domestic violence and exploitation.

However, this study contributes to the literature by focusing specifically on the Mumuye ethnic group and examining the moral dimensions of the practice in detail. The emphasis on participants' perceptions and experiences provides valuable insights into the lived realities of women affected by exorbitant bride price.

6.3 The Gender Dynamics of Bride Price

The gender dynamics of bride price are complex and multilayered. On one hand, bride price can be seen as a form of compensation to the bride's family for the loss of her labour and reproductive capacities. On the other hand, it can be a source of status and empowerment for women, as it demonstrates their value and the commitment of their husbands.

However, when bride price becomes exorbitant, these positive dimensions are overshadowed by negative consequences. The commodification of women, the financial strain on families, and the social stigma associated with being unmarried all contribute to women's vulnerability. As Walby's theory suggests, these dynamics reflect the operation of patriarchal structures that systematically disadvantage women.

6.4 The Complexity of Moral Implications

The moral implications identified in this study are complex and multifaceted. They include economic strain, limited autonomy, social stigma, and serious consequences such as prostitution and suicidal tendencies. These implications are

interconnected and mutually reinforcing. For example, economic strain can lead to marital conflict, which can reduce women's autonomy and lead to social isolation.

It is important to note that the causal relationships between exorbitant bride price and these moral implications are not always straightforward. Some participants reported that exorbitant bride price has led to prostitution, disease, unwanted pregnancies, suicidal tendencies, and drug addiction. However, these are participants' perceptions rather than independently established outcomes. The study's qualitative methodology allows for the documentation of these perceptions, but it does not establish a direct causal link between bride price and these social problems.

6.5 The Role of Modernization and Social Change

The findings of this study reflect broader processes of modernization and social change in Nigerian society. The transition from a traditional economy based on agriculture and barter to a monetized economy has had significant implications for bride price practices. The replacement of traditional items such as livestock and agricultural produce with cash has made bride price more quantifiable and has facilitated its inflation.

Similarly, changes in social values, including increased emphasis on education, career achievement, and material wealth, have contributed to bride price inflation. Parents who have invested in their daughters' education often expect a return on their investment in the form of higher bride price. This reflects the intersection of traditional practices with modern economic values.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the contemporary moral challenges of exorbitant bride price on Mumuye women, the paper recommends that:

7.1 Parental Attitude Change

i. Parents exhibiting friendliness and love, rather than prioritizing material things (Napu, Oral Interview). Parents should approach the marriage of their daughters with a focus on the well-being of the couple rather than material gain. This requires a fundamental shift in attitudes from seeing daughters as sources of income to seeing them as individuals deserving of happiness and fulfillment.

ii. Parents should moderate bride price to avoid scaring away potential suitors (Philip, Oral Interview). By setting reasonable bride prices, parents can ensure that their daughters have access to marriage opportunities and are not left unmarried due to financial barriers.

7.2 Institutional Reforms

iii. Customary requirements for marriage, including bride price, should be lenient to allow access to marriage for those who wish to marry (Avonapu, Oral Interview). Traditional institutions and elders should work to reform the bride price system to make it more accessible.

iv. The Mumuye Cultural Development Association should regulate exorbitant bride prices to enable women to get married

at the right age and time (Anthony, Oral Interview). This could involve setting maximum bride price limits, establishing standards for bride price components, and creating mechanisms for dispute resolution.

7.3 Educational Interventions

v. Education and awareness campaigns should be conducted to shift cultural attitudes and promote understanding of the negative consequences of exorbitant bride price. These campaigns should target both parents and community leaders and should emphasize the importance of marriage based on love and mutual respect rather than financial transactions.

vi. Ladies should counsel their parents on the moral implications of fixing exorbitant bride prices (Alex, Oral Interview). Women themselves can play a role in advocating for reasonable bride prices and resisting commodification. Educated women, in particular, can influence their families' attitudes toward bride price.

7.4 Legal and Policy Measures

vii. Legislative measures should be considered to regulate bride prices and prevent exploitation. While such measures must respect cultural practices and traditions, they should aim to protect women from the negative consequences of exorbitant bride price.

viii. Initiatives to promote women's economic empowerment and autonomy should be supported. This includes access to education, employment opportunities, and financial independence. Economic empowerment can reduce women's vulnerability and increase their ability to negotiate marriage conditions.

7.5 Community-Based Interventions

ix. Community dialogue forums should be established to discuss the issue of exorbitant bride price and develop community-based solutions. These forums should involve elders, women, youth, religious leaders, and other stakeholders.

x. Intergenerational dialogue between elders and young people should be encouraged to bridge the gap between traditional practices and contemporary values. This can help ensure that bride price practices evolve in ways that respect tradition while addressing modern concerns.

7.6 Health and Social Support

xi. Psychosocial support services should be made available to women affected by the negative consequences of exorbitant bride price, including those experiencing mental health issues, suicidal tendencies, or exploitation.

xii. Programs should be developed to support unmarried women and single mothers, addressing their social and economic needs and combating stigma.

8. CONCLUSION

The concept of *Kaa* (bride price) has different connotations to various families and communities among the Mumuye ethnic

group. Bride price is a customary prerequisite for marriage, considered an affirming sacred institution for procreation and societal growth. However, the fixed high bride price has led to a pathetic fate for Mumuye ladies, who remain unmarried, and some resort to prostitution, drug addiction, and other social problems.

This study has examined the contemporary moral implications of exorbitant bride price on Mumuye women through the lens of Sylvia Walby's Theory of Patriarchy. The findings reveal that exorbitant bride price operates as a mechanism of patriarchal control, limiting women's autonomy, commodifying their bodies, and perpetuating gender inequality. The economic strain placed on families, the social stigma of being unmarried, and the reported consequences such as prostitution, unwanted pregnancies, and suicidal tendencies all reflect the operation of patriarchal structures that systematically disadvantage women.

However, it is important to note that these consequences are not inevitable outcomes of the bride price system itself but rather of its distortion and inflation. When bride price is maintained at reasonable levels and remains symbolic rather than commercialized, it can serve positive social functions. The challenge for the Mumuye community is to preserve the positive aspects of the *kaa* system while addressing its negative consequences.

Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach, including education and awareness campaigns to shift cultural attitudes, legislative measures to regulate bride prices and prevent exploitation, and initiatives to promote women's economic empowerment and autonomy. Parents, community leaders, and women themselves all have roles to play in reforming the system. Exorbitant bride prices should be reduced, allowing Mumuye women to get married to intending suitors. Material attachment should be discouraged, and marriage should be respected based on what a person can afford and also from genuine love.

Ultimately, the goal is to create a more equitable and just society for all, where marriage is based on love, respect, and mutual commitment rather than financial transactions. This requires a collective effort to challenge patriarchal norms and transform cultural practices in ways that respect tradition while promoting gender equality and human dignity.

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