

AN EVALUATION OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF HIGH BRIDE-PRICE ON YOUTH IN MBANO, IMO STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the socio-cultural implications of high bride-price on the youth in Mbano, Imo State. Traditionally, Mbano bride wealth has been perceived as exceptionally high, creating stereotypes about Mbano women and influencing courtship and marriage decisions. The research aims to investigate how these perceptions affect the youth's relationships, marriage choices, and social interactions, while comparing these beliefs with contemporary practices. The research involves collecting data from both primary and secondary sources, which includes personal communication with young men and women, community elders, and leaders across Mbano villages. Findings reveal that while high bride-price is a recognized cultural expectation, its actual economic burden is often exaggerated. However, the perception of expensive bride wealth discourages timely marriages among youth, contributes to relationship tensions, and perpetuates social stereotypes. Moreover, some families exploit the tradition to assert social prestige, further complicating youth interactions in courtship. The study recommends that community leaders and cultural custodians promote awareness about realistic bride-price expectations, encourage flexible and culturally sensitive practices, and engage youth in dialogue to balance cultural preservation with social well-being. Such interventions can mitigate misconceptions, reduce socio-cultural pressures on youth, and enhance harmonious community relationships.

KEYWORDS: Evaluation, Socio-Cultural, Implications, Bride-price, and Youth.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage remains one of the most important social institutions in African societies, representing not only a personal union between a man and a woman but also a collective alliance between two families and communities. In traditional Igbo society,

marriage is regarded as a sacred and social duty that sustains family lineage, community identity, and social stability. A vital component of this institution is the payment of bride-price, also known as *ime ego* among the Igbo people. Bride-price is the material or monetary token given by the groom and his family to the bride's family as a sign of gratitude, honour, and commitment. It symbolises the man's ability to assume responsibility for his wife and acknowledges the woman's value and the role of her family in nurturing her. In contemporary times, however, this long-held cultural practice has been subjected to significant social and economic changes. In many parts of Mbano, Imo State, the payment of bride-price has become increasingly expensive and commercialised, creating several socio-cultural challenges, particularly for the youth. High bride-price has been observed to influence the timing of marriage, discourage potential suitors, and place significant economic and psychological pressure on young people. Modern interpretations of bride-price also raise moral and cultural questions regarding gender relations, the dignity of women, and the purpose of marriage. While some argue that it reduces women to material possessions, others maintain that it preserves cultural identity and traditional values. These differing perspectives have generated tensions between cultural preservation and social progress, particularly among educated and urban youths exposed to global ideas of marriage, equality, and individual choice.

The researcher employed both primary and secondary sources to investigate the socio-cultural implications of high bride-price on youth in Mbano, Imo State. Primary data were collected through interviews with youths and community elders to gain insights into their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes regarding bride-price. Secondary sources comprised books, journals, reports, newspapers, and scholarly works on marriage practices, youth issues, and cultural traditions, providing a context for understanding the phenomenon. A thorough review of these secondary materials helped establish the current state of knowledge, refine the research focus, and inform the formulation of interview questions, ensuring that the study captured both the cultural context and the lived experiences of Mbano youth in relation to high bride-price. This study is relevant as it provides a critical evaluation of the socio-cultural implications of high bride-price on youth in Mbano, exploring its effects on economic wellbeing, attitudes toward marriage, gender roles, and cultural identity. Existing literature highlights the dual nature of bride-price. While it functions as a mechanism for cultural continuity and family recognition, its commercialisation has increasingly imposed economic burdens and social pressures on young people. In focusing on Mbano youth, this research fills a gap in empirical studies on the lived experiences of young people navigating traditional marriage customs and offers insights into how cultural practices can be preserved while responding to contemporary socio-economic realities.

THE CONCEPT OF BRIDE-PRICE

The concept of bride-price has been conceptualized by many scholars and writers of marriage payments. Bride-price may be defined as payment made in kind, cash or material as demanded by custom of a group by a groom or his family to the family of the bride in order to make the union legitimate. According to OguliOumo (2004), bride-price consists of a contract where material items (often cattle or other animals) or money are paid by the groom to the bride's family in exchange for the bride, her labour, and her capacity to produce children. Rakhimdinova (2005) defined bride-price as the amount of money or property, or wealth, paid by the groom or his family to the parents of the woman upon marriage of their daughter to the groom. The agreed bride-price is generally intended to reflect the perceived value of the girl or young woman. According to Alupo (2004), bride-price refers to a transfer of value, in cash or in kind, from the husband and his kin to the bride's family; it serves as a social token recognising the marriage and the families' reciprocal obligations. It is symbolic of friendship, but in actual fact, it's the transfer of productive and reproductive services to the man's family. To Meekers (1992), bride-price (*lobola*), common in South African marriages, symbolizes the transfer of the right of the girl's sexual and economic services to the husband. Radcliffe-Brown (1987) also defines bride-price as the situation where payment of goods and services is made by the bridegroom to the bride's kin as an essential part of the establishment of the legality of marriage. Wegh (2003) conceptualized bride-price in the Tiv perspective. To him, bride-price (*kem*) refers to the act of acquiring bit by bit and the accumulation of an item; it is an element of saving. Akiga (1939) shows that it is an expression of intent to make an exchange, to impose a cash payment of bride-wealth. Anyebe (1985), in his analysis of bride-price, expatriates that bride-price (bride-wealth) makes marriage legal and establishes the legitimacy of children. Also, it is a compensation for the loss to the woman's family of one of its members, a potential child bearer, it is marriage insurance to stabilize the relationship and protect the wife.

MBANO PEOPLE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Mbano people are divided into two local government areas: Ehime Mbano and Isiala Mbano, with numerous autonomous communities that share common ancestry, traditions, and customs (Okafor, 2005). Mbano's history is traced to the Awka-Orlu migration in Igbo history. However, among the Mbano, the most popular version of oral tradition traces their origin to a certain Abba Uruogu, who reportedly migrated from Abba in the Isu in Orlu area. Abba had led his people, the Osu, and first settled at a place called "Obob" (Umuezeala) presently occupied by the parts Osu clan - Isiala

Oboh. According to E. Nwaeme (Personal Communication, 27th January, 2025), he married and had three sons named in their order of seniority: Osu-Ama, Osu-Owerre, and Osu-Achara. In the same vein, C. Ukeachu (Personal Communication, 27th January, 2025), these three sons with their descendants founded the various villages in Osu. The villages founded by Osu-Ama (meaning Osu in the streets) are Oboh, the first settlement, Eziamma, Anara, Ezumoha, and Umunachi. Osu-Owerre and his descendants founded Okohia, Mbeke, Ezihe, Umuokpukpara, Umuelemai, Umuekebi, and Umuaro. The third son, Osu-Achara founded Umuduru, Obiohuru, Isiebu, Orji, Umuluwe, Umuegbe, and Ugwuala. These villages form part of the communities within the Mbano (now Isiala Mbano) area that also spread further into other areas, founding more communities as they multiplied. Ukeachu has also noted that the villages of NneatoUgwumeze, Umunumo, Nzerem, and Ikpem are branches of Osu.

However, M. Echerue (Personal Communication, 27th January, 2025) said that Umunumo claims to have migrated directly from Abba and settled in their present location. Irrespective of the claims, it could be suggested that all these groups may have migrated from the same Isu in the Orlu area. Probably, due to socio-economic and political reasons, communities tend to claim direct migration status to avoid being ruled by others, and also to affirm authority over their area of settlement. N. Nduka (Personal Communication, 29th January, 2025) avers that Ehime are related to Osu. They are said to be an offshoot of the same wave of migration from Abba in Orlu area. Ehime tradition claims a relationship with Osu, particularly the Umuekebi village of Osu-Owerre. They were led by a man called Ehim, the son of Elele, their progenitor. Elele was said to have died on the way around the Osu area during their movement from Abba. Consequently, Ehim's son led his people further and settled near Afo-Umueze square. Ehim had installed the *IguEhim* (black stone) used as an ancestral ground by the Ehime people for socio-cultural, and other ritual ceremonies. This area is today located close to the present site of Mbano Join Hospital. On arrival, they settled and formed the village of Umueze I, while others continued and spread further, forming the villages where they are presently located. Ehim's direct descendants founded the group of villages called *Umu-Ehime*.

Ehim had six sons who founded the towns named after them. Thus, Eze, the first son, founded Umueze, which later split into two: Umueze I and Umueze II. Ezeala, the second son founded Umuezeala; Agbaje founded Agbaja; Akanu founded Umunakanu; Kabia founded Umukabia, while Nsu, the last son, founded the Nsu community. These villages were named after their ancestors-Ehim. These traditions claiming Orlu origin would appear to have gained some support from notable scholars of Igbo history. For instance, Prof. A.E. Afigbo's study of Igbo origins, migration, and dispersal suggests that the Awka-Orlu upland was one of the areas first settled by the Igbo group. He opines that Isu-Ama Igbo (meaning the Isu who had gone abroad), which includes,

amongst other groups, Mbama, Mbieri, Osu, Ehime, Uboma, migrated eastwards from the general area of Orlu. The migration claims by the Osu and Ehime people from Abba in the general area of Orlu are in line with Afigbo's suggestion. Hence, they belong to the group described as Isu-Ama Igbo.

Mbano operates a decentralized leadership system. The traditional governance structure includes elders, village heads (*Ndi Nze na Ozo*), and Eze (traditional rulers) who mediate conflicts, enforce cultural norms, and oversee community affairs (Obi, 2012). Decision-making is often communal, with age grades, titled men, and women's groups playing significant roles in maintaining social harmony and development (Okeke, 2015). Historically, the Mbano people have engaged in farming, trade, and craftsmanship. The fertile land supports agriculture, with crops such as yams, cassava, palm produce, and vegetables being cultivated (Uche, 2017). Mbano people are known for their entrepreneurial spirit, with many excelling in commerce, education, and skilled trades both within Nigeria and in the diaspora (Chukwu, 2020). Mbano, like other Igbo communities, has a vibrant cultural heritage that includes traditional festivals, folklore, and music. The New Yam Festival (*Iri Ji*) is widely celebrated, marking the beginning of the harvest season (Okafor, 2005).

Traditional religion, which includes veneration of ancestors and deities, coexists with Christianity, which has become the dominant faith due to missionary influence during the colonial era (Eze, 2010). The colonial era brought significant changes to Mbano, including Western education, Christianity, and new administrative structures (Nwosu, 2018). British colonial rule altered the traditional governance system, introducing warrant chiefs and modern legal institutions (Obi, 2012). Post-independence, Mbano has continued to evolve, contributing significantly to the economic and political landscape of Imo State and Nigeria at large (Chukwu, 2020).

STAGES OF MARRIAGE RITES AND CUSTOMS IN MBANO

Traditional marriages amongst the Mbano community, as part of traditional marriages in Igboland, follow a process after which it is considered sealed. Any traditional marriage that did not go through these stages is considered incomplete, and the bride is not expected to be called the wife of the groom.

Iju Ese

In the context of traditional marriage, particularly among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, *Iju Ese* refers to the formal inquiry stage of marriage negotiations. It is the visit during which the groom's family officially asks about the bride's background and family lineage to confirm that there are no issues such as blood relations, taboos, or hereditary illnesses that might hinder the marriage. In Mbano, this process is initiated when the suitor's family has made secret inquiries about the prospective bride and her

family. According to Igwe and Akolokwu (2014), the issues that were inquired about included knowing if the girl was *Osu* (outcast) because an *Osu* is not allowed to marry a *Diala* (freeborn) in Mbano and other parts of Igboland. Both intending couples should be from a respectable family and have good character, whether her family had any blood disease, including epilepsy, or had some undesirable family traits such as stealing, barrenness, promiscuity, curses, and hereditary sicknesses, amongst others. These preliminary inquiries are conducted in cases where the suitor's parents did not personally select a bride for their son, as was customary in the past. The practice also sufficed if the suitor's family was from a distant or different village from the girl's family and therefore did not know the family well. These preliminary inquiries were often made by the two families. According to Omenukor (2014), "this practice, as it was argued, reduced the tendencies for the breakup as a result of the discovery of something later which could undermine the foundation of the marriage" (p. 5). The two families go into a very thorough and critical investigation about the families of both, respectively, to look out for negative traits like stealing, generational sickness or malady that is consistent with their generation, for instance, madness, barrenness, imbecility, epilepsy, and leprosy, over and above all, their general reputation. The people involved in the *ijuase* (inquiry) are parents of both the maiden and the man, the brothers and sisters of both families, the *ikwunne* (the mother's people), the in-laws, etc.

It is important to note that in the midst of all these processes of inquiry (*ijuase*), *ihemgbata* (my offering) would still be intact. The girl and the mother would not touch it. If, after the inquiry and there is a problem with either family, say sickness or bad reputation, the *ihemgbata* would respectfully be taken back to the mother of the man by the mother of the girl. But when the two parties are satisfied with the reports and results of the *ijuase*, the parents of the two would agree on a date for *iku aka*. It is significant to note that the Mbano people are engaged in both endogamous as well as exogamous marriages. In any case, the background check on the girl and her family determined whether a marriage proposal was to be initiated or not by the suitor's family.

Upon getting satisfactory answers to these issues, the parents of the suitor, in the company of a few kinsmen, visited the prospective bride's family. The atmosphere of the meeting was usually that of strangers seeking direction. This was reflected in the language used by the suitor's family. Upon their welcome into the house of the prospective bride (this was usually marked by the presentation of a kola nut to the visitors), the father of the suitor or the most elderly male began by making some complimentary remarks, usually in proverbs and wise sayings. This meeting is usually ceremonial since the families would have earlier discussed the reason for the meeting informally and fixed the date. In some parts of Mbano, the daughters of the bride's family were immediately lined up for the identification of the prospective bride by the

suitor, while in other parts, the identification was left for the second stage. After the entertainment and exchange of information, a date for the next stage was fixed.

Iku aka

This stage normally commences some days after the first stage. To demonstrate the seriousness attached to their marriage proposal and to avoid competition from any other perspective suitor, the suitor's family usually would not waste much time before visiting the bride's family for this second stage. As the name suggests, *Iku aka* literally translates “to knock at the door,” suggesting that the suitor's family had come to knock at the door of the house of their prospective bride. According to A. Onyeakazi, (personal communication, January 27th, 2025), before this meeting, informal arrangements would have been made by the two families. Elderly members of the two families and other accompanying guests are usually involved. At this meeting, the prospective bride is made known to the two families. However, before then, the bride's family would have gotten the consent of their daughter to the marriage proposal. It was after this confirmation that the list for all the items for the entire stages of the marriage ceremonies would be handed over to the suitor's family by their prospective in-laws.

Izu na ato (ijeileta ala)

As the name suggests, this is the stage and event where the groom's family finally confers to their prospective in-laws their intention to marry their daughter by presenting formally their first wine (palm wine and in modern times other assorted local and foreign gins), with other items listed in the marriage list. It is at this stage that the proposal is made public, and the two families are at liberty and excited to refer to themselves as in-laws. At the end of the ceremony, the bride is usually allowed to follow her in-laws' home. According to J. Nwoko (personal communication 17th January, 2025), *Izu naato* is a ritual for the bride to be acquainted with her in-laws' family and for the in-laws to well ascertain the bride's character. In a typical traditional setting, the bride is tested in various ways, which include: waking up earlier in the morning to sweep the house, fetch water for the entire household, and do any other chore that would be required of her, including cooking for the family. The purpose of the visit to the man's family house is to give the girl the opportunity to make a critical assessment of the family in which she is going to live for the rest of her life. The same goes for the groom's family. Each party may decide to call off the process if negative traits are noticed. This goes a long way to show that in the Mbano community and by extension in the Igbo tradition, *ofuonyeanaghi alu nwanyi* (one person does not marry a wife).

Igba nkwu

This is usually the biggest, most colourful, and most significant stage in the traditional marriage rite in Mbano town. It usually involves the entire village, visitors,

and guests of both families. The bride's family usually invites traditional dance groups, drummers, and masquerades in some instances where the bride's or groom's father is a titled man. Age-grade dances are also a normal sight, especially for the groom, as a mark of support and solidarity from his age grade. According to J. Nowoko (personal communication 17th December, 2024), one of the highlights of the event, apart from the payment of the bride-price, is the bride's search for the groom who will have to be seated amongst several young men. The bride's father usually hands over to his daughter a cup of palm wine and asks her to locate and show the people the young man she has chosen to live with. This search could take up to ten minutes or more as the bride goes to and fro amid loud shouts and chants from the excited crowd each time she appears to make a move towards the wrong man. At the end of the search, she locates the groom by kneeling in front of him to offer the cup of palm wine to him and signalling to the crowd that here is the right man. The groom then, as a confirmation, accepts the cup of wine, drinks the wine, puts some money into it, and then hands it back to her. Before the advent of paper money, cowries were used for this purpose. The crowd then roars in excitement. It is at this point that the bride-price has been settled. *Nkwu*, as a drink, can last for a long time, and this is why it is used during marriage rites, as it brings awareness to the couple that marriage is a lifelong journey. *Oji* which is known as kolanut, signifies life, togetherness, love, and respect because it unites the living and the dead. Also, kolanut is used to invite the ancestors for blessing and fruitfulness during the marriage consummation.

Traditionally, the bride-price discourse is usually conducted by the two families. Nwoko (2020) enunciates that it is conducted in absolute silence by the male elders of both families who are skilled in the art of bargaining. The groom's family responds to this by making their offer, and this is followed by a counteroffer until the two families agree on the final bride-price to be paid. Once an agreement is reached, it is heralded by three backhand clicks and a handshake by the elders of the two families. This is followed by shouts of excitement by the womenfolk who would have been outside waiting for the agreement to be reached. This is then followed by the actual payment of the agreed amount. This payment has been made to the bride's father in his inner room, then he emerges before his kinsmen with a loud hailing.

C. Opara (personal communication 17th January, 2025), the payment is usually done in the inner room so that no one else apart from the two in-laws would know the exact amount paid. In any case, the amount paid must be enough to cover the share due to the elders and youths of the clan and village, while the balance of the amount, obviously the father's share, is to be paid later to the bride's father whenever the groom and his family are able, as the two parties have agreed. This gesture is suggestive of good and lasting relations that would exist between the in-laws in the future. Apart from the bride-price, other items provided for the ceremony includes: wraps or some

quantities of tobacco, several jars of palm wine and assorted local and foreign gins, cartons of cigarette, several quantities/pieces of stock fish, a huge number of tubers of yam, bar soaps, several gallons of palm oil, and in modern time, bags of rice and beans and other foodstuff and assorted gifts as contained in the list, amongst others. Most of these were shared amongst the kinsmen and villagers. At the end of the ceremony, which marks the last stage of the marriage, the bride goes with her husband and in-laws to her new home to start a new life with her new family. She is usually presented with gifts from his family and relatives (Nwoko, 2020). Such gifts include: cooking utensils such as cooking pots, pestle, and mortar, wooden bench, goats, fowls, amongst others.

Igba nkwu is the highest point in the rite of marriage in the Mbano community. The increased and unlimited number of people here is to make the union of the couple extensively open. This would make any other young man who has been eyeing the maiden know at that point that the maiden has been taken. Again, for the other young girls to know that the man has united with a maiden, and as such, no room for other things. *Mmanyenlurunwanyi* is the event of showing the man, the various relatives of the family from which he married. Going to their houses would help identify them one by one, because from that point, the man has become a member of the wife's family. Thus, the Mbano people would say that *ogo buikwuito* (the in-law is an extended relative). Again, the gifts from the parents are to make available for their daughter, what she would start life with, and also to show their in-laws that their daughter comes from a family that recognizes her and, as such, ought to be taken care of by them too.

FACTORS DETERMINING HIGH BRIDE-PRICE IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Educational Attainment

The level of education attained by the bride influences the bride-price in Mbano. Women with higher education are perceived as valuable assets, leading to an increased bride-price demanded by their families. According to Okafor (2015), educated women are expected to contribute more effectively to family stability and economic growth, thereby justifying a higher bride-price. Education enhances a woman's social standing, increases her earning potential, and equips her with the skills necessary for effective home management, making her a desirable partner. Parents often consider the financial and social investments made in their daughter's education when negotiating the bride-price. Families believe that a well-educated woman will not only support her husband but also contribute to the welfare of the extended family, which reinforces the justification for a higher bride-price (Eze, 2018). Furthermore, an educated bride is seen as more capable of raising well-informed and successful children, ensuring the long-term prosperity of the family lineage. Moreover, professional qualifications and career

prospects play a role in determining bride-price. According to Uche (2017), a woman with specialized skills or professional training is likely to command a higher bride-price as she is perceived to bring additional financial stability to the marriage. In contemporary Mbano society, women with careers in fields such as medicine, law, and academia are often associated with higher bride-price demands due to their earning potential and social prestige.

Social Status and Lineage

The social status and lineage of a bride also determine the bride-price in Mbano. Okeke (2016) states that families of high social standing or those with noble ancestry tend to demand a higher bride-price, as marriage within their lineage is considered prestigious. Such families are often regarded as custodians of cultural heritage and traditions, making their daughters more sought after in marriage negotiations. In Mbano, families with strong political, economic, or religious influence often set higher bride-prices to maintain their status and ensure that their daughters marry into equally prestigious families. This practice reinforces social stratification, where marriage alliances serve as a means of strengthening family connections and expanding economic influence. Lineage purity is highly valued, and families with strong ancestral ties tend to uphold higher bride-prices to reflect their historical prestige. Some lineages are believed to possess unique virtues, skills, or leadership qualities, which further elevate the value placed on their daughters in marriage transactions (Obinna, 2021). This cultural perspective contributes to the continued significance of social status and lineage in bride-price determination.

Traditional and Customary Obligations

Traditional and customary obligations also determine the bride-price in Mbano. These obligations are rooted in cultural practices and often involve ceremonial rites, family contributions, and community expectations. According to Nduka (2019) the fulfilment of these customs serves as a means of legitimizing the marriage and ensuring the approval of both families. Families expect grooms to adhere to traditional rites, which may include presenting gifts such as livestock, drinks, and monetary payments to various family members and community elders. Customary obligations also extend to post-marital expectations, where the groom is required to maintain a respectful and supportive relationship with his in-laws. This expectation is often factored into the bride-price, as families seek assurances that their daughter will be well-treated and cared for in her new home (Eze, 2018). The completion of traditional rites signifies the groom's ability to provide and sustain a family, reinforcing the cultural belief that marriage is not only an individual affair but a communal responsibility. While these customs foster unity and cultural continuity, they have also been criticized for imposing

financial burdens on prospective grooms. Some argue that the extensive obligations associated with bride-price negotiation create barriers to marriage, leading to delays or even discouragement among young men seeking to marry (Chukwu, 2020).

SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF HIGH BRIDE PRICE AMONG MBANO YOUTH

Unwanted pregnancy

The high bride-price tradition has significant socio-cultural implications, particularly among the youth in Mbano. Prominent among these are poverty, lack of access to sexual education, and the erosion of traditional moral guidance. One major issue is the prevalence of unwanted pregnancies among young women who are unable to marry due to financial constraints. When young men cannot afford the bride-price, couples may resort to cohabitation or engage in secret relationships that often result in unintended pregnancies (Chukwu, 2020). Unwanted pregnancy places immense pressure on young women, many of whom face stigmatization, abandonment, or economic hardship. In some cases, families reject pregnant daughters who conceive outside of marriage, viewing it as a dishonour to their lineage (Eze, 2018). This societal pressure often forces young women into early motherhood without adequate financial or emotional support, affecting their education and prospects. Moreover, the fear of paying a high bride-price has led some men to avoid marriage altogether, contributing to rising cases of single motherhood and unstable family structures (Uche, 2017). This trend has wider implications for community stability, as children born outside formal marital unions may lack the social and financial security traditionally provided within marriage. Addressing the socio-cultural implications of high bride-price requires a collective effort from traditional leaders, policymakers, and community members. Advocates for cultural reform argue that reducing excessive financial demands in marriage negotiations could encourage responsible family formation and reduce cases of unwanted pregnancies (Okafor, 2015).

Cohabitation

In Mbano, the payment of bride-price is considered a fundamental part of formalizing a marriage. When a couple cohabits before paying the bride-price, it is often viewed as bypassing or disrespecting the traditional processes of marriage. As a result, the bride's family may feel the need to raise the bride-price when the couple decides to formalize their relationship, to restore the respect and cultural significance that the bride-price symbolizes. Cohabitation without the payment of bride-price can be seen as an informal union that lacks cultural legitimacy in the eyes of the community. In Mbano, where marriage is traditionally seen as the union of not just two individuals but two families, skipping the bride-price may be considered disrespectful or a sign that the

groom does not fully recognize the cultural importance of the marriage. This perception can lead to social stigmatization, especially if the couple decides to remain in a cohabiting relationship without formalizing it later. The bride-price, in this case, acts as a form of validation and cultural recognition that is often sought after cohabitation.

Parental Pressure

In Mbano, marriage is not only a personal union between two individuals but also a communal and familial affair. Parents, particularly those of the bride, emphasise the traditional customs surrounding marriage, including the payment of bride-price. For parents, bride-price is not just a financial transaction but a significant event that marks the formalization of the union. Many parents view the payment of a substantial bride-price as a sign of respect and honour, both for their daughter and for the cultural heritage they are trying to preserve. Consequently, parental pressure to pay a high bride-price can be immense. Young people may feel compelled to meet these expectations, sometimes to the detriment of their financial well-being or personal desires. In some cases, parents may even refuse to approve of the marriage if the agreed-upon bride-price is not paid, creating tension between the youth and their families. The pressure to meet parental expectations regarding bride-price can place a financial strain on young couples in Mbano. In an economy where the financial capacity of many youths is limited, the growing expectations surrounding bride-price can become a barrier to marriage. Some young people may resort to borrowing money from family or friends to meet the bride-price demands, which can lead to financial indebtedness. This pressure to meet parental expectations can delay marriages, force individuals into premature financial commitments, or even prevent couples from marrying altogether.

Illegitimate Children

In Mbano, the concept of legitimacy is tied to the practice of bride-price, which serves as a formal recognition of a union between a man and a woman. A child born within such a union is seen as legitimate, whereas a child born outside of wedlock is often labelled as illegitimate. This label carries with it significant social stigma, which can deeply affect both the child and the mother. Illegitimate children in Mbano often face discrimination and exclusion from their communities. The absence of a paid bride-price signifies that the parents' union was not formalized according to cultural expectations, leading to the perception that the child's birth was not sanctioned by society. This marginalization can result in the child being treated as an outsider, not fully accepted into the family or community. They may not be allowed to participate in certain cultural rituals or rites of passage, which are important for social integration and recognition in the society. The social stigma attached to being born out of wedlock can also lead to emotional and psychological challenges for the child, who may struggle with issues of identity, self-worth, and belonging. The constant reminder of their

perceived illegitimacy can cause feelings of shame and rejection, impacting their self-esteem and ability to integrate socially. For the mother, the implications of giving birth to an illegitimate child can be even more significant.

In Mbano, as in many African societies, a woman's value is often tied to her role as a wife and mother within the context of marriage, particularly one validated by the payment of bride-price. A woman who has a child outside of wedlock, or who becomes a single mother, may face severe social repercussions. She is often seen as failing to live up to the societal expectations of marriage and motherhood. This failure can lead to stigmatization, with the woman being labelled as morally questionable or irresponsible. The woman may experience isolation from her family and community, as they may view her as a disgrace or as someone who has brought shame to the family. Moreover, single mothers may face significant economic challenges, as they often must raise their children alone without the support that comes from a formal marriage. In traditional settings like Mbano, the groom's family is expected to contribute financially to the well-being of the bride and children. However, a single mother, especially one whose child was born outside of marriage, may not have access to this financial support. She may be left to shoulder the financial burden of raising her child alone, leading to further hardship and strain. Without the protection and recognition that comes with marriage, a single mother may find it difficult to secure stable economic resources, making it harder for her to meet her child's basic needs, such as education, healthcare, and nutrition. In addition to the social stigma and financial burdens, single mothers in Mbano may also face challenges in terms of emotional and psychological well-being. The pressure of raising a child alone, coupled with societal judgment and potential alienation from family, can result in significant emotional distress. The woman may feel a sense of guilt, shame, or inadequacy, particularly if she is unable to meet the community's expectations of her role as a wife and mother. These emotional burdens can affect her overall mental health and her ability to provide a stable, nurturing environment for her child. The challenges faced by illegitimate children and single mothers are not only social but also legal and economic. In many cases, illegitimate children in Mbano may not be entitled to inheritance or other benefits that come with being part of a formal family unit. Without the recognition of their father's side of the family, they may not be considered heirs to property, land, or wealth. This exclusion from inheritance can limit the opportunities available to the child and contribute to their continued marginalization within the society.

Single Motherhood

High bride price is not the only reason why we have single mothers. The woman-to-man ratio in the country is largely to be blamed for this in Mbano, where family reputation and honour are paramount; a single mother is often seen as failing to meet the expectations of the community. The bride-price tradition, which symbolizes the

formalization of a union, is absent in the case of single motherhood, and as a result, the woman's social status may be questioned. She may be labelled as morally irresponsible, dishonouring her family and community by having a child outside of marriage. The stigma attached to single motherhood can cause emotional distress for the mother, as she may feel isolated, judged, and even ostracized from family and community activities. Social stigma aside, single mothers in Mbano also face considerable economic and logistical challenges. Traditionally, marriage is not only a social contract but also an economic partnership. In formal marriages, the husband is expected to provide financial stability for the family, contributing to the overall well-being of the wife and children. However, a single mother often bears the full financial responsibility for her child. This can lead to significant hardships, especially if the woman does not have a stable income or financial support from her family. Raising a child alone without the support of a partner can make it difficult for the mother to meet her child's needs, including access to education, healthcare, and other essential services. The absence of bride-price and the formalization of marriage also impact the mother's status within the extended family structure. In traditional African societies like Mbano, the extended family plays an essential role in providing support, both financially and emotionally. However, a single mother who does not have the backing of a formalized marriage may not receive the same level of support from her family.

In some cases, her family may distance themselves from her, seeing her as a source of shame or disappointment. This lack of familial support further exacerbates her struggles, leaving her to navigate the challenges of raising a child alone. Furthermore, the emotional toll of single motherhood is significant. The societal expectations placed on women to be both nurturers and upholders of cultural norms can create a sense of guilt, inadequacy, and isolation for a single mother. She may feel as though she has failed in her role as a wife and mother, even if the circumstances leading to single motherhood were beyond her control. The emotional strain can affect her mental health and overall well-being, making it harder for her to provide a stable and nurturing environment for her child. Single mothers in Mbano, particularly those raising children born out of wedlock, also face challenges related to their child's legitimacy. In traditional societies, children born to unmarried parents may be labelled as illegitimate, carrying a social stigma that can affect the child's status within the community. The lack of a formalized union through the payment of bride-price means that the child is not automatically recognized as a legitimate heir to the father's family and inheritance. This exclusion from family resources, including land, property, and other assets, can limit the child's opportunities and social mobility, further perpetuating the cycle of poverty and marginalization.

SOLUTION TO SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF HIGH BRIDE PRICE AMONG MBANO YOUTH

Reducing the Financial Burden on Young Couples

The high cost of bride-price in traditional societies like Mbano can be a financial barrier for young couples seeking to marry. In many cases, the bride-price becomes an obstacle, especially for youth who are just starting their careers and may not have the financial means to meet these expectations. The excessive cost of the bride-price can delay marriages or prevent young people from formalizing relationships, leading to social pressures, cohabitation, or even illicit unions. Reducing the bride-price to a minimum, the financial burden on the groom and his family would be alleviated, enabling more youth to marry at an appropriate age and within their economic capacity. This, in turn, could lead to fewer cases of cohabitation or children born outside of wedlock, helping to maintain social stability while also respecting traditional practices.

Easing the Stigma Associated with Illegitimacy and Single Motherhood

The current practice of high bride-price contributes to the social stigma surrounding children born outside of marriage in Mbano. The larger the bride-price, the more it emphasizes the perceived need for a formal marriage to validate the child's legitimacy. In instances where young couples struggle to raise the bride-price, they may choose cohabitation or have children outside of marriage, which leads to the labelling of the child as illegitimate. If the bride-price were reduced, it would help to normalize relationships and marriage, encouraging more couples to formalize their unions. By easing the pressure to pay large sums for bride-price, couples may be more likely to marry legally and avoid the stigma attached to having children outside of wedlock. This change could also lessen the social ostracization experienced by single mothers, who could then be seen as having had a legitimate marriage, even if it was modest or scaled down.

Promoting Equality and Gender Balance

In many cases, the bride-price is viewed as a transaction where the groom pays the bride's family for the privilege of marrying her. This practice reinforces the idea of women being treated as property or possessions. By reducing the bride-price, this perceived commodification of women can be minimized, fostering more equitable relationships between men and women in Mbano society. A smaller bride-price would place less emphasis on the financial transaction and more on the mutual love, respect, and partnership between the couple. Reducing the bride-price also helps address gender disparities, as it would not place undue financial strain on young men while simultaneously respecting the woman's family without overburdening the groom's

family. A fairer and more equal exchange between both families would promote the value of relationships based on commitment, love, and shared values, rather than financial transactions.

Encouraging Social Integration and Less Discrimination

By lowering the bride-price, young couples from diverse socio-economic backgrounds would have equal opportunities to formalize their marriages without the fear of discrimination based on their financial status. Currently, individuals who cannot afford the full bride-price may be perceived as inferior or unable to meet the community's expectations. This can cause social division and marginalization. A reduced bride-price would contribute to more inclusivity and reduce the social gap between different groups within the community. In addition, by removing the financial barrier that separates youth from the opportunity to marry, communities can foster a more inclusive atmosphere where marriage is seen as an expression of commitment and partnership, not just a financial transaction.

Promoting Stable Families

Reducing the bride-price can lead to more stable family structures. Young couples who can marry without significant financial strain may be more likely to stay together and raise their children in a stable, legally recognized environment. By facilitating legal marriages, this solution could reduce the number of unmarried cohabiting couples, prevent the birth of illegitimate children, and lower the rate of single motherhood in Mbano.

CONCLUSION

The practice of bride-price is a pressure on young people, particularly those who may not have the financial resources to meet the high demands associated with it. This financial burden often leads to delays in marriage, cohabitation, and, in some cases, the birth of children outside of wedlock, which brings about social stigma and challenges related to legitimacy. Moreover, the bride-price system perpetuates gender imbalances and can foster the commodification of women, which creates a disparity in marital relationships. It also leads to social exclusion, with youth from less privileged backgrounds facing difficulties in accessing the institution of marriage. These socio-cultural challenges are compounded by the emotional and psychological stress experienced by young people, especially women, who face societal judgment and pressure to conform to expectations tied to marriage and family. However, the evaluation also points to potential solutions, such as reducing the bride-price to a more reasonable and symbolic amount. This change could alleviate financial pressures, promote marriage as an expression of love and commitment rather than financial

transaction, and reduce the stigma surrounding illegitimate children and single motherhood. A revised bride-price system could lead to more inclusive, equitable, and stable family structures, offering a way forward for Mbano youth to navigate the intersection of culture, economics, and social norms in a modern context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evaluation of the socio-cultural implications of bride-price on youth in Mbano, several recommendations can be made to address the challenges identified:

- i. One of the most effective ways to alleviate the financial burden on young couples is to reduce the bride-price to a more manageable and symbolic amount.
- ii. There is a need for extensive community awareness campaigns to educate the people of Mbano about marriage and family life. These campaigns should emphasize the importance of marriage based on mutual love, respect, and partnership, rather than focusing solely on the bride-price. This could reduce the societal pressure on young couples and encourage healthier, more stable relationships that are not constrained by financial barriers.
- iii. The bride-price system often reinforces gender imbalances and can commodify women. To address this, community leaders and elders should advocate for more equitable marriage practices, where both parties' roles and contributions are valued equally. This could include revising the language and expectations surrounding the bride-price to ensure that women are not perceived as property but as equal partners in the marriage.
- iv. The stigma surrounding single motherhood and children born out of wedlock can be reduced through social programs that promote acceptance, provide financial and emotional support, and educate the community about the importance of inclusivity and understanding.
- v. To complement the reduction of the bride-price and encourage legal marriages, there should be greater access to legal and institutional support for marriage registration and family life. Providing low-cost or free marriage registration services would make it easier for young couples to formalize their unions without the financial burden of additional legal fees.

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