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TENDENCY AND FACTORS AFFECTING FEMALE ADOLESCENTS TO ATTAIN EARLY MARRIAGES: ANALYTICAL STUDY OF HOW SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION FOR CONTEMPORARY RURAL ISSUES**Dr. B.V.N. Wijewardhana**

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Abstract: Family turns to be the building block of the existence of human society, which starts form the marriage. According to the accepted law in Sri Lanka the permitted age limit for marriages starts from 18 years. Nevertheless, a tendency is visible specifically in rural areas in Sri Lanka for motherhoods in low ages. Without legally registered marriages some males and females in low age categories seemed to be living together as husbands and wives. There is a notable propensity of the emergence of social problems due to the said relationships. The key objective of this research is to identify effective causes affecting the tendency of illegal marriages in schooling age. And mainly focused to identify the intervention measures so as to prevent the underage marriage and to provide a framework for utilizing rural youth females through social work as a human resource in rural social development.

The selected locations for this research were the two GN divisions namely; Kotakethena and Dimbulwala in Rathnapura district under Kahawatta police division. The selected study

sample is represented by 36 females below 18 years of age and those had been attended mothers' clinics in a period of 5 years from 2012 up to 2017. Research method applied for data collection was on questionnaires, discussions, case studies, group discussions and observations.

Research outcomes disclosed that a considerable number of those commenced early living together with loved parties secretly evading from parents knowledge was mainly due to the interrupted education resulted by poor economic conditions. Besides, indirect behavior of mothers or the habit of drunkenness of fathers or else being eldest child in the family were other causes affected.

Key words: Early marriages, Education, Intervention, Law, Poverty, Social work and income,

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH TOPIC

'Family system' as defined by Murdock as a unit combined with Common living, Economic support, Sexual procreation and social adaptation. Generally, the family co-operation is built up in line with above elements through a Marriage. The legal base needed for family co-operation depends on the status of legally registered marriage. In the traditional practices in Sri Lanka different modes of marriages such as; (single woman, single man) were in practice, whereas, the fixed age limit legally accepted according to the laws in Sri Lanka is the completion of 18 years. Hence it is essential for a marriage the completion of 18 years whether it is a proposed marriage or a marriage on a friendship. Though, legally accepted age of the marriage is 18 years the number of marriages taking place in the said age range is a lesser number mainly due to the equal opportunities for education is open for females as well within a free environment. One of the reasons of such situation is the existing educational pattern in Sri Lanka, in which, when a girl or a boy gets through the border exams of O' level or A'level he or she has to pass over the age of teenage and if they joined higher education they need to exceed age limits of 23 or 24, becomes as another reason. Owing to this, and in comparison to the pattern in the past when a girl enters marriage she has to exceed age of 18.

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Health has warned on an abundance of early marriages below 18 years. Reason was that a considerable numbers of pregnant women attending Mothers 'clinics are less than 18 years. This situation prevails mainly in districts of Monaragala, Anuradhapura, Badulla and Rathnapura which has also reported through media as well as through various researches. The said researches had further elaborated several negative effects of immature marriages such as ; abortion, varied mental and physical illnesses including cervical or breast cancers with socio-economic problems too, such as; unresolvable economic deficits, widowers, domestic violence.

This research aimed at in identifying the causes and factors behind the pre-matured male–female relationships and to diagnose the tendency of rural social settings to control such occurrences and also to study the bases of reasons behind the rural social settings to usher a conducive environment for same.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are series of academic documents illustrating the child marriages, reasons affecting such decisions and poverty as a major cause. Some of those studies had revealed the said child marriage as a human right issue, too. As illustrated by UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) 2014 a. under the topic of Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects. New York: UNICEF stated that. "Child marriage is a widespread violation of human rights. It is an impediment to social and economic development, and it is rooted in gender inequality. The low value placed on girls and women perpetuates the act and acceptability of child marriage in societies where the practice is common. Child marriage is defined as any legal or customary union involving a boy or girl below the age of 18. This definition draws from various conventions, treaties, and international agreements, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and recent resolutions of the UN Human Rights Council. While boys sometimes marry young, this paper addresses the practice primarily as it

affects girls who make up the large majority of children who are married under 18. If current trends continue, more than 140 million girls will marry early in the next decade or nearly 40,000 per day.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

What are the specific causes and reasons influencing teenagers to start illegal affairs ending up with husband and wife relationships, before completing 18 years, and also to determine if there any factors of social environment enriching such pursuance, is the research problem.

OBJECTIVES

Main Objective

The key objective of this research is to identify effective causes affecting the tendency of illegal marriages in schooling age. And mainly focused to identify the social work intervention measures so as to prevent the underage marriage and to provide a framework for utilizing rural youth females through social work as a human resource in rural social development. To arrive at conclusions on the status of alluring young girls basically in rural societies before reaching the legally fixed age, to commence husband and wife relationships.

Specific objectives

- To identify recent causes affecting the incidences of immature aged affairs
- To diagnose analytically the nature of social problems emerged due to the child aged marriages in rural areas.
- To propose workable solutions through social work approaches to minimize underage marriages.

METHODOLOGY

Study area and the Research sample

Study Area:

The selected locations for this research were 1. Kotakethena GN Division and 2. Dimbulwala GN Division situated within the Kahawatta police division in the district of Rathnapura. There was an unforgettable incident that took place from 2008 to 2012 in this region in which series of murdering of women happened and a wide publicity was imparted on it nationally and internationally. Followed by these assassinations varied researches too were conducted. Wider discussions came to light on specifying reasons imperiled for the said murdering and the factors revealed were ; the low education, marriages took place between parties living in same village, anti-social affairs whereas, a principle root course emerged was the marriages took place without reaching the fixed ages. This situation was the key factor to select these villages for this research too.

SAMPLE

Out of 44 selectees below 18 those who attended Mothers' clinics in different years from 2012 to 2017 from Kotakethena and Dimbulwala GN divisions, were considered at the beginning and finally selected 36 Informants for the sample.

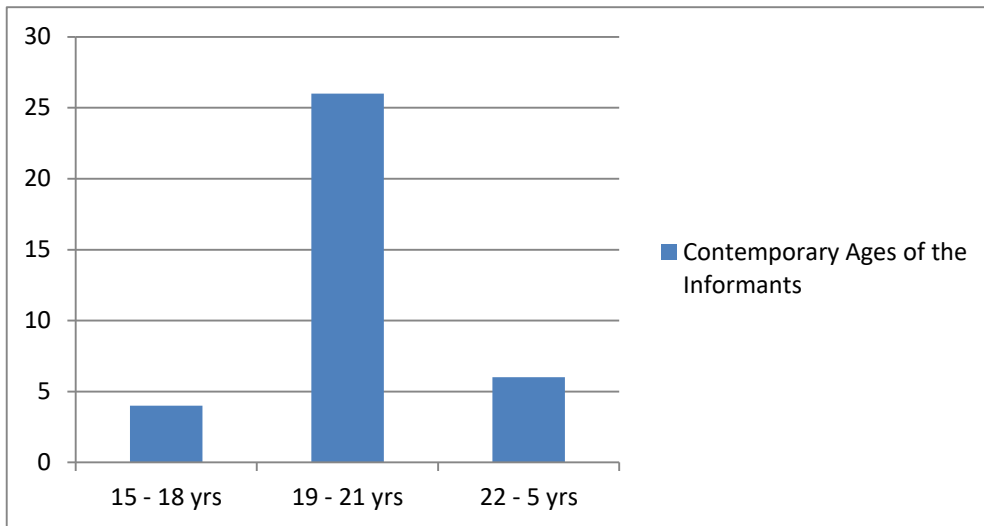
Data Collection :

Process of data gathering was accomplished through questionnaire, discussions, group based discussions, case studies and observations. In addition the team interviewed villagers, family members and few Government officials too.

DATA ANALYSIS

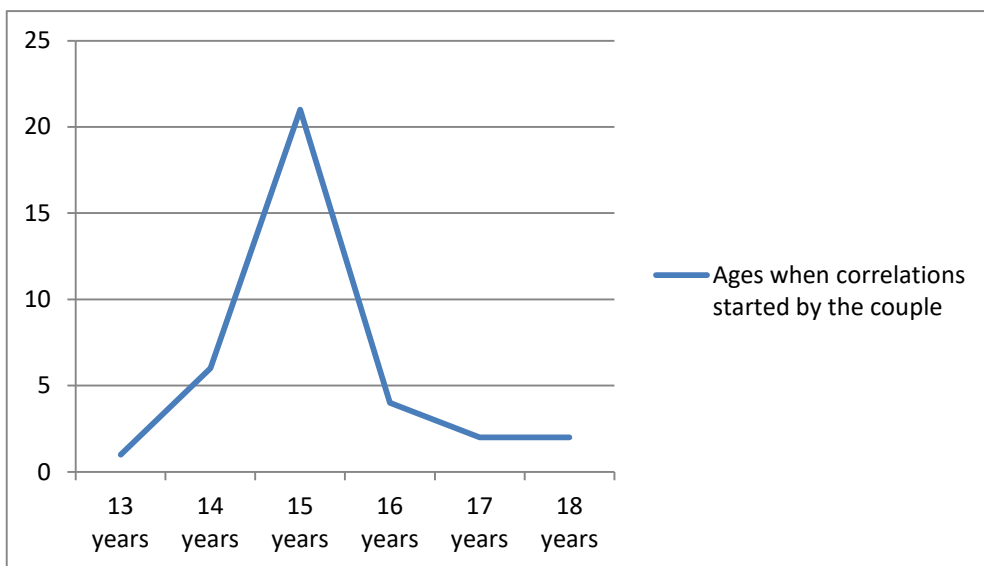
Graph No 01

Contemporary ages of the informants

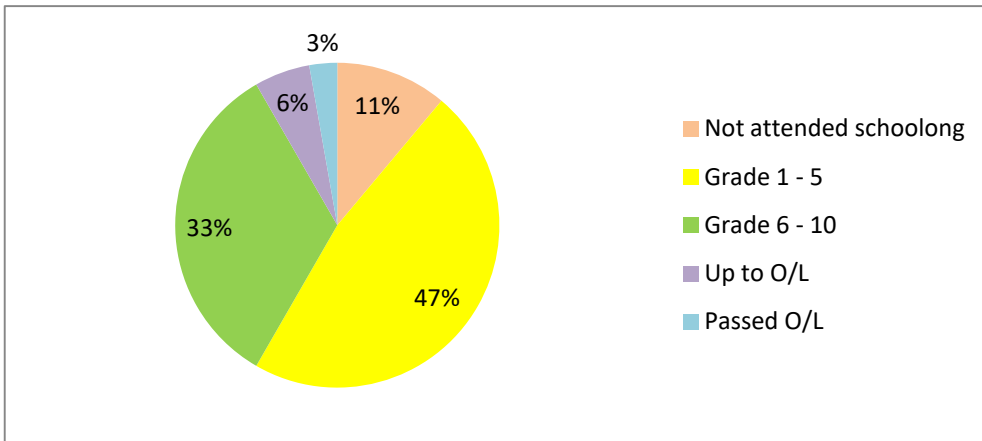


Graph No 02

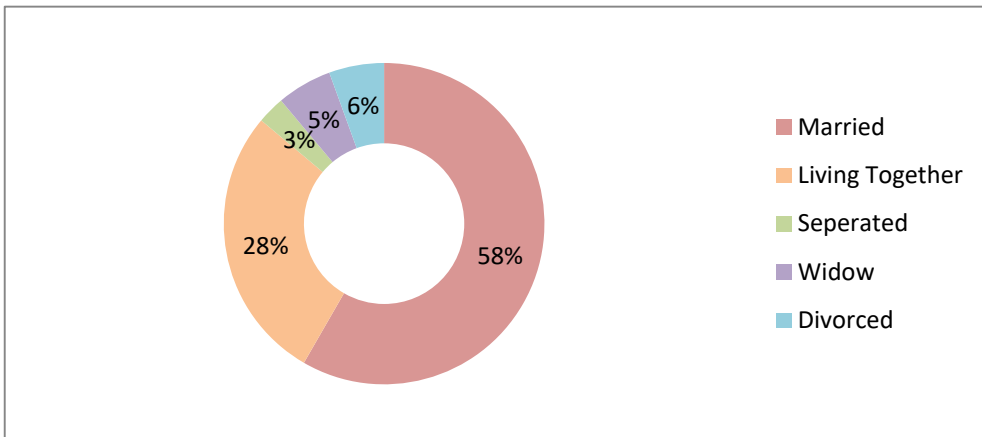
Ages when correlations started by the couple



Graph No 03
Levels of Education



Graph No 04
Marital Status



Graph No 05
Employment of the Husband

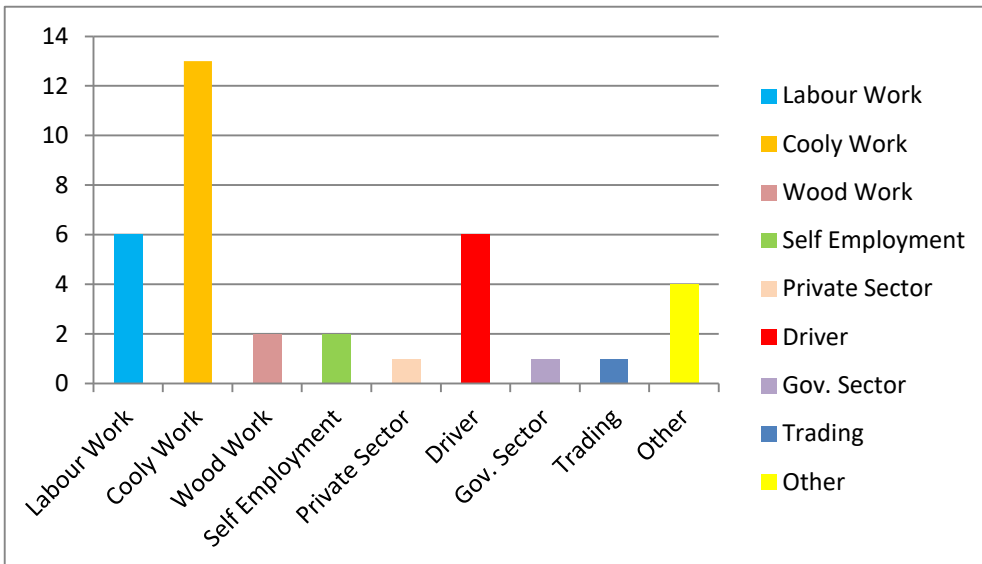
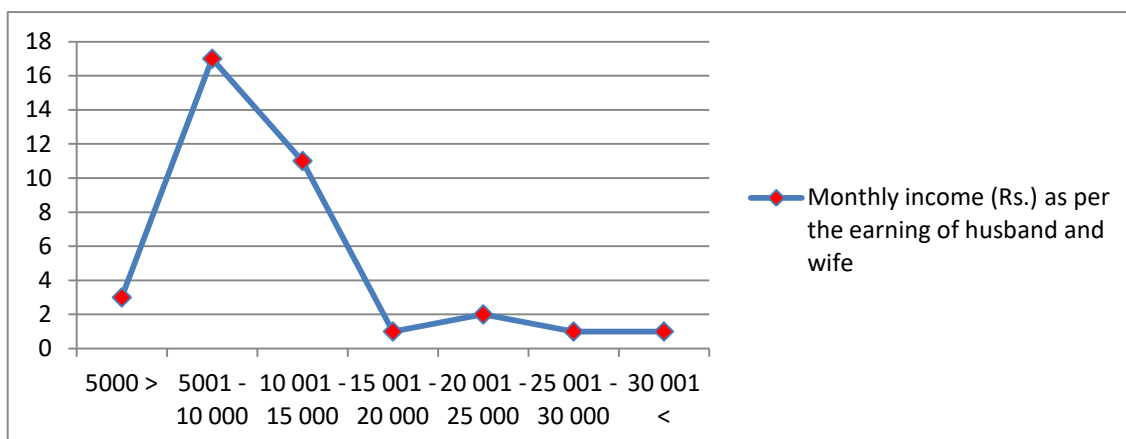


Table No 01
Status of Employment of Informant

Status of employment of informant	Number = 36	Percentage
Not employed	01	(2.77)
Trading	04	(11.11)
Self-employment	09	(25)
Cooly work	09	(25)
Private sector job	04	(11.11)
Govt. sector	02	(5.55)
Working in Estates	06	(16.66)
Other	01	(11.11)

Graph No 06
Monthly Income (Rs.) as per the earning of husband and wife



Graph No 07
No. of Children in the family

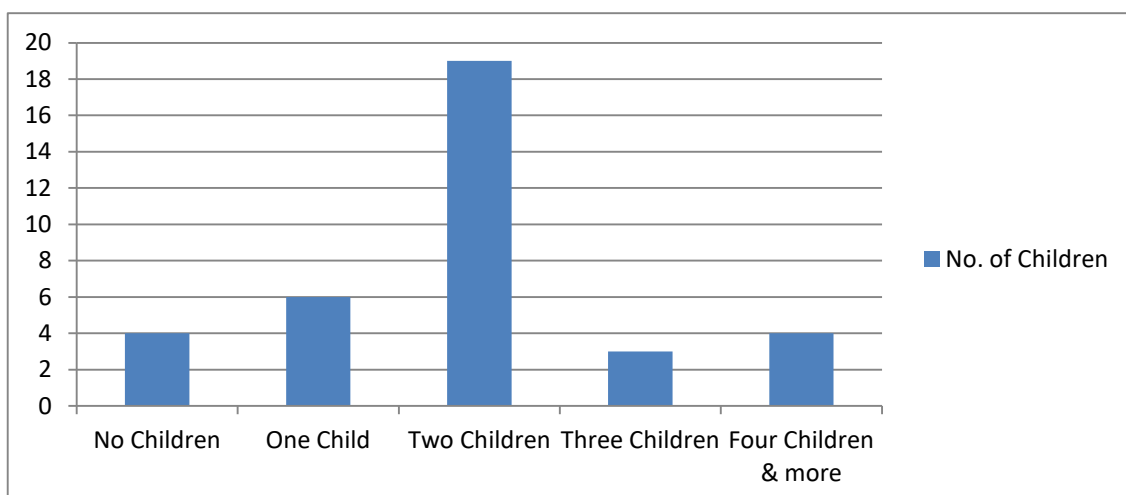


Table No 02
Details of families during Childhood

Details of families during childhood	Number = 36	Percentage
Both parents were alive	25	(69.44)
Father or mother was not alive	11	(30.55)
Mother was in overseas	06	(16.66)
Father was in overseas	01	(2.77)
Self is the eldest in the family	19	(52.77)
Father was addicted to alcohol or drugs	21	(58.33)
Both parents not permanently employed	23	(63.88)
Father/Mother had divorced	03	(8.33)
Education was to be discontinued due to	26	(72.22)

Graph No 08
Employment of Mother & Father before the marriage of informant

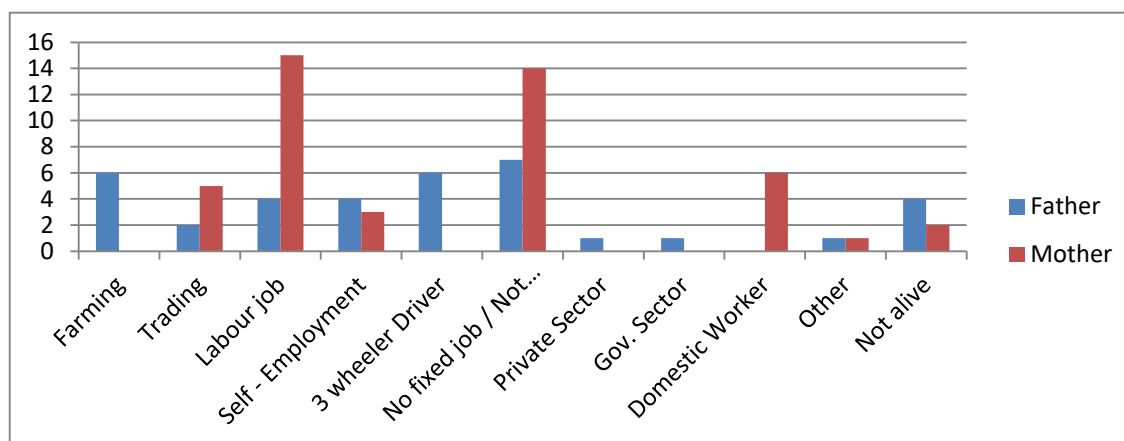


Table No 03
Most related issues led to decide early marriage

Most related issues led to decide early marriage	Number = 36	Percentage
Due to economic hardships	25	(69.44)
Problems emerged within the family	21	(58.33)
Schooling was inactive/stopped	18	(50)
Mother/Father was in overseas	04	(11.11)
Either mother or father or both not alive or	06	(16.66)

Due to the pressure of the lover	06	(16.66)
For being the eldest in the family	09	(52.77)
Due to faced injustices	11	(30.55)
Other	02	(5.55)

Table No 04**Informant's feelings on the married life or living together**

Informants' feelings on the married life or living together	Number = 36	Percentage
No happiness at all	23	(63.88)
Repent	29	(80.55)
Had to find whatsoever job	18	(50)
This was a fatal incident	26	(72.22)
Can be happy	04	(11.11)
Satisfactory to an extent	06	(16.66)
No opinion	05	(13.88)

Table No 05**Problems being faced by informant in the family**

Problems being faced by informant in the family	Number = 36	Percentage
Unavailability of a fixed job	22	(61.11)
Poverty	29	(80.55)
Subjected for some diseases	16	(44.44)
Drunkenness of husband	19	(52.77)
Sexual violence	07	(19.44)
No permanent house for living	06	(16.66)
Clashes between Mother-in-law Vs.	11	(30.55)
Other	06	(16.66)

DISCUSSION

Essentially, this research was concentrated on the nature of factors which had influences on girls who was entered into marriages before reaching the acceptable age level that prevailed in the rural society. As per the data shown above an investigation was attended on the indispensable factors such as, socio-economic, educational, as well as the family background when the girls started their affairs while also assessing the status and role of them in such family setting

Status of education revealed that 47.22% of the informants had studied only up to 5th. Grade while 11.11% had not attended schooling at all. As stated in the data table above, only one girl had succeeded in Level whereas, 33.33% had reached up to 10th. Grade. Accordingly the low scale of education had paved the way for girls to enter into early marriages. On the inquiry on reasons to withhold education the fact mentioned by 52.77% referred that they were being eldest in the family and had to take care Youngers while also spending time to assist parents on their casual / farming work.

"..... I am the eldest in my family. I had two younger brothers and two younger sisters after the death of father, mother had to struggle to earn money through labour work. When mother was away from home the younger children were left for me to take care. Some other days I had to join mother to deliver sand from the river. On these reasons I could not perform my education. Becoming eldest in the family is a result of evil deed". - (20 year old woman)

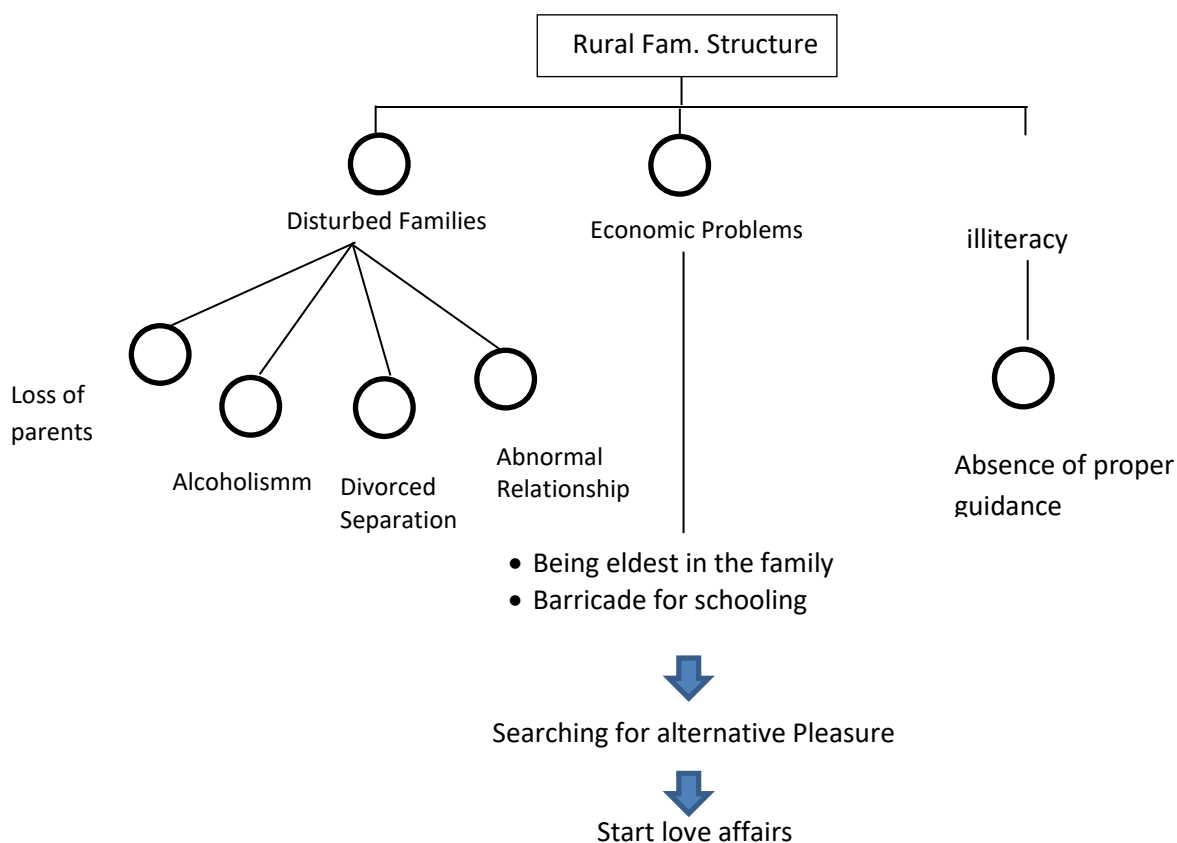
Informants articulated that the tediousness occurred in the family setting had impelled each of them to start love affairs in pretty young ages in which the affected causes were; being eldest in families, family-life with deteriorated income, fathers' addiction on liquor, uncivilized connection within parents were some of them.

Gem mining is one of the leading industries inherited to the physical environment in this region. Since Gem mining related jobs has the feature of generating quick money those youth in schooling age trying their best to join such work. Most of the youth were influenced on such job opportunities. Also disclosed through the sample that only two informants could manage family affairs without hindrances mainly due to the status of parents who were Govt. employees.

"..... My father was the owner of a gem mine that he maintained it in addition to his job. There were 4/5 boys employed for the jobs of the mine and Shantha was one of them. Shantha and I became lovers and we continued our affaire for a period by evading from the knowledge of family members. Since I knew affirmably that no permission could be obtained from parents to continue this affair, I left home saying that I am going to school with Shantha. - (Women in 19)

As revealed through the study there are number of reasons and causes affecting girls in particular in rural setting to start love affaires before they reach the matured ages. The following chart illustrates such reasons.

Chart 1.1. - Factors affecting young girls to start love affairs



CONCLUSION

It is determinable that there are crucial factors still unresolved in rural Sri Lanka namely; the inherited poverty in rural localities, inadequacy of infra structural facilities, Illiteracy, broken family setting, informalities of strategic Agricultural and other economic actions and it can be concluded that those factors have direct influences on children as well as adolescents in Sri Lanka.

This process has circular effect. It is also apparent that illiteracy, and destiny of parents has penetrated to children and children continue same without change. Children in such families when they are not reach the marital age consider short term satisfaction alone while emphasizing day to day living only. Through such process it is clear that rural family setting has to face enormous amount of hardships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The strategic to ending child marriage through social work intervention methods

Cultivate partnerships broadly

Ending and responding to child marriage requires the commitment, involvement and collaboration of a diverse network of partners, who bring unique perspectives, skills, and resources to face a daunting challenge. Governments need to uphold the international treaties they signed and ensure

the rights of children by enforcing laws within their countries. Private organizations and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can elevate the need to end child marriage by making it a priority and dedicating resources to the effort. Working with lawmakers and parliamentarians is also critical, as they can promote enactment, implementation, and enforcement of laws and policies that discourage child marriage. Community leaders, traditional leaders, and members of law enforcement and the judicial community have critical contributions to make in implementing and enforcing laws passed.

Mobilize communities to shift norms that perpetuate child marriage

Often, child marriage is considered a private family matter, governed by religion and culture. In some cases, child marriages are pursued by families as a social and/or economic imperative. In other cases, child marriages are used to consolidate relations between families, secure deals over land or other property, or even to settle disputes. Other times, families present child marriage as a viable and necessary way to protect girls from sexual violence or the consequences of unprotected pre-marital sex, including becoming unwed mothers who are vulnerable to abandonment and ostracism in their communities. Programming efforts, therefore, must be sensitive to cultural context in tackling complex economic issues and deep-rooted social norms, attitudes, and practices. As such, it becomes absolutely essential to engage with communities in finding locally appropriate strategies for ending child marriage. Local civil society and NGOs are important to the cause as they can mobilize their communities and encourage children, youth, and adults to participate in developing programs at the national, regional, and community levels. **Working in partnership with parents is also essential**, as child marriage is often a consequence of the constraints and stresses experienced by families as a result of poverty, displacement, or societal pressures. Working with parents to transform attitudes and identify viable alternatives that advance the interests of individual children and the wellbeing of the entire family is critical to ensuring that interventions have positive, sustainable results.

Engaging men, particularly fathers and brothers will be necessary. Interventions that involve fathers and religious and traditional leaders broaden understanding of the dangers of child marriage, and the long-term benefits of education and economic opportunities. Equally important is reaching out to boys at a young age to encourage equitable gender attitudes and norms so that they can be allies in preventing child marriage and change agents within their communities.

Finally, interventions should leverage the role of women and girls as change agents within their societies. Women and girls must be recognized as more than victims or people at risk. Because they are closest to the problem, they will have particular insights helpful in finding solutions. They must have a voice in decision-making and be allowed to become leaders in national-, regional-, and community-level decision processes, enabled to speak out to advance their own rights.

Address the unique needs of married children in programs

Married girls are among the most vulnerable and marginalized, often isolated from family, social, and support networks, with very little education and decision-making power. To address the needs of married children, existing interventions should be expanded to enhance married girls' and boys' educational opportunities, social networks, economic assets, negotiating skills, and access to health

and other social services. These efforts should always be designed to take into account the power dynamics behind male and female relationships, in part to avoid placing married children at additional risk.

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