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THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER EQUALITY IN SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**A INFLUÊNCIA DA IGUALDADE DE GÉNERO NO
DESENVOLVIMENTO EDUCATIVO SUSTENTÁVEL**

**LA INFLUENCIA DE LA IGUALDAD DE GÉNERO EN EL
DESARROLLO EDUCATIVO SOSTENIBLE**

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ABSTRACT

Since its independence, Uzbekistan has promoted and forced to fight for equal rights among boys and girls, especially in the educational sphere. It creates new opportunities for girls, starting from the allocation of educational grants for girls to the opening new projects for the participation and hence, popularization of science among our female population. However, while much has been done to achieve equal access and opportunities for girls in Uzbekistan, much remains to be implemented and done to promote and reach equal education. From recent investigations and statistics, it can be concluded that only around 37% of university students are female in our country. This research article investigates the impact of early marriage practices in Uzbekistan on girls' educational opportunities and outcomes. Specifically, it explores how the cultural norm of early marriages may hinder young girls' ability to fully engage in their education by imposing added responsibilities and challenges, potentially leading to a decline in academic focus and motivation. In the study presented in this article, the findings from research conducted among students at Fergana State University are illustrated, which offer insights into the effects of early marriages on educational engagement and highlight the need to address barriers faced by young women in pursuing their academic goals.

KEYWORDS

Early marriages; Societal standards; Education in barriers; Professional development

RESUMO

Desde a sua independência, o Uzbequistão tem promovido e forçado a luta pela igualdade de direitos entre rapazes e raparigas, especialmente no domínio da educação. Criou novas oportunidades para as raparigas, desde a atribuição de bolsas de estudo para raparigas até à elaboração de novos projectos para a participação e, conseqüentemente, para a popularização da ciência entre a nossa população feminina. No entanto, embora muito tenha sido feito para alcançar a igualdade de acesso e de oportunidades para as raparigas no Uzbequistão, há ainda muito por implementar e fazer para promover e alcançar a igualdade na educação. Com base em investigações e estatísticas recentes, pode concluir-se que apenas cerca de 37% dos estudantes universitários são do sexo feminino no nosso país. Este artigo de investigação investiga o impacto das práticas de casamento precoce no Uzbequistão nas oportunidades e resultados educativos das raparigas. Especificamente, explora a forma como a norma cultural dos casamentos precoces pode prejudicar a capacidade das jovens de se empenharem plenamente na sua educação, impondo-lhes responsabilidades e desafios acrescidos, o que pode conduzir a uma diminuição da concentração e da motivação académicas. No estudo apresentado neste artigo, são ilustrados os resultados da investigação conduzida entre estudantes da Universidade Estatal de Fergana, que oferecem uma visão dos efeitos dos casamentos precoces no empenho educativo e salientam a necessidade de abordar as barreiras enfrentadas pelas jovens na prossecução dos seus objectivos académicos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Casamentos precoces; Padrões sociais; Educação com barreiras; Desenvolvimento profissional

RESUMEN

Desde su independencia, Uzbekistán ha promovido y obligado a luchar por la igualdad de derechos entre niños y niñas, especialmente en el ámbito educativo. Se crean nuevas oportunidades para las niñas, empezando por la asignación de becas educativas para niñas hasta el planteamiento de nuevos proyectos para la participación y, por ende, la divulgación de la ciencia entre nuestra población femenina. Sin embargo, aunque se ha hecho mucho para lograr la igualdad de acceso y oportunidades para las niñas en Uzbekistán, aún queda mucho por aplicar y hacer para promover y alcanzar la igualdad en la educación. De investigaciones y estadísticas recientes se puede concluir que sólo alrededor del 37% de los estudiantes universitarios son mujeres en nuestro país. Este artículo de investigación estudia el impacto de las prácticas matrimoniales precoces en Uzbekistán sobre las

oportunidades y los resultados educativos de las niñas. En concreto, explora cómo la norma cultural de los matrimonios precoces puede obstaculizar la capacidad de las jóvenes para comprometerse plenamente con su educación al imponerles responsabilidades y retos añadidos, lo que puede conducir a una disminución de la concentración y la motivación académicas. En el estudio que se presenta en este artículo, se ilustran los resultados de la investigación llevada a cabo entre estudiantes de la Universidad Estatal de Fergana, que ofrecen una visión de los efectos de los matrimonios precoces en el compromiso educativo y ponen de relieve la necesidad de abordar las barreras a las que se enfrentan las jóvenes a la hora de perseguir sus objetivos académicos.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Matrimonios precoces; Normas sociales; Educación en barreras; Desarrollo profesional

1 INTRODUCTION

Early marriages are the phenomenon affecting both and girls in a diverse way. However, taking the proportion of females getting married in their early ages is much higher in the comparison with males globally. Additionally, since they have more responsibilities that are connected to their new families and children, they tend to have fewer opportunities to develop professionally. Early marriages are the global issue nowadays, affecting the nations in diverse ways, especially the developing countries. Unfortunately, Uzbekistan, being a developing county at the moment and that is allocating and investing huge sums of money for girls' education among the country in order to tackle this issue, cannot confront the Uzbek culture and mentality. As a result, the cultural norms of getting married in an early age for females creates the limitations and barriers for them fully invest in their education.

According to the statistics of WHO in 2018, approximately 16 million girls are getting married in the age range between 15 and 19 years, illustrating us the existence and prevalence of this issues in the entire world.

O.C.Ngozi (2020) in his work 'Early Marriage and it's Impact on Girl's Education in Abakalik Education Zone of Ebonyi State' has stated the problem in his country Nigeria that female, having the same potential as male, most often are denied of their opportunities, and education in particular, because of the social standards and views towards the marriage of girls and their 'abilities' to achieve their goals.

The results of the research done by S.Kanji *et al.* (2023) showed the evidence of a negative treatment effect of early marriages on the educational achievements and even health issues related to them of the female population. Additionally, A.Fakhari *et al.* (2020) in the results of their research highlighted that NLEs (Negative life events), especially early marriages, are significantly associated with the severity of depressive symptoms in both adolescence and young adulthood, and these factors were found to be the most important determinants of depressive symptoms in the study.

In the work 'Analysis on the effects of early marriages on a girl child's education' written by Thelma Chansa Chanda *et al.*(2023), we can find the results of the study, stating that early marriages practice is considered a huge problem in Solwezi district in North-western province of Zambia, where the key indicators of that problem lies on the parents' and their responsibilities to invest in the education of their children and this research illustrates how the parents are underestimating the importance of the education at all, giving priority to the social standards. They raised the need of the governmental assistance to deal with this issue by creating a strict policy against it.

2 METHODS

The survey was conducted using an online Google Form questionnaire consisting of 17 personal multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The questions were designed to gather information on the participants' marital status, age, and their perceptions of how early marriage impacts their education. The survey was distributed to Fergana State University students who met the criteria of being female, married, or both married and having a child, and aged between 20 and 23 years old.

2.1 PARTICIPANT SELECTION

A total of 17 participants from Fergana State University were selected to take part in the survey. The participants were chosen based on the criteria of being female, married, or both married and having a child, and falling within the age range of 20 to 23 years old. The participants were selected to ensure a diverse representation of the target population.

2.2 DATA ANALYSIS

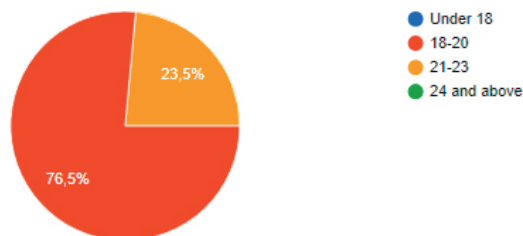
Once the survey responses were collected, the data was analyzed to examine the hypothesis that the cultural practice of early marriages in Uzbekistan creates a barrier for girls to fully invest in their education. The analysis focused on how the added responsibilities of marriage and raising children at a young age impact the participants' level of engagement and motivation in academic pursuits. Quantitative data such as age proportions were calculated, and qualitative responses were analyzed to identify common themes and patterns related to the impact of early marriage on education. The findings were then used to draw conclusions regarding the relationship between early marriage and educational outcomes among young women in Uzbekistan.

3 RESULTS

The survey question 'At what age did you get married?' aimed to gather information about the age at which the participants got married, providing insights into the prevalence of early marriages

among the target population. The responses were categorized into four age groups: under 18, 18-20, 21-23, and 24 and above (figure 1).

Figure 1 - At what age did you get married?



Among the participants, 76.5% reported getting married between the ages of 18 and 20, indicating a significant proportion of early marriages in the sample. This finding aligns with the cultural practice of early marriages in Uzbekistan, where marrying at a young age is common. The high percentage in the 18-20 age group suggests that many young women in the sample entered marriage during their late teenage years or early twenties.

In contrast, 23.5% of the participants stated that they got married between the ages of 21 and 23, indicating a smaller but still notable proportion of participants who married at a slightly older age. This finding may reflect a shift towards slightly later marriages among some individuals within the sample.

Interestingly, none of the participants reported getting married under the age of 18 or at the age of 24 and above. This absence of responses in these age categories suggests that early marriages (under 18) and later marriages (24 and above) were not prevalent among the surveyed group.

Among the participants, 5.9% reported that marriage has not impacted their academic focus. This small percentage suggests that for a minority of individuals in the sample, being married has not had any noticeable effect on their ability to focus on their studies. This finding may indicate that these individuals have found a balance between their marital responsibilities and academic commitments.

In comparison, 17.6% of the participants stated that marriage has moderately impacted their academic focus. This group may experience some challenges in balancing their marital duties with their academic responsibilities, leading to a moderate level of impact on their ability to concentrate on their studies.

Additionally, a significant proportion of the participants (29.4%) reported that marriage has significantly impacted their academic focus. This finding suggests that for almost one-third of the sample, being married has had a substantial influence on their ability to prioritize and dedicate time to their academic pursuits. Factors such as increased household responsibilities, family commitments, and emotional stress related to marriage may contribute to this significant impact on academic focus.

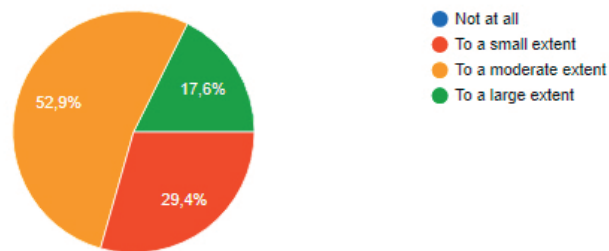
Notably, the largest percentage of participants (47.1%) indicated that marriage has improved their academic focus. This finding is intriguing as it suggests that for nearly half of the respondents, being married has had a positive effect on their ability to concentrate on their studies. Possible explanations for this improvement could include emotional support from a spouse, shared responsibilities that free up time for studying, or a sense of motivation and purpose derived from the marital relationship.

The survey question “Do you feel that early marriage has affected your level of engagement in university activities?” aimed to investigate the impact of early marriage on the participants’ involvement in university activities. The responses were categorized into four distinct levels: not at all, to a small extent, to a moderate extent, and to a large extent.

Among the participants, 0% reported that early marriage has not affected their level of engagement in university activities. This finding suggests that none of the respondents felt that being married early had no impact on their ability to participate in various university-related activities. This result implies that early marriage may have some influence on individuals’ engagement in academic or extracurricular pursuits.

Interestingly, 29.4% (figure 2) of the participants indicated that early marriage has affected their level of engagement in university activities to a small extent. This group may experience minor challenges in balancing their marital responsibilities with their involvement in university activities. Factors such as time management, conflicting priorities, or emotional stress related to early marriage may contribute to this small impact on engagement.

Figure 2 - Do you feel that early marriage has affected your level of engagement in university activities?



The majority of the participants (52.9%) reported that early marriage has impacted their level of engagement in university activities to a moderate extent. This finding suggests that more than half of the sample feels that being married early has had a noticeable effect on their participation in academic or extracurricular endeavors. This moderate impact could stem from increased responsibilities at home, limited time for university activities, or emotional strain associated with managing both marriage and academic commitments.

Additionally, 17.6% of the participants stated that early marriage has affected their level of engagement in university activities to a large extent. This group may face significant challenges in balancing the demands of marriage with their involvement in university-related tasks. Factors such as financial pressures, family obligations, or lack of support systems may contribute to this substantial impact on engagement in university activities.

The responses to the open-ended survey question regarding the influence of cultural expectations of early marriage on educational aspirations and goals were concise but provided valuable insights into the participants’ experiences. The varied responses reflect a range of perspectives and attitudes towards the impact of societal norms surrounding early marriage on individuals’ educational ambitions.

The response “Great” suggests a positive outlook on how cultural expectations of early marriage have influenced the individual’s educational aspirations. This response may indicate that the participant views early marriage norms as empowering or motivating factors that have positively impacted their academic goals. It is possible that this individual sees early marriage as a source of support or encouragement for their educational pursuits.

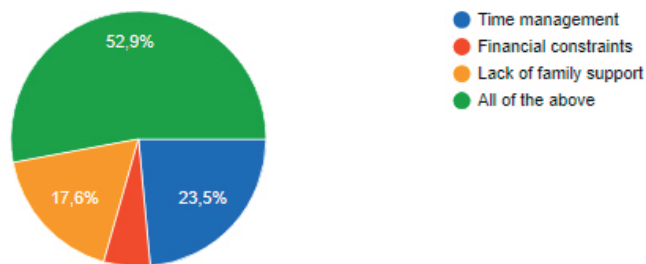
On the other hand, the response “No way” indicates a strong rejection of the idea that cultural expectations of early marriage have influenced the individual’s educational aspirations. This response may suggest a firm stance against conforming to societal norms and a determination to pursue academic goals independently of external pressures related to early marriage. The participant may prioritize personal growth and autonomy in shaping their educational aspirations.

The responses “they were decreased” and “yes, it has” highlight a negative impact of cultural expectations of early marriage on educational aspirations. These participants acknowledge that societal pressures to marry early have hindered their academic goals, leading to a decrease in their educational ambitions. Factors such as limited opportunities for personal development or conflicting priorities may have contributed to this negative influence on their educational aspirations.

The responses “yes” and “yes, of course” affirm that the cultural expectation of early marriage has influenced the participants’ educational aspirations and goals. These individuals acknowledge the impact of societal norms on shaping their academic ambitions, indicating that they have experienced some form of influence or pressure related to early marriage expectations. It is likely that these participants have grappled with balancing societal expectations with their own educational goals.

The survey question regarding the challenges faced in balancing marriage and academic responsibilities elicited a range of responses that shed light on the multifaceted nature of this issue. The data shows that the majority of respondents, 52.9%, indicated that they have faced all of the listed challenges, namely time management, financial constraints, and lack of family support (figure 3). This suggests that a significant portion of individuals navigating the intersection of marriage and academic responsibilities encounter a combination of obstacles that impact their ability to effectively balance these competing priorities.

Figure 3 - What challenges have you faced in balancing marriage and academic responsibilities?

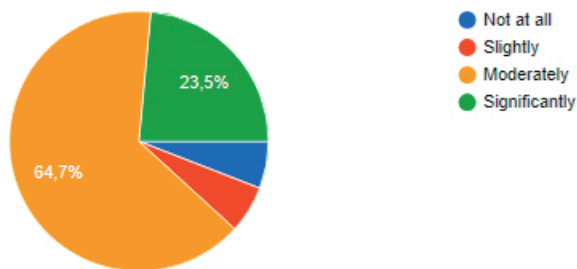


The survey question on the impact of early marriage on individuals' motivation to pursue higher education or career aspirations revealed significant insights into the correlation between marital status and educational or professional ambitions. It was found that a majority of respondents, 64.7%, indicated that early marriage has moderately influenced their motivation to pursue higher education or career aspirations, suggesting a substantial impact on a significant portion of individuals. Additionally, 23.5% reported a significant effect, highlighting the profound influence of marital commitments on educational and career goals, likely due to challenges such as balancing family responsibilities and financial constraints.

Conversely, a small percentage of respondents, 5.9%, stated that early marriage has not affected their motivation at all, while an equal percentage reported a slight impact. These responses indicate that for some individuals, early marriage may not necessarily impede their drive to pursue higher education or career goals, possibly due to strong intrinsic motivation, external support systems, or effective time management strategies that enable them to navigate both marital and educational or professional responsibilities concurrently. This nuanced range of responses underscores the complex interplay between early marriage and individuals' aspirations in the realms of education and career advancement.

The survey question on the impact of early marriage on individuals' motivation to pursue higher education or career aspirations yielded valuable insights into the correlation between marital status and educational or professional ambitions. The data revealed that a majority of respondents, 64.7%, indicated that early marriage has moderately influenced their motivation to pursue higher education or career aspirations, suggesting a significant impact on a substantial portion of individuals (figure 4). Additionally, 23.5% reported a significant effect, underscoring the profound influence of marital commitments on educational and career goals, potentially due to challenges such as balancing family responsibilities and financial constraints.

Figure 4 - Has early marriage affected your motivation to pursue higher education or career aspirations?



Conversely, a small percentage of respondents, 5.9%, stated that early marriage has not affected their motivation at all, while an equal percentage reported a slight impact. These responses indicate that for some individuals, early marriage may not necessarily impede their drive to pursue higher education or career goals, possibly due to strong intrinsic motivation, external support systems, or effective time management strategies that enable them to navigate both marital and educational or professional responsibilities concurrently. This nuanced range of responses underscores the complex interplay between early marriage and individuals' aspirations in the realms of education and career advancement.

The responses to the open-ended question shed light on the challenges faced by married students with children at the university. Themes like emotional stress, financial strain, lack of support, time management, and balancing academic and family responsibilities emerged from the data. These factors impact academic focus, with emotional stress, financial strain, and lack of support being significant contributors. Addressing these challenges through tailored resources and support can help married students with children maintain their academic focus amidst competing priorities at the university.

The responses to the open-ended survey question on how the university can better support married students with children in their academic journey highlight several key strategies.

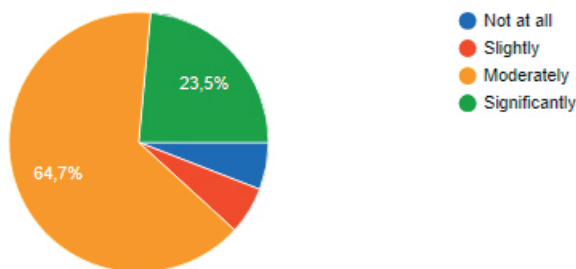
Firstly, offering more flexible class schedules, online classes, and evening classes can greatly benefit married students with children who have childcare responsibilities during the day. These options provide alternative ways for parents to pursue their studies while accommodating their family obligations. By diversifying class formats and timings, the university can help create a more inclusive academic environment for this specific demographic.

Secondly, the suggestion to establish support networks or groups tailored for married students with children underscores the importance of fostering a sense of community and belonging. These networks can serve as valuable platforms for parents to connect, share experiences, and access resources that cater to their unique needs. Such support systems can enhance the overall student experience and provide much-needed emotional and practical support for this group.

Thirdly, the idea of assigning academic advisors specialized in working with married students further emphasizes the significance of personalized support and guidance. These advisors can offer targeted assistance in navigating academic requirements, managing time effectively, and balancing family commitments with studies. By having dedicated advisors, married students with children can receive tailored academic support that acknowledges their circumstances.

Additionally, the suggestion to expand online study options and convert offline lessons into online formats can offer added flexibility and accessibility. Online learning can provide a convenient solution for parents who may find it challenging to attend on-campus classes regularly due to caregiving responsibilities. By digitizing course content, the university can cater to the diverse needs of married students with children and create a more adaptable learning environment.

The survey results indicate that a significant portion of respondents, 64.7%, feel that early marriage has had a moderate impact on their motivation to pursue higher education or career aspirations (figure 5). This shows that a majority of individuals perceive a notable influence from early marriage on their academic and professional goals. Additionally, 23.5% of respondents reported a significant impact, highlighting a substantial number of individuals for whom early marriage has had a pronounced effect on their motivation in these areas. The findings suggest that early marriage can play a significant role in shaping individuals' aspirations and drive towards furthering their education or advancing their career. Further exploration of the factors contributing to these differing levels of impact could offer valuable insights into the challenges faced by individuals navigating the intersection of personal and professional goals after getting married early.

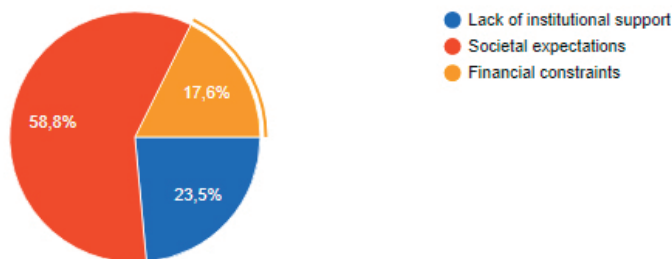
Figure 5 - Has early marriage affected your motivation to pursue higher education or career aspirations?

The responses to the open-ended survey question shed light on key factors contributing to a decrease in academic focus among married students with children at the university. The recurring themes identified include the challenges of balancing academic responsibilities alongside family commitments, such as childcare and household duties. Emotional stress emerged as a significant factor impacting academic focus, highlighting the emotional strains of managing family and academic responsibilities simultaneously. Financial stress was also cited as a barrier to academic focus, underscoring the importance of financial stability in supporting married students with children.

Furthermore, the responses highlighted the lack of support as a critical factor hindering academic focus for this student demographic. Married students with children expressed the need for more comprehensive support systems tailored to their specific needs and circumstances. In addition, time management challenges were prominently mentioned, emphasizing the importance of effective time management skills to juggle academic demands and family responsibilities successfully. The survey responses underscore the multifaceted nature of the obstacles faced by married students with children, emphasizing the significance of addressing these factors to enhance academic focus and support their educational journey.

The survey question 'What are the key factors that contribute to a decrease in academic focus for married students with children?' delves into the underlying factors contributing to a decline in academic focus among married students with children at the university. The responses reveal significant percentages attributing academic distraction to societal expectations, financial constraints, and lack of institutional support. The dominant mention of societal expectations, highlighted by 58.8% of respondents, suggests that external pressures and cultural norms may heavily influence married students with children, affecting their ability to prioritize academic pursuits (figure 6). This emphasizes the impact of societal dynamics on the academic trajectories of this student demographic and underscores the need for a supportive and inclusive environment that acknowledges and alleviates these pressures.

Figure 6 - What are the key factors that contribute to a decrease in academic focus for married students with children?



Furthermore, the acknowledgment of financial constraints as a considerable factor in impeding academic focus, as reported by 17.6% of respondents, highlights the importance of addressing economic challenges faced by married students with children. Financial stress can significantly impact academic performance and engagement, indicating a need for targeted resources and support mechanisms to alleviate this burden. Additionally, the recognition of lack of institutional support by 23.5% of respondents underscores the critical role that universities play in fostering a conducive learning environment for married students with children. Addressing these key factors through tailored interventions and support services can enhance the academic success and well-being of this student population.

The responses to the survey question 'In your opinion, what steps can be taken to address the challenges faced by married students with children in fully investing in their education at Fergana State University?' addressing the challenges faced by married students with children at Fergana State University present a diverse range of suggestions for addressing these obstacles. One prevalent recommendation, supported by 33.3% of respondents, is to create a supportive community for this specific student group. This underscores the importance of building a network of understanding and camaraderie to help married students with children navigate their academic endeavors more effectively. By fostering a sense of community, students can connect, share experiences, and access support tailored to their unique circumstances, promoting a conducive learning environment.

Another notable suggestion, endorsed by 16.7% of respondents, is to provide resources for achieving work-life balance. This highlights the significance of offering practical tools and guidance to assist married students in managing their academic commitments alongside their familial responsibilities. Additionally, the proposal to convert offline lessons into online formats received equal support, emphasizing the value of flexible learning options that can accommodate the diverse needs of married students with children. These responses collectively underscore the vital role that tailored support, flexibility, and community engagement play in enhancing the educational experiences of married students with children at Fergana State University.

4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of the study shed light on the prevalent practice of early marriages in Uzbekistan and its impact on girls' educational pursuits. The results indicate a high proportion of early marriages among the surveyed population, with many individuals marrying between the ages of 18 and 20, in alignment with cultural norms. While some respondents reported that marriage has had a positive impact on their academic focus, a significant portion acknowledged varying degrees of influence, with some experiencing challenges in balancing marital responsibilities with their educational commitments. These findings underscore the complex interplay between marriage and education, highlighting the need for further exploration and targeted support to address the barriers faced by young married women in fully engaging in their academic journey. By understanding the nuances of early marriages and their effects on academic engagement, stakeholders can better tailor interventions and initiatives to support these individuals in achieving their educational goals and fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

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