

# **An Exploratory Study of Bride Price and Domestic Violence in 3 Sub counties in Bundibugyo District, Uganda**

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# Background and Study Objectives

## **Background:**

- Bride price consist of a traditional marriage practice that involves the negotiation and payment of material items to the brides family as part of formalizing the marriage
- Concern that bride prices is a practice that promotes violence against women.

## **Study Objectives**

- To describe the current practice of paying bride price in the three sub counties of Bundibugyo District.
- To describe community perceptions and views towards bride price, and
- To explore the relationship between bride price and domestic violence in Bundibugyo District.

# Summary of the methods used

## **Participants:**

- Community leaders (including church officials, community development officer, clan leaders)
- Elderly men who take part in deciding the bride price in the communities;
- Unmarried and recently married men who have recently gone through the negotiations of bride price;
- Unmarried and recently married women who are yet gone through the negotiations of bride price;
- And older women who participate in decision making about bride price. (aunties)

## **Data collection:**

- 9 focused group discussions, 3 in each sub county.
- 12 key informant interviews, 4 in each sub county.
- 9 in depth interviews, 3 in each sub county.

# The process

- *'They family members of the girl decide on what be paid as bride price with out the knowledge of the girl. The clan head chairs the meeting when deciding the items to be brought from the boy's family. Its always 12 goats, clothes for the parents, local brew (12 calabashes), hoe, mattress and 12 crates of soda. Some people pay both goats and cash depending on what they agreed upon.'* (clan leader)

# Meanings for a women

Words women used to describe bride price

- *Respect/Safety/Gift/Security/stability*
- *'I feel bad, my husband could not afford bride price, I feel lonely, rejected, neglected by my family members, since they got no benefit from my marriage, my family is on bad terms with me because there was no dowry paid'.*
- Women want bride price to be paid because it showed respect, stability. They attach value to it.

# Impact on men

- Issues for poor & young men
  - Those who don't have wealth are denied women of their choice because they can not afford bride price
- Men who don't pay bride price will be less respected by their wives relatives including the parents in law.
  - *'The man may have to borrow substantially and go into debts and impoverishments in order to pay bride price and may have no income.'* secretary for women and children affairs.
- Younger brothers may have to pay back bride price for a sister who leaves her husband.
- Some men are left unmarried because of bride price, or even inferiority complex if no bride price is paid or even forced into cohabitation.

# Impact on the family.

- Men who marry multiple wives, it becomes an extra expenditure on family resources and incomes
- *“Family can be divided, mothers in-law, sisters in-law can be resent less, their cows get taken away to pay for a new wife”* (recently married man)
- Having to pay for a deceased wife was also raised as key and most embarrassing and expensive venture. (when BP is not paid at the time of the deceased death)

# Connections to VAW

## If bride price not paid

- Women whose bride price has not been paid are humble and thus emotionally psychologically tortured.
- Some women completely disrespect their husbands should they fail to pay.

## When bride price paid

- “Bride price some time brings violence in a home after the payment wives tend to behave badly since they feel now that they are part of the family. They do any thing they want to do not caring whether it pleases the husband or not.” (reported by a man)*
- Some men after paying bride price they mistreat their wives, they beat them up because no one will ask.
  - She has to work hard in compensation for what they paid on her as bride price



# Speaking about bride price

*“It can be as if you are insulting your mother, your fore fathers. As globalization happens, we need to preserve the old but remove the harmful bits of it. Don’t throw out the baby with the bath water. Shake up the practice by all means but try to get its basic value.”*

(Senior church leader)

*It is not right to put human beings on the commercial market, bargain for them and when one is fed up, dump them leaving the woman psychologically tortured. Women lose their dignity, have to do endless hard labor – and then failure to produce children becomes a big crime once you have been paid for. (Duty bearer and Christian father)*

# Key Findings

- Women don't want to quit their relationships even when no bride price is paid, because of pressure, value of being with a man.
- Amidst bride price – violence happens for other reasons – control by husband
- It was also shared that women seeking to divorce can only do so if the bride price is repaid to the husband. In some cases women be abusive relationships because they are likely to be turned away if their families are unable to repay the bride price.

*She experienced abuse because of bride price. She left her violent husband, her brother had to sell off iron sheets of his house to repay the bride price but the money was not enough, as a result she was forced to remarry; the second husband contributed two cow to refund the first husband, she is still suffering even with the second husband but cant go back home because she is paid for. (FGD)*

# Conclusions and Lessons Learned

- The tradition of bride price and its importance is now less clear to some people due to modernization and commercialization of social customs.
- Bride price will take long to change from the current systems of commercialization because people see it as part of their life since they earn from the institution.
- Respondents in the study overwhelmingly recommended the practice of bride price required reform.
- Lessons Learned:
  - Bride price is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into subordinate position compared to men.
  - Bride price/ wealth as a historical institution is a practice that has been denied documentation on the limitation, process and its usefulness.

# Recommendations

**If the reform, mitigation and change of bride price institution has to be made/ carried out, the following emerged as entry points:**

- Community awareness raising and sensitization.
- Legislative and policy reform at local level – develop bye laws.
- Advocacy strategies.
- Finally people need awareness of both the importance and impact of bride price in all spheres

- **THANK YOU FOR LISTENING**