

Is there a link between bride price and perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem of women? An experimental study of a Nigerian sample.

Valentine C. Ezeh
Department of Psychology
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

Bride price payment has been viewed as perpetuating unequal gender power relations that affects women's rights to self determination. There is however an increasing need for further studies on bride price and its effect on women. This study investigated the effect of pride price on perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem of Igbo women. Measures used were modified Kansas Martial Satisfaction Scale and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Two hundred and seventy nine female undergraduates participated in the study. Bride price was manipulated by making participants imagine and visualize they were recently married with either high or low bride price or a control condition. The first analysis tested the direct effect of bride price on perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem using MANOVA statistic while the second analysis tested whether perceived self-esteem mediates the relationship between bride price and perceived marital satisfaction. There was a significant effect of bride price on perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem with those in high bride price condition reporting higher perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem followed by the control condition. Bride price also significantly predicted perceived marital satisfaction and the relationship was partially mediated by perceived self-esteem. Results underscore the need for consideration of socio-cultural contexts in understanding the dynamics of bride price payment on women. It is also suggested that cultures should seek to re-conceptualize bride price payment and moderate bride price requirements so as to make the practice only symbolic in marriage contract.

Key words: Bride price; perceived marital satisfaction; self-esteem; Igbo women.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Among the people of Nsukka in South Eastern Nigeria, marriage is not only a relationship between two individuals but a contract between two extended families. Marriage unites families and clans in such a way that the families involved share their very existence in that reality and become one people, one thing (Magesa, 1998, p. 110). Except for the religious who opt for celibacy, marriage in this society defines a "complete" man and woman and confers status and dignity irrespective of one's financial standing. It is also viewed as permanent as divorce is seldom contemplated. Traditionally, the marriage process starts with the man picking a woman that is acceptable to his family. Factors that determine desirability include the woman's family background (i.e whether they engage in witchcraft practices, are known for antisocial behaviours, kill using diabolical means, have a history of untimely death, or insanity), the woman's level of education, enterprise and attractiveness. Once the woman is accepted by the man's family the marriage is solemnized through the payment of bride price.

Given that in this culture marriage is highly valued and bride price play crucial role in the process, it is important to evaluate how bride price impacts on perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem of Igbo women especially given that marital satisfaction and self-esteem contribute to stability of marriages that has been linked to better physical, mental, intellectual, and emotional health of married couples and their children (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Marital satisfaction refers to a global level of favorability that individual spouses report with their marital relationship (Roach, Frazier, & Bowden, 1981). It is therefore a key element of perceived happiness and marital functioning (Schoen, Astone, Rothert, Standish, & Kim, 2002) and has been viewed as one of the indicators of the quality of marriage since inclusive in its conceptualization are terms like genuine feeling of pleasure, satisfaction, and joyfulness experienced by a husband and wife when they consider all aspects of their marriage (Taghani, Ashrafizaveh, Soodkhori, Azmoude, & Tatari, 2019). Studies have shown that marital dissatisfaction has negative effects on physical and emotional health that may manifest in depression,

cardiovascular diseases e.g. high blood pressure, stroke or even death (Robles, Slatcher, Trombello & Mcgrinn, 2014).

Self-esteem, on the other hand is an evaluation of the self that reflects the extent to which individuals like themselves (Zeigler-Hill, 2013). Self-esteem is a judgment of oneself and also an attitude toward the self including how one views one's strengths and weaknesses. It is therefore inextricably related to self-worth, self-confidence, self-respect, self-value, self-acceptance and self-integrity. Having a high self-esteem is a strong indicator of inclusion, acceptance, respect, and love for oneself and from others and it is an important component of healthy interpersonal relationship and psychological well-being (Baumiester, Campbell, Knienguer, & Vohs, 2003).

Compelling evidence has shown that women who report having high self-esteem are more responsive and committed to their partners (Murray, Holmes, McDonald, & Ellsworth, 1998) and report having higher quality interpersonal relationships (Denissen, Penke, Schmitt & van Aken, 2008) and higher satisfaction with romantic relationship (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988) than those with low self-esteem.

Bride price, perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem

Bride price is a practice deeply engraved in the African culture especially among the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria. The custom involves an exchange of money from the groom's family to the family of the bride and which culminates in the solemnization of customary marriages (Thiara & Hague, 2011) where the man is fully recognized as an in-law. In Igbo custom, where a relationship leads to pregnancy outside payment of bride price fathering of the child is denied unless the man quickly pays an advance deposit with the woman's family before the delivery of the child.

Although payment of bride price is highly valued and varies across cultures in Africa it has generated so much controversy in recent times and studies on usefulness of and effects of bride price have remained debatable. In Senegal for example bride price ranges from less than \$100 to tens of thousands of dollars and in Niger although there is an official maximum rate of 50,000 CFA francs (\$83) many pay much more than that (BBC News, 2015). In many other countries such as Teso region of Uganda (Oumo, 2004), Northern Ghana (Awedoba, 2001), South Africa (Kachika, 2004), and Kenya (Wanga, 2004) the bride price is even much higher because it is paid in cattle (e.g. cows, goats, sheep, turkey) and money. Sometimes the groom pays as much as or more than 12 cattle as bride price and in some cases the cattle are monetized in order to bargain for higher bride price especially in Ghana (Asiimwe, 2013).

It is against the backdrop of perceived exorbitant bride prices across cultures that some researchers have reported diverse views of bride price and its effect on women. Kaye, Mirembe, Ekstrom, Kyomuhendo, and Johansson (2005) for example, reported that in Uganda, high bride price is perceived as indicating that a woman was 'bought' into the man's household, which reduced her household decision-making roles, limits women's independence and perpetuated unequal gender power relations, especially regarding health-seeking behaviour and also reduces sense of esteem. High bride price has also been linked to increase in number of extramarital affairs for men (Bishai & Grossboard, 2010), instability of marriages through precipitation of domestic violence, poverty especially among young couples, dehumanization of the women and increased propensity for divorce (Ngutor, Yandev & Arumun, 2013), commercialization of sexuality and parents forcing girls into an early marriage (Osuna, 2003). These reports have made many groups and organizations to advocate for the abrogation of bride price payment with the argument that it makes women vulnerable by impinging on their rights to self-determination. Some other findings are however contradictory. For example, a study in Jacobabad, Sindh showed that respondents believe that the practice of bride price is beneficial for both families and that bride price practice safeguards women and protects them from violence (Avais, Wassan, Brohi, & Chandio, 2015) and it is also found to be positively related to self-esteem of both the bride and groom (Brown & Buchbinder, 1976).

Among the Igbos of Nsukka, however, there is a widely held belief that women are not for sale and are therefore not equated with articles of trade. Thus, paying bride price is simply symbolic and not a source of financial gain. Furthermore, in Nsukka culture, marriage is a give and take pact between two families. While the groom pays the bride price the bride's family is expected to provide household items such as set of bed, plates, kitchen utensils (depending on the financial capacity of the bride's family) for their daughter to facilitate the smooth take off of the young family (*idu obi*). In this configuration, payment of high bride price may increase the likelihood that the woman will feel she is valued and her family appreciated by the man. In contrast, where the bride price paid is low the woman may feel her family is shortchanged and she was gotten cheaply. These scenarios can differentially impact on a woman's marital satisfaction and self-esteem. In this context, it seems as though bride price is a direct indicator of a woman's worth and high bride price may actually help women to gain value, importance and respect and may prevent them from being abused. Research on bride price has therefore remained inconclusive.

This study examined the link between bride price, perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem of Igbo women and based on the socio-cultural context, it is hypothesized that high bride price will significantly

affect perceived marital satisfaction (Hypothesis 1) and self-esteem of Igbo women (Hypothesis 2). Studies have also demonstrated the association between self-esteem and relational satisfaction. For example, for couples, initial level of self-esteem of each partner predicted the initial level of the partners' common relationship satisfaction, and change in self-esteem of each partner predicted change in the partners' common relationship satisfaction (Erol & Orth, 2014). Self-esteem also monitors the individual's eligibility for lasting, desirable social relationships and has been reported to be especially sensitive to people's self-perceptions of their desirability as a mate (Pass, Lindenberg, & Park, 2010) and low self-esteem predicted relationship break-up (Luciano & Orth, 2017). It is therefore suggested that self-esteem may be a mediational variable. In this regard, it is hypothesized that self-esteem will mediate the relationship between bride price and perceived marital satisfaction of Igbo women (Hypothesis 3)

II. METHOD

Participants:

A total of 279 undergraduate students of University of Nigeria, Nsukka participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 23-36 years, with mean age of 26.61 years. The participants were all volunteers and are all of Igbo ethnic group.

Measures:

1. Measure of perceived self-esteem

Perceived self-esteem was measured using Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). This is a 10-item scale placed on a four point scale ranging from (4) strongly agree to (1) strongly disagree. Examples of the items are "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" and "At times I think I am no good at all". To reflect perceived self-esteem the items were modified as follows: "On the whole, I will be satisfied with myself" and "At times I may think I am no good at all". The higher the scores the higher the perceived self-esteem. Internal consistency of .78 was obtained in the present study using Nigerian sample ($n = 60$).

2. Measure of perceived marital satisfaction

Kansas Marital Satisfaction (KMS) scale was originally developed by Schumm, Nicholas, Schectman and Grigsby (1983) to measure marital satisfaction. It is a 3-item questionnaire placed on a likert type scale ranging from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied). An example of an item is: "how satisfied are you with your spouse?" To also reflect perceived marital satisfaction items were modified as follows: "how satisfied will you be with your spouse?" The higher the score the higher the perceived marital satisfaction. Using Nigerian sample ($n = 60$) an alpha coefficient of .89 was obtained for the scale.

3. Bride price manipulation:

Bride price was manipulated by creating three bride price conditions (high bride price, low bride price and control conditions). To obtain the bride prices that depict low and high a pilot study was conducted on a group of female volunteers ($n = 20$). They were given a 10-point semantic differential scale with multiples of ₦10,000 and ranging from ₦10,000 to ₦100,000 to rate the appropriate bride price that should be paid on a woman's head during marriage. The range falls within the bride price payment practices in Nsukka. They were to rate the prices by assigning "L" for low, "M" for moderate and "H" for high bride price. From the ratings, ₦30,000 and ₦40,000 were considered as normal; below ₦30,000 was considered as low and above ₦40,000 was considered as high. The median values were determined for prices above ₦40,000 and below ₦30,000. ₦75,000 and ₦15,000 were found to represent high and low bride price respectively.

Procedure:

Ninety three participants were each assigned to high bride price, low bride price or control conditions. Participants in all conditions were given 5mins and instructed to imagine and visualize their recent marriage scenario where their prospective husband performed their traditional marriage rite with the payment of ₦75,000 (about \$205) (high bride price condition) or ₦15,000 (about \$41) (low bride price condition) or no indication of bride price (control condition). Imagined scenarios are strong in assuming a life on its own (Brown, 1996) and some studies have widely used imaginary experiments to explain behaviours (e.g. Leslie, 1994). For manipulation check, participants in both conditions were asked to indicate how they felt about their bride price payment on a 2-point scale of fair (1) and not fair (0). The mean difference was found to be 3.12 in favour of high bride price and the difference was significant [$t = 6.87$, $df = 278$, $p < .01$]. Participants were then asked to respond to modified Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and Kansas Marital Satisfaction (KMS) scale in relation to the bride price paid.

Ethical consideration

This research work received ethics approval from the Department of Psychology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka Ethics Committee.

III. RESULTS

To assess the direct effect of bride price on marital satisfaction and self-esteem Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used considering perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem as dependent variables. Descriptive statistics for the study variables is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for bride price, marital satisfaction and self esteem.

Conditions	PMS		PSE	
	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD
High Bride price	16.07	2.64	28.29	4.74
Low Bride price	12.94	3.25	23.81	3.65
Control	14.06	2.50	25.89	5.10

Note: PMS = Perceived marital satisfaction; PSE = Perceived self-esteem

Those who imagined and visualized being married with high bride price had higher mean perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem than both those who imagined and visualized being married with low bride price and the control. Those in the control condition had higher mean perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem than those who imagined and visualized being married with low bride price. In both cases, the mean difference was higher for perceived self-esteem than for perceived marital satisfaction. The tests of between-subject effects are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Tests of between-subject effects

Source	DV	SS	df	MS	F	η^2
BP	PMS	470.46	2	235.23	29.70*	.177
	PSE	936.39	2	468.20	22.74*	.141
Error	PMS	2185.70	276	7.92		
	PSE	5682.60	276	20.59		
Total	PMS	60176.00	279			
	PSE	195171.00	279			
Corrected Total	PMS	2656.16	278			
	PSE	6618.10	278			

Note: BP = Bride price (-1 = Low, 0 = Control, 1 = High); PMS = Perceived marital satisfaction; PSE = Perceived self-esteem; * = $p.001$.

There was a significant bride price main effect on both perceived marital satisfaction $F(2,278) = 29.70$, $p < .001$ (95%CI = 13.70 to 14.87) and self-esteem $F(2,278) = 22.74$, $p < .001$ (95%CI = 24.97 to 26.82) of Igbo women. Bonferroni Post-hoc test revealed that those under high bride price condition had significantly higher perceived marital satisfaction compared to those in low bride price condition (MD = 3.14, $p < .001$, 95%CI of 2.15 to 4.13) and control (MD = 2.01, $p < .001$, 95%CI of 1.02 to 3.00). Similar results were obtained for perceived self-esteem (low bride price condition: MD = 4.48, $p < .001$, 95%CI of 2.88 to 6.09), (control: MD = 2.40, $p < .01$, 95%CI of 1.80 to 4.00). Those in the control condition also reported significantly higher perceived marital satisfaction (MD = 1.13, $p < .05$, 95%CI of 1.14 to 2.12) and self-esteem (MD = 2.09, $p < .001$, 95%CI of 1.48 to 3.69) compared to those in low bride price condition.

Meditational role of self-esteem on bride price and perceived marital satisfaction was also examined. Table 3 shows descriptive statistics and inter-correlations for bride price, perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations for bride price, marital satisfaction, and self-esteem.

Variable	\bar{X}	SD	1	2	3	4
1. PMS	14.79	2.12	-			
2. Age	20.6	2.09	.196*	-		
3. BP	-	-	.211*	.201*	-	
4. PSE	27.22	5.66	.307**	.198*	.324**	-

Note: PMS = Perceived marital satisfaction; BP = Bride price (-1 = Low, 0 = Control, 1 = High); PSE = Perceived self-esteem; * = $p.01$; ** = $p.001$.

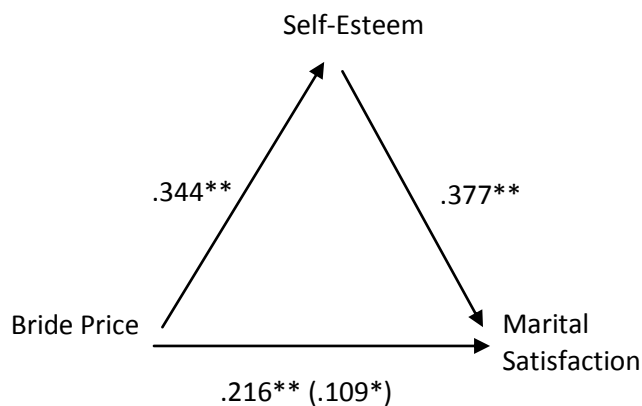
As expected, all variables were found to be significantly positively related. Linear regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses. Regression coefficients are shown in Table 4 and Figure 1.

Table 4: Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting perceived marital satisfaction.

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	β	B	β	B	β
Age	.02	.03	-.02	-.02	-.01	-.01
BP			.19	.24*	.16	.21*
PSE					.23	.39**
Adjusted R²	.001		.032		.046	
R²Δ	.000		.061		.084	

Note: BP = Bride price (-1 = Low, 1 = High); PSE = Perceived self-esteem; * = $p < .01$; ** = $p < .001$.

Figure 1: Standardized regression coefficients for the relationship between bride price and perceived marital satisfaction as mediated by perceived self-esteem.



Note: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .001$

Age was entered in the first step and considered as control variable and it did not significantly predict perceived marital satisfaction. The inclusion of bride price in step two contributed 6.1% variance in perceived marital satisfaction. In step three, perceived self-esteem was added and this addition contributed 8.4% variance in perceived marital satisfaction. To test the hypothesis that perceived self-esteem mediates the relationship between bride price and perceived marital satisfaction, the requirements described by Baron and Kenny (1986) were satisfied. First, the results demonstrated a significant relationship between bride price and perceived self-esteem ($b = .120$; $\beta = .344$; $p < .001$). Second, there was a significant relationship between bride price and perceived marital satisfaction ($b = .104$; $\beta = .216$; $p < .01$). Third, there was a significant relationship between perceived self-esteem and perceived marital satisfaction ($b = .140$; $\beta = .377$; $p < .001$). As shown in Figure 1 after controlling for perceived self-esteem (the mediator) the effect of bride price on perceived marital satisfaction was significantly reduced ($b = .018$; $\beta = .109$; $p = .05$) indicating that partial mediation existed. Bride price was indirectly related to perceived marital satisfaction through its relationship with perceived self-esteem with a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval based on 5000 bootstrap samples indicating that the standardized indirect effect was $(.34)(.38) = .13$. A Sobel test was conducted in order to verify the findings of the mediator processes (see Baron & Kenny, 1986). The results of the Sobel test revealed that perceived self-esteem significantly but indirectly mediated the relationship between bride price and perceived marital satisfaction (Sobel statistic = 2.879, $p < .001$, effect size = 0.130, 95% CI = -.016 to .054).

IV. DISCUSSION

This study investigated bride price, perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem of Igbo women. The results revealed that those under high bride price condition perceived themselves as having significantly higher marital satisfaction and self-esteem than those under low bride price and control conditions with those under low bride price condition reporting the least perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem. Also, self-esteem was found to partially mediate the relationship between bride price and marital satisfaction. The findings in this study that high bride price impacts positively on perceived marital satisfaction and self-esteem of Igbo women is in contradiction with the global criticism of bride price practices and scholars who argue that payment of bride price can be a major factor on how the man treats the woman including how he sees her as a person who has the right to self-determination (Kaye, 2004; Fuseini & Doodoo, 2012). Also, because the man is responsible for taking care of the financial needs of his family Ngutor, et al. (2013) argues that after paying very high bride price and the man fails to meet up with the responsibilities there may be serious implications for the stability of the marriage. These arguments point to the fact that high bride price leads to marital dissatisfaction, lowered self-esteem and instability.

In part, the findings corroborate some research that suggests the need for rethinking the possible links between marital processes and socio-cultural contexts (Bradbury, Fincha, & Beach, 2000). For example, traditionally the Igbos of Nsukka considers bride price payment as a symbol of marriage between a man and a woman where the family of the bride does not anticipate to be enriched in the process. The important thing is that there is an exchange of money rather than how much was paid. However when the bride price is low there is the tendency for the bride to be a laughing stock among her fellow women who may equate her to a woman who ran away from her parents home to cohabit with a man in the name of marriage. In some cases, in the event of a misunderstanding a man can use the amount he paid as bride price to insult the woman by mocking her as being cheap. Thus paying a low bride price in this cultural context can be a source of abuse and unhappiness on the part of the woman and which can lead to instability of marriage and low self-esteem. Furthermore, payment of high bride price is an indication that the woman is valued, respected and held in high esteem. Such women are culturally viewed as a symbol of womanhood and which in turn boosts her self-esteem and marital satisfaction. There are also higher tendencies for women married with high bride price to also value and respect their husbands and the extended family thus leading to general marital satisfaction.

It then seems as though if bride price is significantly moderated and viewed as only symbolic across cultures women will develop a more favourable view of bride price practices especially given that when bride price is very low, women feel being gotten too cheap and when it is very high, they feel been sold as a commodity. There is therefore the need for further cross-cultural studies on bride price practices in Africa with the aim of understanding cultural differences that contribute to its negative effect on women.

From the mediational analyses the current study demonstrates that self-esteem partially mediates the relationship between bride price and marital satisfaction. The mediational analysis suggests that self-esteem is one of the pathways through which bride price is associated with marital satisfaction. Thus, self-esteem is an important explanatory link through which one can understand the way in which bride price exerts its influence on marital satisfaction of women. This implies that in predicting a woman's marital satisfaction through the bride price paid one also needs to evaluate the extent to which the woman likes herself, her judgment of her self-worth, self confidence, self respect, self value, self acceptance and self integrity. Similar studies have established mediational effects of self-esteem on relational aspirations (see Kavanagh, Robins, & Ellis, 2010) and marital satisfaction and depression (Khan & Aftab, 2013).

In line with self-esteem functions, the findings suggest the need to examine in more detail the mechanisms through which self-esteem contributes to a happy relationship (Erol & Orth, 2016). Findings suggest that the increasing clamor for the abrogation of bride price may have been informed by its exorbitant nature in some cultures and which tend to place women as goods for sale. Cultural reconsideration of bride price practice aimed at moderating bride price requirements and consequently making the practice a cultural symbol rather than source of wealth is highly recommended. Although the findings are illuminating, some limitations of this study should be mentioned. Firstly marital satisfaction and self-esteem were indirectly measured and secondly the study was conducted only among the Igbos. Thus, generalizing the findings should be made with caution.

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