**Causes of Early Marriage**

The causes of early marriage as cited by Reuben 2013 are as follows:

* **Poverty and Economic Transaction**

Poverty is the critical factor contributing to early marriage. Where poverty is acute, a young girl

may be regarded as an economic burden and her marriage to a much older man, a practicecommon in some Middle Eastern and South Asian societies, is a family survival strategy, andmay even be seen as being in her interest. In traditional societies in Sub-Saharan Africa, the bridefamily may receive cattle from the groom, or the groom’s family, as the bride wealth for theirdaughter. This is because in Africa the monetary value of bride wealth islinked to marriage.

Bride wealth is a sum, either in cash or kind, used to exchange a bride for her labour and fertility. On the other hand, in communities where early marriage is practised marriage is regarded as a transaction, often representing a significant economic activity for a family. A daughter may be the only commodity a family has left to be traded and sometimes girls can be used as currency to settle debts. In India, for example, dowry as a gift to a daughter married is like a bribe to the groom to take one’s daughter off one’s hands. In the context of poverty, the practice of paying bride wealth can encourage early marriage. Bride wealth enhances the practice in most African communities as it is highly valued and encourages parents to marry off their children early. In addition, some communities do not regard education of the girl highly as that of the boy child. Therefore, marrying off daughters early relieves the family financially and socially (International Centre for Research on Women, in Onoride 2011).

* **Traditional and Cultural Practices**

Traditional and cultural practices such as female genital cutting (FGC) contribute to the early marriage of girls. FGC is defined as partial or complete removal of the external female genitals for cultural rather than medical reasons. Other names for FGC include female circumcision or ritual female surgery. It is performed in some African, South American, Asian and Middle Eastern countries. Female genital cutting is a cultural rather than a religious practice, and its origins are unknown. However, its practitioners believe the procedure enhances the girl’s health, hygiene, chastity, fertility and marriage prospects. Globally, an average of 140 million women have undergone FGC with 4 and 5 million procedures performed annually on female infants and girls.

* **Cementing Alliances**

Reasons behind early marriages vary from one country to the next. The most cited reason for

this is culture. According to a study done in Ethiopia by ICRW, children are betrothed before

birth to cement the strategic alliances between families (International Centre for Research on Women, Onoride 2011).

* **Women’s Status in Society**

The status of women in society plays a key role in early marriage; women are seen as inferior and they are neglected and despised. A girl is seen as a burden given the fact that she will get married elsewhere and leave her natal family. Thus, parents prefer to educate boys and marry the girls off at an early age. A male child is more likely to gain full education, gain employment and pursue a working life, tending to marry later. The low status of women in society is due to gender inequality. Gender inequality is a product of culture in that male children are given preference which leads to poor treatment of girls and women in society.