

# Urban Migrants and Marriages without Bridewealth in Yenagoa

**Erebagha T. INGIABUNA, PhD**

Department of Sociology, Niger Delta University,  
Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria  
[eingiabuna@yahoo.com](mailto:eingiabuna@yahoo.com) [erebaghaingiabuna@gmail.com](mailto:erebaghaingiabuna@gmail.com)

**Undutimi J. DUDAFU, PhD**

Department of Sociology, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria  
[ududafa@yahoo.com](mailto:ududafa@yahoo.com)

## **Abstract**

In urban Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, living together without a formal marriage between people of opposite sex is becoming increasingly normal. The study interviewed 500 Yenagoa residents in order to better understand the socioeconomic consequences of cohabitation, which is rapidly becoming the norm. The descriptive survey design was used, and the data was analyzed using the cross tabulation statistical tool. The study found that many young men and women cohabit before marriage, that many of them do so for longer periods of time without formalizing their relationship, and that the longer they live together, the more likely male partners are to postpone formalizing their relationship. It did, however, offer a means of getting to know one's partner and saved many women the trouble of having to pay for lodging and food. The study suggested that women remain at home until they are legally married because of the socioeconomic and psychological consequences of living with a spouse who is not legally married.

**Key words: Urban Marriages without Bridewealth**

## **Introduction**

In Africa, marriage is extremely necessary. Adults without marital partners have no role in society in Sub-Saharan Africa, where it is considered compulsory. One of the most important responsibilities of each family/lineage is to find a suitable partner for a member. Marriage is a contract between two people who agree to spend the rest of their lives as husband and wife together. However, in most of Africa, it is a marriage between one man and one woman, with the help and consent of both families, bridewealth transition, and religious blessings/incantations (Ingiabuna, 2012).

The emergence of Bayelsa State from the old Rivers State of Nigeria opened several doors for people who had previously sought refuge in their rural enclaves, resulting in a high rate of rural-urban migration to Yenagoa, the state capital. Those relocating as civil servants from the old Rivers State as a result of the state's formation and subsequent establishment of governmental departments; those from neighboring states, especially the

South-South states of Delta, Edo, and Akwa Ibom; and those from the South East states of Imo, Abia, Ebonyi, Anambra, and Enugu, who are known for their coziness.

Many of the young migrants were single when they arrived in Yenagoa to look for jobs and other opportunities. As the African proverb goes, you can't stop a goat from eating hay, so it's difficult to stop an adult goat from mating or forming unions. Many young men and women find it difficult to go long periods of time without establishing a sexual or other relationship with anyone of the opposite sex. Because of a lack of suitable accommodation, many young men and women began to live together (cohabitation), many without using contraceptives or condoms, and some became young mothers and fathers with or without their families' approval. For the proper upkeep of the offspring, joint child rearing necessitates that they continue to live together. Many marital arrangements (cohabitation, trial marriages, and natolocal and duolocal residential arrangements) became public over time and were commonly referred to as "family" without being formalized.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Marriages are only valid in most of Africa if three conditions are met: family agreement, exchange of bridewealth, and loyalty to the lineage gods/ancestor or God Almighty (Oтите & Ogionwo, 2005, Ingiabuna, 2019). While this requirement may be required for marriage

validation in normal circumstances, living conditions in many urban centers are often uncommon, and cultural constraints and taboos seem ineffective or unobserved, so some people experiment with short courts. Although it was previously unthinkable for men and women to openly seek and receive consent from partners in modern times, people have tried to do the opposite in unusual situations such as short court as men and women in modern times openly seek and receive consent of living together ire marital decisions before informing family members. Many friends of opposite sex are often lured to cohabit as a demonstration of their love for each other or empathize so end up marrying, producing, and rearing children in urban areas where members capable of sanctioning deviant conducts are absent, and where circumstances of hunger, crisis, lack of livable accommodation due to scarcity and/or expense, many friends of opposite sex are often lured to cohabit as a demonstration of their love for each other or empathize so end The thesis critically examines the socio-economic ramifications of this unconventional practice of marrying without bridewealth in Yenagoa, where no previous research has been conducted.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective here is to examine the pattern of marriages emerging in urban areas without meeting the prescribed cultural formalities. The specific objectives are:

- To ascertain the cultural requirements for the formation of family/marriage in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
- To determine the underlying factors in the rise in marriages without bridewealth in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.
- To unveil the socioeconomic implications of marriages without bridewealth on spouses and society.

## Research Questions

The following research shall guide the study:

- What are the cultural requirements for marriage/family formation?
- What factors influence the rising number of marriages without bridewealth?
- What are the socio-economic implications of marriages without bridewealth?

## Study Area

Yenagoa serves as both the headquarters of the Yenagoa Local Government and the administrative and political capital of Bayelsa State. Epie, Atissa, Ekpetiama, and Gbarain are the four kingdoms that make up Yenagoa's capital territory, and they all have a common culture. On October 1, 1996, Bayelsa State was formed from the old Rivers State, with eight Local Government Areas and Yenagoa as its capital. It has a population of citizens. Yenagoa serves as the state's administrative and commercial nerve center, attracting people from all walks of life.

## Literature Review

Marriage has traditionally involved the exchange of economic or social goods in many cultures. These exchanges take place in all cultures, but they are probably more common in Third World societies such as Africa, Asia, and Melanesia (Wikipedia). In most of Africa, such rites of passage play a significant role in determining whether or not a relationship is legitimate. It is also required for Christian, civil Islamic, and customary marriages to be celebrated. Several words are used to characterize the transactions, including 'bride price,' 'bride wealth,' 'bride token,' 'progency price,' 'bride transfer,' and 'dowry' (Wikipedia). Bridewealth exchange is as old as civilization in most of Africa, and it is still commonly practiced today (Ansell, 2001, Isiugo- Abanihe, 1994). It is observed in matrilineal, patrilineal, and double descent cultures, as well as Christian, Muslim, and traditional communities, both urban or rural (As-Saleh, 2006), as well as contemporary works by Evans-Pritchard (1934), Radcliff-Brown, and Ford (1950).

Despite the fact that non-marital fertility and cohabitation are more prevalent in urban than rural enclaves, bridewealth is still a significant factor in all circumstances (Anderson, 2007). Bridewealth is paid by both the wealthy and the poor, including Africans in the Diaspora (Mulder, 1995, Lesthaehe, 1989). It is known as 'tebe-sa' (Ijaw), Yaa, Egwa (Okrika), and 'lobola' among the Zulu of South Africa.

Bride price, bride token, procgency price, and other terms refer to a man and his family transferring money or valuable property to the woman's family, while dowry refers to the girl and her family making a sacrifice to match the would-be spouse's spending. However, in today's world, these ideas are increasingly giving way to bride wealth or bride transition (Ingiabuna, 2012).

Bride payments have been interpreted as cementing the partnership, retaining the contract, compensating for the loss of the daughter's services, transferring rights, establishing families as kin groups, compensating for the formation of a workforce, maintaining the contract, and shielding women from social and physical assaults, among other items (Charles, 2005; Ingiabuna, 2012; Okaba, 2017).

In Arica, according to Ogbu (), bride price serves the purpose of improving women's rights and privileges rather than decreasing their status. It is suggested that the definition of bride wealth as it is understood in Africa does not have an exact analogy outside of Africa, though the agreement may be similar in certain ways to marriage contracts in most of Europe (Aborampah, 1999; Horne & Dodoo, 2013).

Horne and Dodoo (2013) argue that strengthening normative restrictions on women's reproductive autonomy weakens a society's rejection of male violence against women who have violated their reproductive obligations.

## Methodology

Since the study was mainly exploratory, a descriptive research design was chosen. It also helps the researcher to determine particular study issues in order to achieve desired outcomes. The aim of the study is to learn more about the socioeconomic effects of the increasingly popular urban marriages without bridewealth. Third female field assistants were employed to help administer the questionnaires in three locations in Yenagoa, Bayelsa: the Bayelsa State Secretariat, Swali Market, and the Federal Medical Centre, Yenagoa. The cross-tabulation statistical method was used to analyze the results. A total of 500 questionnaires were sent out to male and female participants. A total of 461 (92.2%) questionnaires were retrieved as properly completed, while 39 (7.8%) were either not retrieved or not completed properly.

## Data Analysis

The bio-data of respondents is seen in Table 1 at a glance, with 195 (42.30 percent) males and 266 (57.70 percent) females. It also indicates that 126 (27.55 percent) of respondents are between the ages of 18 and 25, 139 (30.15) are between the ages of 26 and 30, 73 (15.84 percent) are between the ages of 31 and 45, 65 (14.10 percent) are between the ages of 46 and 55, and 57 (12.36 percent) are between the ages of 55 and more. 259 (56.18 percent) of respondents were single, 153 (33.19 percent) were married, 32 (6.94 percent) were divorced or separated, and 17 (3.69 percent) were widowed. In addition, 182 (39.48 percent) of respondents said they cohabitated prior to marriage, 298 (42.95 percent) said they lived separately (duolocally), and 81 (17.57 percent) said they married formally before living together. 82 (17.79%) of respondents said they were unemployed, 137 (29.72%) said they were self-employed, 158 (34.27%) said they worked for the government, and 84 (18.22%) said they worked for the private sector. Their educational accomplishments showed that 34 (7.38 percent) of respondents had no formal education, 98 (21.26 percent) attended primary schools, 222 (48.15 percent) are high school graduates, and 107 (23.21 percent) attended tertiary schools.

**Table 1: Demographic Information**

S/N	Variables	Freq.	%
1.	Sex: Male	195	42.30
	Female	266	57.70
2.	Age: 18-25 Years	127	27.55
	26-30 Years	139	30.15
	31-45 Years	73	15.84
	46-55 Years	65	14.10
	56 and above years	57	12.36
3.	Marital Status: Single	259	56.18
	Married	153	33.19
	Divorced/Separated	32	6.94
	Widowed	17	3.69
4.	Initial Residential Pattern: Cohabitation	182	39.48
	Duolocal	198	42.95
	Marital	81	17.57
5.	Occupation: Unemployed	82	17.79
	Self-Employed	137	29.72
	Civil/Public Service	158	34.27
	Company employee	84	18.22
6.	Education: No Formal education	34	7.38
	Primary	98	21.26
	Secondary	222	48.15
	Tertiary	107	23.21

Unlike many other parts of the world, Africans place a high importance on marriage and spend a lot of money on it. They also go above and beyond to satisfy the legal requirements for a legitimate marriage. One of the conditions for marriage, according to Table 2, is to receive the consent of both the would-be wife's and husband's parents. If any party opposes the plan, the case is effectively closed. A total of 301 respondents (75.29 percent) suggested that they were seeking family consent. Bride Transfer (bridewealth exchange) and religious sacraments are two other conditions. These three conditions, according to several authorities, must be present for any marital relationship to be considered legitimate. Other conditions include having a child or becoming pregnant, as well as inheriting from a widow. Gift marriages, wife capture, and elopement are frowned upon in almost all cultures, and thus are not considered validating elements of marriage. Dating was also out of the question because girls should be virgins before marrying. Trial marriages for understudying couples, on the other hand, are increasingly becoming the beginnings of cohabitation.

**Table 2: Cultural Prescriptions for valid Marriage/Family Formation**

S/N	Variables	Freq.	%
	Seek and secure family consent	301	75.29
	Bride Transfer	211	45.77
	Religious Sacraments	49	10.63
	Trial Marriage/Understudy	53	11.50
	Dating	15	3.25
	Child bearing/Pregnancy	118	25.60
	Gift Marriage	59	12.80
	Widow Inheritance	113	24.51
	Wife capture/elopement	03	0.65

Table 3 indicates that the majority of respondents (128 or 27.77) have never cohabited with a romantic partner who is on the opposite side of the gender spectrum and has remained single. Following that, 119 (21.04 percent) of respondents reported that they have been living with their partner in the hopes of formalizing their partnership one day. Some 97 (21.04 percent) of respondents said they lived together before formalizing their relationship, while 48 (10.41 percent) said they never lived together and married their partners right away.

**Table 3: Respondents' Relationship Type**

S/N	Variables	Freq.	%
1.	Properly married before joining partner	48	10.41
2.	Lived together for sometime before formal marriage	97	21.04
3.	Living together with partner but not yet formalized marriage	119	25.81
4.	Lived together with partner, but separated later	69	19.97
5.	Never lived together with any partner and remaining single	128	27.77

Marriages that do not result in proper bridewealth exchanges have a number of socioeconomic consequences. As a result, partnerships between men and women who live together without properly performing marital rituals are frowned upon and seen as deviations from cultural norms. Table 4 portrays a variety of socio-economic consequences as reflected by respondents' views, including a lack of respect, which decreases their social status among peers. Many of both parties' families will regard the marriage as a family or as in-laws, and women do not react to their partner's name. Others include the fact that many female partners continued to force their male partners to formalize the relationship so they could gain some self-esteem and respect, despite the fact that many such men would see little urgency in doing so through bridewealth exchange. Despite the above, such unions are increasingly becoming the standard, and they serve as a subtle means of finding a life partner before sourcing for the means to formalize the partnership, as many girls who refuse the perceived unholy cohabitation spend more time in their fathers' homes waiting for suitable suitors. In a city like Yenagoa, where lodging is costly, many people have taken up residence in their spouses' apartments until they are properly

prepared to gather both families for the marital rite.

**Table 4: Socio-Economic Implications of Living-Together without bridewealth**

S/N	Variables	Freq.	%
1	Reduces the pride and dignity of spouses among peers Spouses lack respect in society	231	50.11
2	Wife's family does not treat the relationship as marriage	390	84.60
3	Female partners often do not answer husband's name	131	28.42
4	Children cannot be inherited by father/illegitimate children	118	25.60
5	Relationship could be dissolved with ease by either party	31	6.72
6	Male partners see no urgency in formalizing relationship	63	13.67
7	Living together is gradually becoming the norm	113	24.51
8	Credit marriages are subtle ways of getting a partner	198	42.95
9	Many who do not indulge in it have remained unmarried	261	56.62
10	Reduces infidelity in society	119	25.81
11	Encourages illegality	49	10.63
12	Partners easily get accommodated and cared for	132	28.63
13		66	14.32

## Discussion

The conditions for a legal marriage union have remained the same: family consent, bridewealth exchange, and religious sacraments. Childbearing and breastfeeding are also factors that strengthen marriages, but they lack social recognition in the absence of bridewealth exchanges. Cohabiting partners sometimes stayed together for longer periods of time before deciding to marry. Many women in such relationships may be unfaithful because they believe they have no ties to the man. Although living together without a bridewealth is becoming more normal and appropriate, it has also resulted in an increase in the number of divorces because no cultural or legal ties bind a relationship. In a similar vein, it has inspired many responsible young ladies to participate. This is because many women who refuse to cohabit or date before marriage prefer to stay in their birth homes longer and undergo psychological distress as a result of suitors failing to arrive on time. Cohabitation, also known as "trial marriage," has a variety of negative social effects for couples, families, and culture.

## Conclusions/Recommendations

A marriage without the exchange of bridewealth is like a house without a foundation, as it is vulnerable to being swept away by the wind. Bridewealth is a requirement for legal marriage in

most of Africa, as it ties not only the partners, but also their respective families into a union of in-laws. In recent years, however, several unions have begun with cohabitation, trial marriage, or dating. Though these are not the standards, they are quickly becoming the norm among city dwellers. It has tremendous social consequences for couples, but it also serves as a means of seeking a suitable mate, saving many women from housing and feeding problems. According to the report, such unions can only operate for a limited time if they are completely required before being formalized. However, it is advised that ladies stay at home and join their partners only after the bridewealth has been settled, as the longer the cohabitation period, the more likely those partners will find faults with each other and ultimately divorce, whether they have children or not.

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