

# An Exploratory Study of Bride Price and Domestic Violence in Bundibugyo District, Uganda

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## **Dedication**

Women and girls in many societies fare less well than men and boys. They have less access to education and training because of the economic value attached to their household labor, work long hours for lower incomes, and have fewer or no property rights. Bride price, a historic custom that has not been well documented, is one of the most crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared to men. This research is dedicated to the women in Uganda and elsewhere whose labour continues to be bought and sold.

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## **SUMMARY**

This report presents findings of an exploratory research study on the links between the practice of bride price and gender based violence in Bundibugyo, Western Uganda, the first of its kind in this part of the country. It was designed as a response to the growing interest in bride price and to provide information to assist in the mitigation of the negative impacts of this traditional practice. Bride price is used to validate customary marriages and is very common in many African countries. Typically, bride price consist of a contract between families where material items (often cattle or other animals) or money are paid by the groom to the bride's family in exchange for the bride and invariably her labor and her capacity to produce children.

Although much anecdotal evidence exists about the traditional practice of bride price as practiced in most Ugandan communities, there has been very little research to provide details on how this practice impacts on people's lives. Such data would be valuable in informing the public, government, policy makers, duty bearers and other institutions that are working on the issue both in Uganda and Africa as a whole.

The study was part of a gender based violence research development initiative across East and Central Africa. Centre for Human Rights Advancement (CEHURA) a community based organization (CBO) and human rights agency working on sexual and gender based violence conducted the study, with technical support from the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), Liverpool VCT Care and Treatment in Kenya and the Gender and Health Research Unit of the South African Medical Research Council.

The exploratory study focused on gaining insights into the knowledge, attitudes and practices related to bride price as well as its relationship with domestic violence in Bundibugyo district in Western Uganda. The research team conducted 12 focus group discussions (145 participants), 12 key informant interviews with community leaders and 9 semi-structured in-depth interviews with men and women in the communities.

The study found bride price is a very strongly rooted cultural practice with all participants largely supportive of its existence. However commercialization has changed the practice over time and its essential meaning has been eroded creating obstacles in current times. The study showed the struggle many young men have in trying to meet the demands of this practice- particularly poor young men who could not pay bride price and tried to find alternative ways to meet societal demands. Although some participants viewed bride price as a form of protection for women within marriages by providing them respect, status and acknowledgement within society, the process and payment also prescribed their roles in the marriages and ensured women's subordination to husbands which invariable condoned the abuse of wives. On the other hand men could lose status and respect if they were not able to pay bride price. The study has pointed

to the need to engage with communities and the state on how to mitigate the negative impacts of bride price on these communities.

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## 1. BACKGROUND

Bride price, a common cultural practice in many African countries, acts as a form of validation of customary marriages. The acceptance and commonness of this practice was shown in a study carried out by the Uganda Association of Women Lawyers with the majority of the respondents stating that bride price is needed to validate marriage (Uganda Association of Lawyers, 1996). The practice is believed to operate beneficially for both groom and bride and provides formal recognition of marriages, stabilization of marriage relationships, and protection to wives against abuse and development of partnerships between families.

Typically, bride price consists of a contract where material items (often cattle or other animals) or money are paid by the groom to the brides' family in exchange for the bride, her labour and her capacity to produce children (Oguli Oumo, 2004). Bride price practices in Africa involving the exchange of money and goods to cement marriage is not very different from common practices in other countries across the globe. Although it appears to be unique, the buying of an expensive diamond ring by a groom for his wife in western societies has similar underlying meanings of affirmation and validation of a marriage. Similarly in many Arab and Islamic societies, bride wealth is a fundamental requirement in terms of *Mahri* (money and material items paid by the groom to the bride). In Indian society the practice is reversed whereby the bride's family provides goods and money to the husbands family (Dalaria & Lawrence, 2005), but the impact on women remains the same such that women are considered a commodity for exchange.

Although bride price practices have remained a cultural norm and are extremely common in rural communities (though varying by ethnic or /tribal group tradition and culture), changes have started to emerge in urban areas with the practice involving the exchange of money and goods rather than animals as the main items. Today, however the practice appears to have become commercialized and to have lost much of its traditional values. It now appears to solely represent the 'buying' of a wife as a commodity or equating the value of a woman to the amount of bride wealth paid. In addition the women's reproductive role in producing children is a key measurement of her value and this violation of women's reproductive rights has also been identified as an outcome of bride price practices (Women and Law in Southern Africa Research Trust, 2002).

Practices that view wives as commodities are abuses in themselves as well as can contribute to abuse towards the wife if she is perceived as not fulfilling her 'value'. Leaving marriages or seeking divorce where pride price is paid is extremely prohibitive since most women or their families are unable to repay (Matembe, 2004; Osuna, 2003; Oguli Oumo, 2004). More than one report has warned of the the potential role bride price could play in the spread of HIV (Kwoba, N. 2004: Baryomunsi, 2004 ) with the UNFPA report on AIDS in Uganda warning that the commercialization of pride price

could force young men to live with women outside of marriage or even alone and both options may contribute to the spread of AIDS (Baryomunsi, 2004).

Bride price as a human rights issue is receiving increased attention because of its negative impact and association with violence against women across Uganda. Another reason is that it contradicts the 1995 Ugandan Constitution (Act 31 1995) (Ugandan Constitution 1995) which states that both men and women have the right to marry and are entitled to equal rights in marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. The 2005 Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) highlights bride price as the most significant factor holding back women's empowerment, and calls have been made for mitigation or even reform (Matembe, 2004; Ogulu Oumo, 2004). Increasing advocacy activities have been emerging from rural Uganda where the practice is entrenched as well as from neighboring countries in the region (Macdonald-levy. & MacMillan, 2005).

The MIFUMI project, a Ugandan NGO focused on securing basic rights for rural people and protecting women and children from domestic violence and abuse has taken a leading role in raising the issue of bride price in Uganda and neighboring countries. Among their activities was a local referendum held in Tororo district in 2001 to ascertain the views of the local people about the practice. In 2004 MIFUMI organized the first international conference on bride price and this resulted in the International Kampala Declaration on Bride Price. However this Declaration has yet to be presented to the UN and other international and national bodies and much more advocacy work is required to get the attention of policy makers. Other interventions to raise awareness of bride price were also initiated by Mifumi such as a Bridal Gifts Ordinance, superseding the 1964 Bukedi By law (which stipulated the amount of bride price to be given in terms of the number of animals as a way of limiting or even regulating it). Its impact has not yet been evaluated.

This research project was done to provide more data on the impact of this practice on people's lives, particularly gender based violence. It was carried out from 2009 to 2010 in a remote part of Western Uganda, an area where CEHURA is working. Such data would be valuable for CEHURA to further develop their advocacy work in mitigating the impact of bride price in this part of the country.

### **Study area.**

The study was done in Bundibugyo District located in the Western region of Uganda. This District covers a total area of 2338 square kilometres that is made up of mountains and forests with agriculture one of its main activities. The District has an estimated population of 209,978 and is further divided into three counties: Bwamba and Bughendera in the south and Ntoroko in the north. There are a number of ethnic groups in Bundibugyo with the two major groups being Bakonzo and Babwisi with the Bamba being the minority population. This research was carried out in three sub counties: Busaru Sub County, Bundibugyo Town Council, and Ntoroko fishing village.



## **2. AIM**

The research was conducted to explore bride price practice and its links to gender base violence in three communities in order to inform the development of community based interventions.

### **2.1 Objectives of the study.**

- 1) To describe the current practice of paying bride price in the three sub counties: Busaru, Ntoroko fishing village and Bundibugyo Town Council.
- 2) To describe community perceptions and views towards bride price.
- 3) To explore the relationship between bride price and gender based violence.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The research proposal was subjected to ethical review and was approved by the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology in Kampala. The study was part of an international collaboration of researchers and activists to build capacity and generate data to inform action on gender-based violence. The collaborators helped facilitate the research process, providing both financial and technical support.

The study used a participatory action research methodology, employing qualitative methods of data collection.

The research was undertaken in three stages. In stage one, a literature review, initial interviews with key respondents in the district and a visit and discussions with MIFUMI in Tororo were conducted. A two day participatory training was provided to the principal researchers from CEHURA on preparation of data collection tools, undertaking fieldwork and ensuring adherence to ethical standards during the research. CEHURA researchers then trained three research assistants who were involved in data collection.

Stage two included data collection by the trained research assistants with ongoing support from the technical assistants. Individual and group Interviews on the current practice of bride price, community perceptions and views of the custom, and its relationship with domestic violence were conducted in the three sub counties with men, women, and clan leaders from a wide variety of tribes and clans. The interviews were conducted in safe environments as agreed upon by the interviewees; both the safety of the interviewees and the interviewers were given prime consideration throughout the study.

The criteria for inclusion in the study did not rule out the experience of bride price nor domestic violence as a result of bride price. Short interview guides were used to collect data and the researchers took notes during the interviews. All the interviews were tape recorded with consent from the participants. Interviews were conducted in lhuwisi and lhukonzo and later translated into English and transcribed for analysis.

Stage three included the analysis of the data and the report preparation as well as the development of strategies for action with the various key participants. Feed-back dialogues were held at the CEHURA office with key stakeholders to discuss the research and develop strategies for action. This was followed by a process of reflection by the researchers to consider the challenges and achievements of the research and all this was fed into the final report.

### **3.1 Study design**

This participatory action research study used an exploratory approach which allowed the researchers to gain insights about the issue of bride price from the perspective of the community. Both focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) were held with community members and service providers.

### **3.2 Sample**

Convenience purposeful sampling was used and participants were invited to take part by the researchers and the local community leaders who were informed of the study and from whom access to the community was sought at the beginning.

The study targeted a variety of key informants, including community members who were usually involved in the acceptance or consent of a proposal by girls' parents before a marriage:

- Community leaders including clan and cultural leaders
- Church officials from at each of the three main religious sects (Imam, Priest/Pastor)
- Secretary of Women and Children (female)
- Elderly men who are involve in deciding the bride price within communities
- Older women (Aunties) who participate in the decision making about bride price
- Unmarried and recently married men
- Unmarried and recently married women
- Service providers such as members from the Secretary for Women and Children Affairs

### **3.3 Data collection**

#### **Focused Group Discussions**

A total of 9 FGDs were held with a total of 180 participants

- 3 FGDs with community leaders – 45 participants (15 from each sub county)
- 3 FGDs with unmarried young woman of 18 years and older - 45 participants (15 from each sub county)
- 3 FGDs with older married men - 45 participants (15 from each sub county)
- 3 FGDs with recently married men (within 2 years)- 45 participants (15 from each sub county)

#### **In depth interviews**

A total of 9 IDIs were conducted in each sub county. There were:

- 3 with recently married women (within 2 years)
- 3 with older women (mummy/partner's aunt)
- 3 with older women (paternal auntie)

#### **Key informants**

We conducted a total of 12 interviews with key informants to gain additional insights into community views and about bride price and the links to domestic violence. Key Informants included:

- Clan/cultural leader (male)
- Secretary of Women and Children (female)
- Imam
- Priest / Pastor (Christian Church official)

An interview guide was developed for each of the different groups of participants. This assisted the researchers during the interview and ensured all the important areas were covered. The FGDs and interviews covered the following issues:

- Description of bride price process and formats
- Impact of bride price on people lives
- Domestic violence as a consequence of bride price

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The interviews and FGDs were audio-taped and these were transcribed for analysis. Since interviews and FGDs were conducted in the local language (Lhuwisi and Lhukonzo) translation into English was done to prepare for analysis. The data were analyzed through processes of data coding which involved reading the transcripts and attaching codes to different segments of the text as a way of separating information into categories. Each code was analyzed separately and summarized to allow for interpretation and making meaning of the data. This analysis and the writing of the report happened simultaneously.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 *The meaning of bride price*

The research showed that bride price remains a deeply embedded cultural process in the study sites. Many participants said that it was considered *'necessary'*. A senior government official said *'Yes, it is necessary to pay bride price because, it is culturally wrong to take someone's daughter without paying bride price.'*

Respondents (or informants) also explained it as a form of cultural symbolism, representing the acceptance of the woman and man into each other's families. A government official said bride price

*'symbolizes that he or she is officially married and known to the parents on the lady's side. Through bride price a man is recognized as a member to the family of the lady and respect is given to that man'.*

Respondents mentioned that for all marriages to be solemnized and recognized a bride price had to be paid first. One respondent said *'After payment of the bride price the woman now belongs to the man and its upon them to decide whether to wed or not'.*

A civil marriage in a government office was for the marriage to be recognized by the government. However many of the recently married young men and women reported that people marry (civil ceremonies) before bride price is paid. Many of the young participants did not agree on the bride price culture and said *'Today things are changing'.*

The term *"appreciation"* was commonly used in describing bride price. Its purpose was explained as a *'sign of appreciation to the side of the lady's parents, for it gives confidence to parents of the lady that they also produced'*. Bride price was important for some of the young women interviewed since they perceived that the status of a wife was bestowed through this process. A recently married woman said *'Women accept it very much because if you are not paid you are looked at as a house girl to that family. Another said 'A woman feels safe, secure, stable and respected if bride price is paid'.*

Young married women felt that Bride price was important as one said *'It improves relationships because the wife feels more secure and therefore works so hard to please the husband. There was peace after paying pride price'*. Another said *'A woman whose bride price is not paid feels less attached to her husband and his family'.*

## **4.2 The process of bride price**

Many clan leaders explained the process as a series of events starting with falling in love followed by families from both parties deciding together on the bride price and finally ending with a religious ceremony in church or mosque. A clan leader said:

*'The two people promise to love each other. After that the relatives of the man go to meet the relatives of the girl to negotiate how much bride price should be paid. After that they prepare the wedding and go to church for marriage vows.'*  
Another said *'A man gets a lady and they fall in love with each other. And thereafter the lady invites the man to her father's place for introduction. During introduction it is when the man is told how much he is supposed to pay.'*

One participant said that a leader amongst the Bukonzo culture had indicated that the bride price payment is a continuous process and therefore does not come to an end. The example was given of how men continued to pay a goat to the in-laws whenever a child is born or a man would be asked to contribute to his brother-in-law's bride price by donating a goat.

A recently married young man related his experience, which illustrated how closely linked bride price is to the process of marriage. He also explained how he was not able to meet all of what was asked for:

*'After sending a gift to the girl, I wrote a letter to them, they replied. I told my people about it. I got 70% of what they had asked. We got there, they were also ready. We told them that we had come to marry. They got the letter (list of items wanted) and they were read out one by one as we showed them what we had brought. They wrote everything we had brought in a book and kept it.'*

A recently married man explained the minimal role that girls have in this process:

*'The speaker chairs the meeting introducing the members. , the girl is then called in the house and asked if she knows them. After acknowledging that she knows them, the letter is then opened by? The groom's family to see whether the items enclosed have been brought. The negotiations continue until the final agreement.'*

It was also evident that young women's involvement was not linked to the negotiations process. However many said that the agreement could only be concluded if she agreed on the acceptance of the husband but she did not have any involvement in the acceptance of the bride price. A young woman said *'After all this process I was asked if I love my husband and if they should accept them as in laws. I said yes before them and they cheered and congratulated me'*. However she also said that she was very concerned during the negotiation because the money that was requested by her family was a huge sum and she was concerned whether the groom could meet these expectations, but an agreement was reached.

A young man explained the minimal role he and his wife played in the negotiation process and the lack of power they had in the agreement of the bride price. Parents and other elder family members were in complete control of the decisions. He said:

*'The man and his wife to be are not always involved in the negotiations. It's culturally not accepted. I was involved in only replying to the letter they wrote to us listing what they wanted. When it comes to the actual discussion I was not allowed to attend the meeting.'*

Another said *'I was not involved in the negotiations it was forbidden for me to get involved in the negotiations'* while a third said *'I was present during the negotiations though I never said any word'*.

Most of the clan leaders spelled out very clearly the items and quantities that were acceptable. For example, according to one clan leader: *'It was customary that bride price should be 12 goats, a blanket, a hoe and 24 jericans of local brew'*. More than one religious leader referred to bride price emerging from the bible. One participant said bride price is *'catered'* for both *'culturally and biblically'* and it was also acknowledged that the bride price items and numbers differ depending on the tribe and its *'customs'* of which the Bukonzo tribe was often mentioned.

However many factors appear to impact on the decisions made during negotiations. A paternal aunt said, *'Even one goat can be enough for bride price depending on the families' background, its way of behavior and also the negotiations between the two families'*. The education and the *'background'* of the girl appear to be deciding factors where *'background'* refers to the financial status of the girls' family in the community. One female leader suggested that girls' education should not be considered as a factor in the decision of bride price and added that the practice is unfair because the boy's education is not considered. She said, *'Education of the lady should not be put at the fore front when deciding bride price because even the parents of the boy have invested in educating him too.'* However a solution to the problem of lack of support among families for girls' education came from one of the clan leaders interviewed who said that girls' education was important because it raised the bride price. He said, *'Education of the girl child should be emphasized in order to improve the family's bargaining power in so far as bride price is concerned'*.

The process was essentially a bargaining process where the bride's family had the last word about how much should be paid. Terms such as *'negotiation and agreement'* between the two sets of relatives was most often used to explain the process. A young woman said:

*'My parents (and relatives) asked for two million and five hundred thousand shillings (US\$ 270) and twelve goats. My in laws said it was too much for them to afford. They bargained up to when both agreed to pay to pay one million and eight hundred thousand shillings and six goats'*.

### **4.3 Changes in bride price over time**

Bride price items were separated into cultural items such as goats and additional items which have been added in more recent times. A woman interviewed said *'they have added sugar, suits for both parents, furniture etc. on top of the cultural bride price.* An increase in the value of goats was often mentioned as a particular problem that adds to men's inability to meet the economic demands of bride price. In addition it was noted that bride price is increasingly becoming a commercialized process. As one leader said *'It is ....business in very many communities.'*

The increased financial status of women in Uganda and its conflict with bride price was mentioned by a clan leader. The leader said that women who make enough money could refund the bride price but it was also said that this could lead to domestic violence women continue not to show any dependence tendencies for they can manager their own affairs.

### **4.4 Problems identified**

**Exploitation of women:** A clan leader identified among others the impact of bride price on women and said *'It enslaves the woman ... disrespects her because the woman was bought through bride price.'* A religious leader mentioned that bride price was a human rights offence and said *'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 labour – and then failure to produce children becomes a big crime once you have been paid for.'* This exploitation was also mentioned by a government official who said *'A woman turns to property of the man after paying bride price and she is exploited to the maximum and this deprives her of her rights.'*

**Economic burden on men:** The economic burden for men was a common theme reported by all participants. The economic impact on the couple and the couple often starting their marriage in poverty was frequently mentioned. A government official said: *'It has resulted in poverty since it is costly and over charged and sometimes boys are left with nothing after the payment of bride price, and therefore suffer after marriage because all the money that would be used to feed the family was used to marry.'* Young men spoke about how bride price affects them financially: *'We suffer so much because we pay a lot of money.'* He thought this was a form of *'financial mistreatment'*. Another noted how men often get into financial trouble due to bride price and said *'The man may have to borrow substantially and go into debt and impoverishment in order to pay bride price and may have no income.'*

The increasing demand for a higher price for more educated girls and the copying of other marriage norms from the neighboring tribes and cultures was also noted. Many referred to the commercialization of the bride price process and that low income men

are particular affected by the rising costs. It was also noted that some men are 'overcharged' thus leading to many financial hardships at the start of the marriage.

**Pregnancy and elopement:** Pregnancies outside of marriage and elopement were mentioned as problems related to bride price expenses. A clan leader said '*This has caused elopement in very many communities and unwanted pregnancies*'. This is as a result of the cost involved in the payment of bride price (commercial tendencies attached to the traditional concept)

**Loss of respect:** Loss of respect was commonly mentioned as a consequence of inability to pay bride price. A man was reported to lose respect if he was not able to pay and a man may also disrespect the girl's parents if they make huge economic demands. A leader explained '*Disrespect among both sides of the man and the woman happens because if one fails to pay then they don't regard him with respect and if they charge him expensively then the man's side of the family disrespects the woman's side.*' Another way in which a man could not earn respect from the women's family is when he is considered poor. A leader explained this as '*A lady may fall in love with a poor man and this causes disrespect on the woman's side.*'

Disrespect for the women in a marriage where bride price was not paid also emerged because such women are considered to be living '*in prostitution*'. Similarly the husband is not considered a part of the family or a son-in-law. Young men also spoke about feeling humiliated when not able to pay bride price. Men's manhood is also questioned if they are not able to pay and this may even be from their wives. A young man said his wife used his non-payment to humiliate him when she said '*What have you paid for me, are you a man?*'

**Death of the woman:** Many participants referred to how non-paying of bride price had a significant impact in the event of the death of the woman. If payment was not done the woman was not considered married and the bride price had to be paid fully before burial could happen. This has led to many disputes between families. It was explained '*In the Bukonzo culture if you don't pay the bride price, if a woman dies when you have never officially married her, you pay double.*' (it acts as away of disciplining the man)

**Conflict:** Starting a marriage while in heavy debt was identified as leading to much conflict between the man and the woman. A respondent reported, '*It (bride price) also leaves outstanding marks like payment of debts and even interest on loans borrowed during the period of paying bride price*'. Also the perception that he has been 'overcharged' could lead to numerous conflicts with the wife and abandoning the marriage because he feels cheated could also occur. A female leader said '*Both parties may misunderstand when the man is over charged; it may also lead to a breakdown of the relationship*'. Being overcharged also created conflict between the bride and her in laws. A participant said '*The family side of the man eventually hates the woman because of overcharging of the bride price.*' Disrespect thus emerged on both sides with the girl's



family disrespecting if the price was not paid and the man's family if the price was considered inconsiderate and too high.

Continuous conflict between the man and his wife due to his non-payment can lead to divorce. Women were said to be feel *'unstable'* in their relationships if bride price had not been paid. A clan leader said bride price *'leads to frequent divorces... which lead to unstable families'*. A young woman however said that bride price *'wipes off the freedom of women and gives the man room to decide on what he wants to do with his life like cheating on the woman since they think that women are mere property bought off in the markets and if you complain the man will beat you seriously.'*

The bride price process was also identified as potentially creating problems within the family due to the absence of presents for all members. One of the aunties interviewed said *'the bride price may bring misunderstandings between the family members...because not every body was considered at the time of sharing the bride price'*.

#### **4.5 Recommendations for change**

While consideration was given to the important role bride price plays in cementing relationships and bringing families together as well as the enactment of cultural traditions, participants overwhelmingly recommended the practice of bride price be reformed.

Many suggestions were given by the clan leaders on how to improve the *'institution'* of bride price. And most did not support the abolishing of the practice because it was perceived that women will lose respect and this process was considered as one of the only ways women can earn respect. Only one female clan leader suggested the abolishment of bride price and said *'It's recommended that bride price which does not meet the cultural standards should be scripted off.'* Exactly what this means was not elaborated on. Another religious leader suggested that the term 'bride price' should be replaced with the term 'dowry' because the term is demeaning to women. It was recommended that there should be constant sensitization about why bride price is necessary and special references were made to the important role that religious leaders could play in these messages.

Others suggested that there should be better mutual understanding between the parties during the bargaining process.

Clan leaders also recognized that the changes and commercialization of bride price were mainly related to the adoption of Western norms and values of commodities. It was said that this corrupted the traditional value of bride price and created an economic burden for the groom. It was suggested that going back to the original price and improving relationships between parents and children was important. Better communication between parents and their children was often mentioned as well as the role of the aunties in the process. One participant said *'Aunts should continue with cultural*

*education to impart traditional values to the daughters' (Commercialisation versus the traditional meaning of the concept of bride price).*

Young men provided some suggestions on how bride price could change and although they did not all want bride price to disappear, they suggested changes in the amounts such as a man suggesting that government must be approached to *'put laws that will help reduce the burden of bride price at least to 6 goats and not 12 goats'*.

Some other suggestions were also made on how to resolve the issue of bride price and the involvement of government was mentioned. *"Government should...ensure...heavy fines to those people with daughters who are not officially married...'*. Such a solution however appears to increase the victimization of poor families rather than dealing with the impact of bride price. Similarly fines for elopement were also mentioned.

Ideas on the regulation of bride price were mentioned by another clan leader who said this will prevent exploitation. He said *'Rules and regulation about bride price should be instituted to prevent exploitation or even by laws put in place according to cultures.'* Another suggestion was that *'Policies be instituted to protect the traditions and the girl child against illegal marriage.'* This was not further elaborated on when the same person said that *'the old traditions have to be put into writing'*.

The change to the monetary value of bride price or flexibility was a common theme. It was often suggested that bride price must be reduced to a more affordable level. A aunty said *'They should reduce the bride price in order to make it affordable for some families or men.'* Another said, *'Price should be reduced in order to make it affordable for even young boys and low income earners.'*

Educating communities about the traditional meaning of bride price was mentioned by almost all of the leaders interviewed. One said *'Communities should be sensitized on the value of bride price according to the culture -- what it was meant for otherwise it has since lost meaning as people are paying bride price for the sake of even marriage or even pleasing the in laws.'* Education in general was also mentioned by one leader while a government official suggested that formal education would lead to less *'early marriages and unwanted pregnancies'* which she identified as the reasons for *'over charge and conflicts among family members'* during the process of bride price negotiations.

The role of the church in educating communities was commonly mentioned, including using weekly sermons. It was also said that *'the gap between the church and tradition needs to be reduced and they should work hand in hand to improve the institution (bride price)'*.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

Throughout the study the researchers remained very aware of the historical significance of bride price and the importance of the practice. . The findings showed that bride price was a widely accepted practice among both men and women and younger and older participants in the three sub counties of Bundibugyo. Although there was widespread support in preserving it, there was also acknowledgement of its negative impact on Uganda society including women, men and their children. This is similar to findings of a nationwide study in Uganda conducted by MIFUMI in which 95% of respondents viewed bride price as important to validate marriage (Osuna, 2003). Such high levels of acceptance among the population are a huge challenge for the engagement of communities and policy makers in working towards mitigating the negative impacts of this practice.

The study revealed the intersection of this practice with domestic violence and the interconnection between economic factors, bride price and domestic violence was a recurring theme. Although bride price was not the only factor that fuels violence against women it was certainly recognized as a contributing factor in complex ways by many participants and many complained about the changes to the practice which were linked to economic issues.

It was recognized by the research team right from the beginning that the issue of bride price is controversial. It remains an important traditional cultural practice and considered by many as a valuable aspect of their lives. However, since modernization the practice has been influenced by economic, social, and cultural changes and its historical integrity, benefits and significance has been affected. It is however the recognition that bride price could result or exacerbate problems of exploitation of women and increase the economic burden on men which provides an opportunity for organizations such as CEHURA to engage in education, awareness and community level discussion and advocacy.

## **6. POST RESEARCH INITIATIVES**

Many different activities and developments occurred at the community level during the dissemination of findings to raise awareness and stimulate dialogue on the negative impact of bride price. Different groups of participants including government representatives, civil society and community representatives from both the elders and the youth were included. It was particularly important to engage with elders who are critical in the bride price negotiation process and may also have involvement in the process of setting by laws. During these dialogues it was clear that different challenges exist because of slight differences in the practice such as what happens in relation to property during divorce proceedings. Much more attention is therefore needed to accommodate these different forms of practices and continued engagement with policy makers.

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