

## Marriage Steps and Practices among the Afikpo-Igbo Clan of Ebonyi State

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### Abstract

*The institution of marriage occupies a central position among social institutions, serving as a fundamental mechanism for the perpetuation of human society through the regulation of conjugal and filial relationships. Across cultures and historical periods, marriage has assumed diverse forms and practices. This study examined the steps and practices of marriage among the Afikpo-Igbo clan of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The research adopted a qualitative approach, drawing primarily on insider knowledge and complemented by secondary sources, including books, academic journals, newspaper articles, and other relevant literature on marriage practices in Igboland. The findings revealed that marriage practices among the Afikpo people have undergone significant historical transformations. These range from an earlier unregulated phase—characterised by varying and sometimes excessive demands for yams and other marriage items by parents, to a more standardised system marked by agreed and uniform quantities and sizes of yams presented as part of the bride price. The study concluded by advocating a dynamic approach to marriage practices, emphasising the need to recognise marriage and family as foundational units of society. It further recommended periodic review and modification of marriage rites and procedures by Afikpo elders and the ruling council, to ensure alignment with evolving social realities and best practices in other progressive societies.*

**Keywords:** Marriage, steps, practices, clan, Afikpo-Igbo.

### Introduction

Historically, marriage has been central to social order, with religious and cultural traditions shaping its norms and practices across societies. These religious and cultural influences have, over time, produced diverse conceptions of marriage among different peoples of the world. Commenting on marriage among the Jews, Baily (1959) observes that marriage was held in high esteem, not primarily for its rational value, but because it served as a means of propagating the Holy People, maintaining the family as the foundation of society, and assuring a semblance of immortality to a man through his offspring.

In medieval Europe, marriages were largely contracted for dynastic and political reasons, particularly to form alliances between families and ensure the production of heirs. In modern times, however, European societies have come to embrace different motivations for marriage. While some individuals marry for love, others choose to forgo marriage altogether. The African conception of marriage, however, differs significantly from the Euro-Asian perspective. In many African societies, marriage is deeply communal, viewed as a union not merely between two

individuals but between two families or lineages. Its primary purposes include procreation, continuity of lineage, and strengthening community bonds, rather than the pursuit of purely romantic or individual fulfilment often associated with Western societies.

Among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, the institution of marriage is highly revered. Marriage is seen as a vital mechanism for the propagation and perpetuation of human life, with childbirth serving as the principal agency for this continuity. Consequently, infertility is traditionally regarded as a severe misfortune. This view is reinforced by Nwoko (2020), who asserts that in Igbo culture, “to marry” means to establish enduring relationships between two families. Marriage is therefore rooted in a worldview where the propagation of life is essentially a communal concern rather than a purely individual responsibility. As a result, Igbo marriages place strong emphasis on collective responsibility, with family elders playing significant roles in decision-making and negotiation processes.

It is important to note that although traditional marriage practices across Igboland share several similarities, often described by scholars as core principles, there are notable variations among different communities and states, including Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. In Afikpo, Ebonyi State, for instance, marriage follows well-defined procedures that are deliberately not hurried. This deliberate pacing ensures that the symbolic expressions of love, respect, and social protocol, especially as embodied in the giving and receiving of gifts, are properly observed.

In Afikpo society, a marriage is not regarded as complete until five traditional stages have been successfully performed. These stages are known as *Anam Abia*, *Atogbo Nku*, *Amari Ulo*, *Ahia Ozi*, and *Ime Eku* or *Eju Mai* (bride price). Against this background, this study examines the steps and procedures involved in marriage among the Afikpo Igbo. To achieve this objective, the paper is structured into several sections. Following this introduction, the second section examines the geographical setting called Afikpo, and the third discusses the concept of marriage and the Igbo perception of the institution as a social construct. The fourth section analyses the various stages and procedures of marriage ceremonies in Afikpo. The fifth section highlights the changes and continuities in marriage rites among the people of Afikpo. The sixth briefly discusses the benefits of marriage, while the final section concludes with policy recommendations.

### **Afikpo: Historical Overview**

Afikpo, located in present-day Ebonyi State, is inhabited by a people who traditionally identify themselves as *Nde Ehugbo* (the people of Ehugbo). During the colonial period, European administrators found the name *Ehugbo* difficult to pronounce and consequently adopted the name *Afikpo*, which was later formalised in colonial records.

Geographically, Afikpo occupies a unique cultural crossroads, sharing boundaries with both Igbo-speaking communities and non-Igbo-speaking groups in present-day Cross River State. This strategic location positioned Afikpo as one of the few Igbo-speaking regions with direct historical and cultural interactions with non-Igbo populations along the western bank of the Cross River.

Culturally, the people of Afikpo display distinctive features that set them apart from many other Igbo groups. These include a double-descent system of kinship, a composite nucleated village pattern, and a well-structured age-grade system of governance. However, they share these characteristics with other Eastern (Cross River) Igbo communities such as Edda, Ohafia, Abiriba, Arochukwu, Abam, Bende, Nkporo, Item, Alayi, and Igbere. Additionally, they share similarities

in marriage and burial rites, as well as in traditional norms regulating marital ceremonies and social conduct.

Like other Igbo groups, the Afikpo people view marriage as one of the foremost sacred and solemn institutions. This is largely because of its interconnectedness with life, procreation, and its symbolic linkage to the world of the ancestors. Hence, marriages were contracted not only among the living but also involved the dead, particularly deceased parents or guardians of the couple, whose spiritual consent was ritually acknowledged.

Furthermore, marriage among the Afikpo-Igbo was regarded as the principal legitimate avenue for procreation. One of its central purposes, among others, was the propagation and perpetuation of human life. Marriage was therefore revered and held sacrosanct because it conferred legitimacy on the couple and on the children born thereof, both in the eyes of the living and the ancestors. This belief in the conferment of legitimacy on children through marriage, and in the paternal ownership of such children (biologically and sociologically), formed the basis upon which Igbo society traditionally regarded any child born outside marriage as illegitimate. Consequently, such a child, especially a male, had no inheritance rights among his kinsmen (Nwoko, 2020).

To maintain the sanctity of marriage in Afikpo, any young girl who became pregnant before marriage faced public ridicule through *Ebu Mbe* songs. *Ebu Mbe* is a traditional performance genre that conveys Afikpo moral values through satire, music, and dramatic expression. Through this medium, individuals' deeds and misdeeds were publicly exposed and socially sanctioned (Aja, 2005).

The succeeding sections will discuss the marriage steps and processes among the Afikpo-Igbo.

### **Marriage: Conceptual Clarifications**

It is highly useful to analyse the definition of marriage, particularly because anthropologists and historians have proposed several competing definitions in an effort to capture the wide variety of marital practices observed across cultures. One influential early definition appears in the *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* (1951), which defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognised as the legitimate offspring of both partners. This definition emphasises legitimacy and social recognition of offspring as central to the institution of marriage.

In modern scholarship, marriage is commonly understood as having social, religious, and legal dimensions. The philosopher Russell (1959) argued that marriage differs from other sexual relationships primarily because it is a legal institution. While acknowledging that marriage is also a religious institution in many societies, Russell maintained that its legal aspect is essential. This perspective underscores the role of law in regulating rights, obligations, inheritance, legitimacy, and social order within marital unions.

The fundamental basis of marriage has also been described as a personal association between a man and a woman and a biological relationship oriented toward mating and reproduction. As a social, legal, and religious institution, marriage has undergone numerous modifications and transformations across time and cultures. Nevertheless, certain core elements, such as recognised partnership and responsibility toward offspring, have remained relatively stable.

From a biological standpoint, Wimalasena (2016) asserts that the primary object of marriage is not merely to legalise sexual union but to ensure the survival of the species and continuity of the social group. From this perspective, marriage is not simply a sexual relationship but a parental association. It is the union of male and female for the production, protection, and care of offspring; reproduction, therefore, constitutes a fundamental purpose of marriage.

Marriage, as both a physical and moral union, is widely recognised as the foundation of the family. In some traditions, it is regarded as a sacrament and an indissoluble union for life and even the hereafter, as in orthodox Hinduism or the Catholic Church. In other contexts, marriage may take the form of a civil contract, sometimes even temporary, as in Mut'ah (temporary marriage) among Shia Islam. Whether conceived as a sacrament or a contract, however, marriage extends beyond sexual satisfaction; it joins two persons in a socially recognised union oriented toward companionship, regulated sexuality, and the procreation of legitimate children.

As James (1952) observed, although individual marriages may be entered into for various reasons, family expectations, social convenience, economic considerations, or personal pleasure, the fundamental purposes of marriage generally include companionship, sexual intimacy, and procreation. Thus, across biological, social, religious, and legal interpretations, marriage remains a central institution in the organisation and continuity of human society

Marriage is a fundamental element of human culture. It is widely acknowledged that without marriage, there would be no family, and without family, the continuation of human existence through procreation would be impossible. Describing the importance of marriage, Mbiti (1969) famously asserts that "marriage is the focus of existence." It is the meeting point of all members of a given community: the departed, the living, and those yet unborn. All dimensions of time, past, present, and future, converge in marriage, where the entire drama of history is repeated, renewed, and revitalised. In many societies, marriage is not merely viewed as a union between a man and a woman but rather as the foundation of the family, encompassing both the living and their ancestral and future generations.

Marriage serves as the bedrock of the family institution and plays a vital role in the continuity, expansion, and organisation of society. Marriage plays a foundational role in maintaining social order and continuity. It serves as society's mechanism designed to regulate and control the many human relationships that arise from the biological fact of bisexuality. The family that grows out of marriage is itself a stabiliser of the marital institution. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2025), marriage is defined as a legally and socially sanctioned union regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accord status to their offspring (if any).

The main legal function of marriage, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2025), is to ensure the rights of partners with respect to each other and to define the rights and relationships of children within a community. Historically, marriage conferred legitimate status on offspring, entitling them to privileges established by community traditions, including inheritance rights. In most societies, marriage also establishes permissible social relations for offspring, including acceptable choices of future spouses.

For instance, endogamy, the practice of marrying within one's own tribe or social group, is one of the oldest known social regulations of marriage. Where communication with outside groups is limited, endogamous marriage becomes a natural consequence. Cultural pressures to marry within one's social, economic, and ethnic group are still strongly enforced in some societies. Conversely, exogamy, the practice of marrying outside one's group, is common in societies where

kinship relations are highly complex, thereby barring marriage among large groups that trace descent from a common ancestor.

In societies that practice arranged marriages, a near-universal custom is the involvement of an intermediary or matchmaker. The chief responsibility of this individual is to arrange a marriage satisfactory to the two families involved. Some form of dowry or bride-price is almost always exchanged in societies that favour arranged marriages. In societies where individuals choose their own partners, dating is the most typical means of meeting and becoming acquainted with prospective spouses. Successful dating may lead to courtship and eventually marriage (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025).

Commenting on marriage among the Igbo, Smith (2005) regards it as one of the most meaningful markers of Igbo ethnicity. For instance, most Igbo villages could intermarry but could not intra-marry. Among exogamous groups, incestuous relationships were avoided and regarded as *alu* or *ihe nso* (taboo). Although monogamy existed, polygamy was widely appreciated as a mark of prestige and high social status.

Again, intermarriage with neighbouring ethnic groups was also encouraged among the Igbo, partly as a means of strengthening intergroup relations. For example, Afigbo (1981) asserts that long-distance traders and polygamists in the precolonial period often selected wives from geographically strategic communities along their trade routes. This had significant implications: through marriage, such merchants gained acceptance in their fathers-in-law's clans, especially when the latter belonged to influential families, thereby guaranteeing security. Furthermore, the father-in-law's household often provided accommodation and warehouse facilities that were otherwise unavailable in precolonial Igboland.

It must also be observed that marriage in Igboland was not restricted to adult males and females alone. To some extent, marriages were contracted between females and also between underage children until they reached maturity. In the case of child marriage, an Igbo girl could be betrothed very early, sometimes before reaching one year of age. However, payment of bride-price in such arrangements was usually deferred until the couple attained maturity. Child marriages in olden-day Igboland were contracted for various reasons: to strengthen friendship ties between families, to retain wealth or business alliances within specific lineages, and to protect the girl-child from future suitors (Nwoko, 2020).

Same-sex marriage also existed in some Igbo communities, as in other parts of Africa. However, in all known cases, it occurred between women. In such unions, one partner assumed the role of "female husband" and sociological father of the children born into the marriage (Amadiume, 1987). To a large extent, these arrangements did not involve sexual relationships between the women, unlike lesbian unions. Reasons for female-husband marriages varied: it enabled wealthy but childless women to procreate socially, served as a status symbol, and functioned as an institutional improvisation of male authority and responsibilities within a patriarchal system (Nwoko, 2020).

Among the Afikpo-Igbo clan, two major forms of marriage were recognised in the past: early child marriage and the polygamous system. In contemporary times, however, both monogamy and polygamy are practised.

### **Stages or Steps in the Conduct of Marriage Rites among the Afikpo-Igbo Clan**

Traditional marriages among the Afikpo-Igbo can only be regarded as valid, effective, and complete when the various stages and procedures are properly and comprehensively performed.

These stages ensure that the union is culturally recognised and legitimised by both families and the wider community.

In Afikpo, the marriage system, its steps, and procedures have undergone significant transformation in recent times. For instance, Mbey (2004) identified the following as components of the old system: (a) Ikpa Ububo, (b) Anam Abia, (c) Amari Ulo, (d) Atogbo Nku. (e) Inyo Ozi, and (f) Ime Eku (Adoba eju mai).

Ikpa Ububo referred to the initial conversation between a man and the father of the girl he intended to marry. Anam Abia demonstrated (in practical terms) the seriousness of his courtship. Amari Ulo (knowing the house) involved an official visit by the suitor to his prospective father-in-law before other rites could be performed. After this came Atogbo Nku, literally meaning “dropping of firewood.” This was followed by Inyo Ozi (undertaking labour or service), during which the suitor rendered certain services to his prospective in-laws. The final stage was Ime Eku (payment of bride price), which signified the completion of the marriage process. In Afikpo tradition, a woman is considered properly married only when the bride price has been duly paid.

The modern system of marriage in Afikpo, which is the focus of this study, comprises the following stages:

1. Anam Abia (Declaration of intention to marry)
2. Atogbo Nku (Presentation of firewood)
3. Amari Ulo (Knowing the house)
4. Ahia Ozi (Undertaking labour or work)
5. Eju Mia/Ime Eku (Payment of bride price)

### **Stage One: *Anam Abia* (Declaration of Intention)**

At the stage of Anam Abia, the suitor formally demonstrates his seriousness by approaching the girl’s family to declare his intention to marry their daughter. The items required at this stage traditionally include ten large tubers of yams and two large sticks of dried fish (stockfish). If these items are not returned to the young man’s family, it signifies acceptance of his proposal

### **Stage Two: *Atogbo Nku* (Presentation of Firewood)**

After the suitor has “known the house” of his prospective father-in-law, he proceeds to the stage known as *Atogbo Nku*, which literally means “dropping of firewood.” Traditionally, the suitor carried a large bundle of firewood to his prospective mother-in-law and placed it in front of her house, usually on the evening of *Orie* or *Nkwo* market day. The following day, being *Afor* or *Eke* market day, he carried a large log of firewood to his prospective father-in-law and placed it conspicuously in front of the house.

The firewood was deliberately placed in visible locations so that passers-by would recognise that a daughter in that household had been formally engaged. Over time, according to Mbey (2004), young men began to express dissatisfaction with this practice, considering it degrading to carry firewood publicly. They appealed to the elders for an alternative. Their request was granted, and the practice was modified. Instead of firewood, suitors were permitted to present items similar to those used in Anam Abia, such as dried fish and wine.

Under the revised Afikpo traditional marriage list, the requirements for *Atogbo Nku* include: (a) 4 large sticks of dried fish or stock fish, (b) 2 gallons of palm wine, (c) 6 gallons of palm wine in cash, (d) 1 crate of Star beer, (e) 1 crate of malt, (f) 1 bottle of seaman, (g) 1 bottle of seaman in cash, (h) 2 bottles of local gin in cash, (i) 2 heads of tobacco in cash, (j) 2 packets of

cigarette and matches in cash, (k) fee for the elders (three thousand naira only), (l) fee for the youths (five thousand naira only) and (m) ten large tubers of yam.

### **Stage Three: *Amari Ulo* (Knowing the House)**

Historically, *Amari Ulo* was not originally part of the Afikpo marriage rites. Mbey (2004) explained its emergence. According to him, a suitor once sent marriage items (*Atogbo Nku*) to his prospective father-in-law's house. The father-in-law rejected the items, questioning how they could bring such items when he did not personally know the man seeking his daughter's hand in marriage. The emissaries were turned back. After consultation, they returned with the required items and formally introduced themselves, stating that they had come to "know the house." From that incident onward, *Amari Ulo* became institutionalised as an essential stage in Afikpo marriage rites.

According to the revised Afikpo marriage list, the items required for *Amari Ulo* include: (a) 4 large sticks of dried fish or stoke fish, (b) 8 gallons of palm wine in cash, (c) one carton of Star beer, (d) one carton of malt, (e) one bottle of seaman in cash, (f) 2 bottles of local gin in cash, (g) 2 heads of tobacco in cash, (h) 2 packets of cigarette and matches in cash, (i) ten large tubers of yam.

### **Stage Four: *Ahia Ozi* (Labour Undertaking)**

In the past, suitors were required to render labour services to their prospective parents-in-law as part of the marriage process. During the farming season, they actively participated in agricultural activities such as clearing bushes, making mounds for yams and cassava, and staking yams at the appropriate time. This stage symbolised commitment, industriousness, and the suitor's readiness to take responsibility. However, this practice has largely changed. Suitors are no longer required to perform extensive farm labour. Instead, the labour obligation has been monetised and itemized in what is now known as the revised Afikpo marriage list.

The requirements for *Ahia Ozi* include: (a) 4 large sticks of dried fish or stoke fish, (b) 8 gallons of palm wine in cash, (c) 2 cartons of Star beer, (d) 2 bottles of seaman in cash, (e) 2 heads of tobacco in cash, (f) 2 packets of cigarette and matches in cash and (g) ten large tubers of yam. For the women, 30 large tubers of yams, 6 large sticks of fish or stock fish, 3 crates of mineral and ten thousand naira for Umuada.

### **Stage Five: *Eju Mia/Ime Eku* (Bride Price)**

"Ime Eku," commonly referred to as bride price, is also known as "Adoba Eju Mai." Among the people of Afikpo (Nde Ehugbo), a woman is regarded as properly married only after the bride price has been paid. Once this payment is made, she becomes the bona fide wife of the suitor, even if she still resides in her parental home.

On the morning of the *Ime Eku*, the suitor presents four gallons of undiluted palm wine (Okputahike) to his father-in-law and his kinsmen. This enables them to entertain themselves while awaiting the arrival of the suitor's kinsmen.

The requirements for *Ime Eku* include: (a) 2 gallons of palm wine, (b) 22 gallons of palm wine in cash, (c) 2 crates of Star beer, (d) 1 crate of stout, (e) 1 crate of malt, (f) 2 packets of cigarette and matches in cash, (g) 2 bottles filled with snuff, (h) 1 big log of wood, (i) 2 bottles of seaman cash, (j) 2 bottles of seaman in cash, (k) 4 bottles of native hot in cash, (l) 10,000 (ten

thousand naira (bride price), (m) ten large tubers of yam, (n) 2 large sticks dried fish or stock fish, (o) 2 bottles of red palm oil, (p) 2 crates of mineral and (q) 1 big head of Oko vegetable (Oha).

### ***Stage Six: Nvunvu and Nkwanwite (Traditional Wedding), which is Optional***

Traditionally, *Nvunvu* is often performed alongside Stage Two. It involves the purchase of essential household items by the groom. These items are presented together with those listed in Stage Two. *Nvunvu* is usually supervised and carried out by married women in the compound whose bride prices have been fully paid, symbolising legitimacy and communal approval.

*Nkwanwite*, though optional, is the grand finale and the most celebrated stage of marriage rites among the people of Afikpo. It typically involves the entire village, as well as visitors and guests from both families. The bride's family invites traditional dancers, while the groom and his friends appear with traditional musicians known as "Alawiyo." *Nkwanwite* represents the public celebration and social affirmation of the marriage and serves as the climax of the marriage rites.

In the next subsection, attention will be given to the changes and continuities that have occurred in the steps and stages of marriage among the people of Afikpo.

### **Changes and Continuities in Afikpo-Igbo Marriage Practices in Modern Times**

Changes and continuities are fundamental historical concepts used to examine how societies evolve across time. Change refers to transformation or modification in social institutions and practices, while continuity denotes those elements that remain stable despite social, economic, or religious influences. In the case of the Afikpo-Igbo, marriage practices have experienced notable adjustments while still preserving core traditional values.

#### **Changes in Afikpo-Igbo Marriage Practices**

One significant historical change concerns the regulation of bride price items, particularly yams. According to Mbey (2004), the Afikpo people traditionally regarded marriage as a sacred institution, and the yam, being a symbol of wealth, masculinity, and fertility, featured prominently in almost every stage of the marriage rites. However, because there was no standardised number or size of yams required, parents began to demand varying and sometimes excessive quantities. This created disparities and tension among families and communities.

The controversy became so pronounced that it nearly caused division within Afikpo society. In response, elders from across Afikpo convened and agreed on a fixed, uniform number and size of yams to be presented as part of the bride price. This decision institutionalised fairness and unity, ensuring that marriage obligations became standardised throughout Afikpo villages.

Modernisation has also introduced additional changes, including:

1. **Monetisation of Marriage Items:** Many traditional items once presented in kind, such as yams, smoked fish, stock fish, or palm wine, are now converted into monetary equivalents, reflecting a cash-based economy.
2. **Influence of Christianity:** With the spread of Christianity, especially in southeastern Nigeria, traditional marriage rites are often followed immediately by church weddings. In some cases, couples perform both traditional and "white" weddings on the same day.
3. **Urbanisation and Labour Mobility:** Increased education, urban migration, and employment opportunities have reduced early marriages and expanded individual autonomy in partner selection.

4. **Decline in Parental Control Over Suitor Choice:** Unlike in the past, where parents played decisive roles in choosing spouses for their children, young men and women now exercise greater personal choice.
5. **Cultural Borrowing – Aso Ebi:** The adoption of the Yoruba-style Aso Ebi (uniform ceremonial attire) from the culture of the Yoruba people has become common in Afikpo traditional weddings, demonstrating inter-ethnic cultural exchange.

### Continuities in Afikpo-Igbo Marriage Practices

Despite these transformations, several core elements remain enduring:

1. **Parental Approval and Involvement:** Marriage still requires the consent and active participation of both families.
2. **Payment of Bride Price:** Though sometimes monetised, the symbolic and cultural importance of bride price remains intact.
3. **Role of Elders and Kinsmen:** Elders continue to mediate negotiations and ensure that customs are properly observed.
4. **Marriage as a Communal Union:** Fundamentally, marriage in Afikpo is still viewed not merely as a union between two individuals but as an alliance between two families and, by extension, two communities.

### Benefits or Importance of Marriage

Marriage plays a vital role in maintaining social order and promoting love, commitment, and stability within society. Across cultures and historical periods, marriage has served as a foundational institution for organising family life, regulating sexual relations, and ensuring social continuity. This may account for the biblical assertion in the Book of Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 that “two are better than one,” emphasising mutual support, strength in adversity, and a bond that is not easily broken. Some of the specific benefits of marriage include:

- i. **Health and Well-being:** Married individuals generally live longer, happier, and healthier lives compared to single or cohabiting counterparts, often experiencing lower rates of depression.
- ii. **Financial Security:** Couples often accumulate more wealth, benefit from combined incomes, and have higher credit ratings, offering better economic security.
- iii. **Child Stability:** Marriage provides an optimal, stable environment for raising children, who are less likely to experience poverty or instability.
- iv. **Emotional Support and Companionship:** It offers a reliable partner for mutual care, intimacy, and support through life's challenges.
- v. **Legal and Social Benefits:** Marriage grants legal rights, such as inheritance, joint property ownership, and access to spousal benefits (e.g., healthcare).
- vi. **Personal Growth and Stability:** It acts as a catalyst for maturity, fostering responsibility, patience, and reduced ego.

### Conclusion/Recommendations

This study examined and analysed the stages and practices of marriage among the Afikpo-Igbo, highlighting the various steps involved in the conduct of traditional marriage rites. In order to eliminate conceptual ambiguities, the study also clarified the meaning of marriage within its cultural and social context.

The findings revealed that marriage practices among the Afikpo people have undergone significant historical transformation. In earlier periods, marriage obligations were largely unregulated, with parents demanding varying and sometimes excessive quantities of yams and other items as bride price. Over time, however, these practices evolved into a standardised system in which the number and size of yams and other required items became uniform and collectively agreed upon.

This standardisation did not merely regulate marriage transactions; it promoted fairness, reduced exploitation, and fostered unity across Afikpo villages. The reform introduced social order and consistency into marriage affairs, strengthening communal harmony. In light of these findings, this study supports the view of Wright & Randall (1975) that marriage and the family should be regarded as the foundational unit of society. As they observe, every individual begins life within a family structure, whether minimal or extended. Despite changes in structure and function over time, the fundamental reality remains that societies are composed of families, and all members of society originate from a family unit.

Thus, the study concludes by advocating a dynamic approach to marriage practices, emphasising the need to recognise marriage and family as foundational units of society. It further recommends periodic review and modification of marriage rites and procedures by Afikpo elders and the ruling council to ensure alignment with evolving social realities and best practices in other progressive societies.

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