



## AN APPRAISAL OF TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE RITES IN ONICHA SUB CULTURE AREA, EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *Marriage is not just a union between a man and a woman, it is a tie between two families and one in which traditional gifts are exchanged between the two families concerned. Although universally accepted, there is the problem of uniformity in the way marriage rites are conducted. This varies from community to community and even from country to country. In some communities, it is simple while in some others, it is complex. The purpose of this study is to find out the structure and peculiarity of betrothal or marriage rites in Onicha subculture area of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Interview and observation methods were employed for this study. The tomcat theory was used to analyze the concept of marriage. This study will apart from significantly adding to our rich cultural heritage, educate and encourage suitors from other parts of the world to engage in intertribal marriage which will assist to a large extent in fostering peace and unity among the people of Nigeria. It was found that the marriage structure in Onicha subculture area has remained basically the same. What differ are the rites and rituals involved in the marriage process. Novelties imported from other cultures also have both social and economic implications for young men of marriageable age. Government at all levels should legislate on what should be the standard marriage procedure to make marriage less expensive and more affordable to persons of marriageable age.*

**KEYWORDS:** Traditional Marriage, Marriage, Rite, Families, Marriageable Age, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

In recent times, certain alien practices have been introduced into the Onicha marriage system which makes it somewhat expensive. These days, it would appear as if parents are selling off their daughters in marriage because of the high price attached to the various stages of their traditional marriage. It starts with the collection of the humongous marriage list by the groom after introduction or *iku aka n'uzo* (*marriage introduction*). A certain amount of money is now paid before the groom is given a marriage list which he considers paying up or purchasing the contents of what was drafted in the list after knocking on the door of the in-laws. It is assumed that the sincerity or resolve of the groom or intending husband to marry is determined by his ability to collect the marriage list as that presents him with the first challenge in the marriage process. The expensive dowry system which make parents spend a fortune in order to purchase gift items for the send forth of their daughters which was outlawed a few years ago has returned because of the enormous pressure from alien cultures. There is also discrepancy in the list given to indigenous and foreign suitors. If the groom is an indigene of the community, certain payments or rites in the marriage process may be waived for him. But a non-indigene may be required to fulfill all the marriage rites without exception. This is discriminatory rather than all encompassing. The bride's family used to



shoulder the responsibility of providing refreshment for the guests on the traditional wedding day, but now, it has become the exclusive function of the groom's family. This has added to the marriage burden for the groom. Perhaps, these are the reason many young men now marry without recourse to the means approved by the society.

### **Meaning of Marriage**

From the traditional outlook, marriage is a contract involving two families of equal or unequal socio-economic status who have agreed to live together for life and to share certain things in common. It is also the coming together of two mature individuals from the opposite sex to undertake lifelong responsibilities and duties that go with being a man or woman. It is an institution that bestows on its participants exclusive rights and privileges of cohabitation and procreation. To Nmah (2012), for marriage to be marriage, there must be a will or two wills meeting together, that is, there is the consent between the man and the woman. This is the matrimonial mutual will. Shorter (2001) recalls that marriage takes many cultural forms, but a general definition of marriage can be given. Marriage as he postulates, is an intimate union between a man and a woman, of which mating is an essential and sacred expression, establishing enforceable rights between them, marking a change of status for them and their parents, giving the children of the union a higher status than extramarital ones, generating relationships of consanguinity and affinity, implying that other forms of mating or intimacy are deviant or preparatory to marriage. Traditional marriage is therefore a system of marriage that is native or indigenous to Onicha.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The tomcat theory is employed to further illustrate our understanding of marriage. This theory was propounded by the eminent sociologist, Professor McDougall in 1928. This theory states that the essence of the institution of marriage is that custom, law and public opinion force man to submit to a bond, to give binding guarantees under penalties, as a condition of obtaining satisfaction of desires. The young man would prefer to have his lady love entrust herself to him without other guarantees than his vows of devotion, but the society dominated in the main by the matrons and the graybeards, takes a more cynical and skeptical view of the devotion inspired by sex attraction. The experience of the ages has taught it that too often, love is fleeting; that in the companionship of the sexes, as elsewhere, familiarity too often breeds indifference and not seldom engenders friction and resentments, hence, the mothers and fathers will not give up their daughters to their lovers without the guarantee of the marriage bond. This theory is well illustrated in a long conversation that ensued between Panurge and Pantagruel where Panurge who sought advice from Pantagruel displayed the characteristic tomcat attitude. He wanted to marry because he needed a woman but he hesitated because, he doubted whether he will have exclusive possession of the woman he marries. To him, the central fact of marriage is nothing but sex competition. However, he was advised to marry instead of getting a new woman every day with continual danger of beating or of disease which will be worse.

This theory explains that marriage is good because it serves to keep together people who would prefer to stay apart. However, not minding how good it is, it might prove difficult to convince the new generations that, marriage is worthwhile because, man may find a way to



satisfy strong desires without giving bond and the mothers and fathers may find that it does not rest with them to decide whether their daughter shall be given to her lover or not.

Binkley and Binkley (1929) asserted that the premises of the tomcat theory are simple. Man is a predatory creature; he is sex-minded; he requires sex satisfaction. Whether he is to seek this satisfaction in marriage or out of it depends partly on the general merits of the marriage institution. There is no expectation that the partners in marriage will be extraordinary people. The tomcat theorists do not bother about character sketches of ideal mates rather they insist on physical beauty or sex appeal but their speculations often constitute a thoughtful judgement on the merits of the marriage relation itself. When marriage is looked upon as an instrument of sex satisfaction, its superiority to the unmarried state is claimed upon the ground that it stabilizes sex relations. It offers a vested interest in sex satisfaction, in lieu of a precarious tenure. It affords an expectation that there will be permanent rather than transitory attachments and guaranties that the children will be the object of fixed legal right and duties. Thus, the major reason for marriage is its proprietary result. A husband or wife is specie of property purchased at a risk with one's own liberty. In making the purchase, one seeks to give up as little liberty and to obtain as complete a possession as is possible. Marriage therefore does not end sex competition, but gives it a new orientation. Husband and wife seek each other to enforce an exclusive sexual right over the other and to resist a like enforcement as regards him. To the man's insistence that his wife shall not make a cuckold, there corresponds the woman's concern, that she shall hold her husband. She must curb his predatory predilections and monopolize his affections.

### **Marriage as a Rite or Ritual**

All over the world, every human community has pattern, procedure, means or ways by which they celebrate important changes or transformations in the life cycle of their people. These changes or transformations or act of migrating from one important stage in life to another is termed passage. The various means or ways or procedure adopted by every community to celebrate these changes is called rite, hence, rites of passage. Marriage is one of such rites of passage which are celebrated in every culture. Marriage is a religious ceremony which involves rites and rituals. As Hornby (1999) defined it, rite is a ceremony performed by a particular group of people, often for religious purposes. Rite is a religious or other solemn ceremony or act while ritual is a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order. Both terms are clearly closely connected. However, rite is used more as a headline term that refers to a particular ceremony, the detailed enactment of which constitutes a ritual. The rite of marriage as Ezenweke (2012) explained may therefore be seen as the third major initiation rite that represents the joining of two persons, their life missions, families and the entire lineages. In other words, the marriage rites are performed not only for the union of the male and the female for procreation and perpetuation of life and the formation of families, but also as an institution that helps both the husband and wife to best fulfill their mission and objectives in life. She further added that, marriage is an elaborate issue with chains of symbolically represented rites and rituals with deep meanings and significance. To Molloy (2010), rituals are the basic ways in which human beings ensure they are living in harmony with each other and with nature. Rituals are frequently devoted to major aspects of human life; key events in the life cycle, rules concerning certain kinds of behaviour, sacrifice and access to the spirit world. Indeed, in many cultures, marriage is the most important rite of passage into adulthood. In most cases, it is a happy occasion celebrated universally by music, dance, food and drink.



### **Traditional Marriage in Onicha Sub culture Area**

This is the type of marriage that is native or indigenous to Onicha people. It is the kind of marriage that has been in practice before the arrival of the white man in Onicha. It is a cultural system that ensures that the customs and tradition of the people as instituted by their forefathers are followed in establishing a union between a man and a woman. Traditional marriage requires the families of the future bride and grooms to engage in ritual visits and exchange of gifts.

In Onicha, marriage is not just a time to unite two individuals of the opposite sex, but an occasion for families to establish new relationships. Marriage is highly celebrated as it is a thing of joy for parents to see their children get married. However, as Iwe (1985) observed, "In marriage, the dignifying role of women reaches its apogee. As wives and mothers, their dignity gains its crown" (p.172). Marriage as an institution in the Onicha subculture area is not different from marriage in other societies. What tends to make it different is the procedure and practices involved in the marriage system which differs from community to community. Anyacho (2005) noted that before marriage is finally contracted, many preliminary activities ranging from proposal, inquiry, acceptance and official engagement or courtship and payment of bride wealth must have been completed (p. 264).

Commenting on courtship and marriage in Onicha, Nwadike (personal communication, October 28, 2017) said that love then usually had no part to play in native courtship. A girl was sent to the parents of the affianced husband, after she had been introduced to all his relatives. This was somewhat of an ordeal as some of the man's kinsfolk do not hesitate to comment freely on the debutante, that is, the girl making her first appearance into the family. Her general behaviour was subject to close observation and her domestic qualities criticized. If the girl was quite young when she was betrothed, she would continue to make annual visits to her prospective parents-in-law, staying with them for about one month at a time. In good homes, she would be carefully guarded but in great many cases, the girl to all intents and purposes becomes actually the wife of the man to whom she was betrothed during the period she was residing with his parents. Amongst young people, morals were not very rigid, the only real stipulation being that a girl must have no intimate relationship with any other man prior to the first visit of her intended husband. There was neither church nor Christian marriage. There were rites guarding or governing the marriage institution or system in Onicha which must be performed by the two families contracting the marriage. The rites in most cases required certain customary gifts to the *umunna*, *umuada* and the parents-in-law. The bride wealth was paid to the father of the bride after a price had been reached during a bargain which ensues to determine the bride price. A day is normally fixed for the celebration of the marriage. It is usually on that day that the bride is traditionally handed over in marriage to the groom in the full glare of the two families and members of the public who will be there to witness the ceremony.

However, Omafodezi (2011) submitted that whether we call it civilization, modernization or advancement, the fact remains that this is a changing world. Traditional practices that were sacrosanct are now being swept aside, giving way to new ways of doing things. In the institution of marriage for instance, issues like tribalism once played a key role in marriage. Even amongst people of the same tribe, segregation still existed. For example, amongst the Onicha people, the osu caste system played a huge role in marriage. This system is a traditional practice where people who fall under the osu class (dedicated to a deity) are



regarded as untouchables. They are not allowed to socialize nor intermarry with people from the wider society. They are only allowed to marry within their class. However, even though it may not be very pronounced today, its vestiges still remain. The intrusion of globalization has dismembered marriage institution in Onicha. Parents rarely play that role of choosing a wife or husband for their son or daughter because they are told that to do so is anti-civilization. Many of them no longer carry out proper investigations to determine the status of who their son or daughter is to marry as they (intending couples) are now allowed to choose for themselves. This has created a lot of problems in most marriages in Onicha society. Problems like divorce, abortion and infidelity in marriages arose because, families no longer care who their daughter or son marries and the tradition that undergirds the marriage institution in Igbo society has been abandoned because of westernization. As it is in the Western world, there is courtship which gives room for immorality. Many young women now get pregnant for their would-be husbands before they wed. Church or Christian marriage is fast taking over from traditional marriage. Couples are issued with marriage certificates after wedding which has no place traditional marriage. Monogamy is fast substituting polygamy and virtually all the aspects of Igbo traditional marriage is caving in to the western system of marriage. These days in some communities in Onicha, church wedding precedes traditional marriage. That means the celebration of traditional marriage now takes place after the church wedding has been concluded and not the other way round. Traditional Marriage institution is abused because most young men and women now cohabit and even produce children without recourse to proper traditional marriage. These trends seem to have been accepted in Onicha and it is fast gaining ground because of globalization.

Eze (2019) submitted that in the past, the parents of the two parties played significant roles in the marriage of their sons and daughters. They were the ones who chose a wife for their son or a husband for their daughter. The two families usually carried out necessary investigations to ensure that their son or daughter married from a good family. This equally served as a substitute to courtship which was not allowed in order to prevent immorality. This way, they prevented their son or daughter from marrying an *osu* or from a family with criminal records or genetic diseases. However, there have been some changes in the nature and degree of discrimination against the *osu* in the traditional Igbo society. In as much as there are pockets of discrimination, the *osu* now get married and mix freely with the freeborn in some communities in Igbo society. Eze (2019) further observed that these days, in some communities, church wedding precedes traditional marriage. In a place like Isu community in Onicha Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, most traditional marriage ceremonies now take place after church wedding. Thus, in Onicha subculture area, when a man finds a woman he intends to marry, he approaches her and solicits for her consent. If she accepts, he goes back to his parents and informs them that he has seen a woman he intends to marry. Kayode (1984) added that, oracles are consulted before a marriage is contracted and sacrifices made when necessary or in some cases, marriages are dropped in accordance with oracular pronouncements. Parental blessing is considered important to a fruitful union (p.36). Thus, the process to tie the nuptial knot according to the custom and tradition of the community begins, first with the consent of the bride and groom and then the consent of their families. Consent in this case is of utmost importance because no valid marriage under the customs and tradition of the people can take place without the absolute consent of all the parties involved. So, consent is to marriage what the bottom of the bucket is to the bucket. The Onicha subculture area in the present Ebonyi State is made up of Isu, Onicha, Oshiri,



Abaomege and Ukawu. These communities share similar cultural and traditional practices in the Ebonyi South Zone, Nigeria.

### **Igbanju Nwanyi (Introduction or Inquiry)**

In his position on marriage, Mkpa (2001) stated that in southern part of the country especially among the Igbo, the adult members of a man's family have the responsibility to initiate and conclude traditional marriages with the bride's family. In the course of the arrangement, drinks feature prominently as an instrument to consummate the betrothal. The girl has the opportunity to select the husband of her choice among numerous suitors, although parents are often a strong factor in the decision-making. Marriage in Onicha also follows the same structure. The first stage towards the actualization of a matrimonial union in Onicha is what they call "*Igbanju*" or "*Ikuakan'uzo*" (enquiry). Having agreed with the woman he wants to marry; the groom visits the family of the bride in company of his father or his representative and some family members with two gallons of palm wine. The occasion is an informal introduction without fanfare but a cordial atmosphere to know each other. The informal introduction does not require much except two gallons of palm wine. The essence of this rite is to ask whether the woman is free or is already engaged and to seek the consent of her parents and to formally ask for her hand in marriage, if she is free. Apart from the mandatory consent of the bride and the groom, the consent of the parents of the parties to the marriage contract is also important. The parents of the bride would request for time usually a week or two to consider his proposal to their daughter. He (the groom) is asked to come back later for an answer. At the expiration of the time frame, the groom and his entourage visit again. If the parents accept, the bride or intending wife is called out to receive the visitors. She will be informed about their mission by her father or his representative who as this rite demands would formally announce to her that they have come to ask for her hand in marriage. The father or his representative will ask her if she knows the groom and whether she has accepted to marry him or not and whether they should drink the wine or not. She will be given a cup of wine and to express her consent, she takes a sip and urges them to drink. This signifies her acceptance of the marriage proposal. At the same time, the middle man or the mediator or a go-between who may be a member of the family or close relation of the bride will be introduced to the groom and his people. The family of the bride hosts the visitors with some meals. Apart from all round introductions, they might discuss when the event will take place or the visitors will communicate the bride's family when they will visit for the next stage.

### **Oji Onye Esin'okpa (The Middleman's or The Mediator's Kolanut)**

The next stage is the rite of *oji onye esin'okpa*. The materials required for this rite or ritual varies from family to family or from kindred to kindred. The groom or his representative is accompanied by some members of his family on a visit to the family of the bride with a crate of beer, two gallons of palm wine and a cash gift of #10,500. The cash gift might be more or less in some families or kindreds. These gifts are to compensate the mediator for his mediatory role. The major role of "*onye esin'okpa*" (mediator) is to guide or direct the groom and his people so that they do not fumble or make embarrassing mistakes and to ensure that they are not cheated. However, Kanu (2015) added that before the parties make a move to tie the nuptial knot, preliminary investigations are carried out on the girl and her family. Such investigations centre on the incidence of premature death, their status, whether they are *osu* (cult slave) or *diala* (freeborn), the divorce rate in the family, genetic diseases and whether the rules of exogamy are respected etc. When the family of the bride gets a hint of the



groom's intention, they also set up their machinery to ascertain these facts about the family of the groom. These facts are collected through friendly connections and contacts close to both families. If the findings are in the affirmative, it is presumed that the girl and or the boy will behave the same way. Sometimes, the diviner's opinion is sought as to the auspiciousness of the marriage. However, where the findings are in the affirmative, then the whole matchmaking is over and courtship begins. In its institutional aspect, courtship involves all the members of the two families, parents and relations become friendlier and the qualities of the two families are critically observed.

### **Oji Unwunna (The Kolanut of the Kinsmen)**

This aspect of the marriage is very important because the members of the bride's kindred who are the owner of the woman also have to be settled. Thus, the groom or his representative is accompanied by two or three other members of his family to the family of the bride. Items required for this rite, that is, *nrita* or *oji unwunna* are eight (8) gallons of palm wine, one carton of beer, a crate of stout, a crate of malt, one bottle of ground snuff or one thousand naira in lieu of a bottle of snuff and potash, two packets of cigarette (Benson and St moris), one bottle of original seaman schnapps and a cash of #15,000. The cash gift also varies from family to family or from kindred to kindred. These gifts are to be shared among the kinsmen and it symbolizes their approval and creates awareness that their daughter is getting married. This rite also symbolizes the consent of *unwunna* (kinsmen) to the marriage contract.

### **Nbata Uno (To enter the House or the Mother's Entitlement)**

This means to enter the house. Just as in the case of the mediator and the bride's kinsmen, the mothers of the bride or the mother-in-law to be and her kinswomen or *unwuada* have to be properly settled. This rite is to compensate the mother for her role in the upbringing of the bride and also for the loss of her services to the family. To perform this rite, a delegation of four (4) persons from the family of the groom or husband-to-be is sent with some customary gifts to the family of the bride. The items for this ritual are a crate of malt, clothing materials (two pieces of wrapper, two blouses and two head ties) and a pair of foot wears. Others are umbrella, handbag, jewelries, a set of dining plates, one big basin, soap, pomade or cream, one gallon of kerosene and a lantern. She is also entitled to some money. The female members of the bride's family or *unwuada* and other friends invited by the bride's mother are given some money to share. This rite also symbolizes the approval or consent of *unwuada* (kinswomen) to the marriage contract.

### **Ego Isi Nwanyi (Bride wealth)**

There is no fixed amount of money for the bride price, as it is usually dictated by the bride's family and is subject to negotiation. Mkpa (2001) further recalled that the financial cost of marriage varies from place to place. Whereas it is very cheap among some ethnic groups, it is beyond the easy accomplishment by the average Nigerian in some ethnic groups especially in some Igbo communities. As demonstrated by Kanu (2015), to determine the price which the groom will pay for the bride is a protracted business which takes a length of time, no matter when it starts. The Igbo are good at haggling and this art is aptly demonstrated at the marriage settlement. During the bride price, as Kanu (2015) observed, members of the girl's family increase the bride wealth and the family of the husband decreases it. But the



customary bride wealth is known and precedents are not lacking. No haste is shown until all are thoroughly tired. Then the parties to the marriage sit down together to discuss the matter more seriously. When an agreement is finally reached, the husband's party rises and shakes hands with the wife's party. In Onicha, this normally happens on the day of the traditional wedding ceremony. The bride price actually varies from village to village. In some villages, it is more expensive while in some others, it is less expensive. It is the payment and acceptance of this bride wealth by the bride's family that legalizes the union. The groom can now lay claim to the proceeds or products of the union.

### **Igbankwu or Nduta Nwanyi (Celebration of Marriage or Traditional Wedding)**

The next and final stage is the celebration of marriage called *igba nkwu* or *nduta nwanyi*. A marriage celebration is not complete until the bride is led to her husband's home. Finally, the marriage is consummated or accomplished by handing over the bride to the groom in what is known as *idunye nwanyi*. As part of the preparations for this all-important ceremony, the son-in-law (groom) sends a sizeable live goat and two bushels of rice, a tin of groundnut oil, onions etc to his parents-in-law a few days before the ceremony. This is to assist them to feed their guests on the day of the ceremony. For the traditional marriage rite, the groom and his entourage arrive at the home of the bride with the requisite items for the ceremony. As custom demands, they present twenty four (24) gallons of palm wine, one carton of beer (guilder or star), eight (8) sizeable kola nuts, a bottle of seaman aromatic schnapps, one leg of dried meat or one thousand naira (#1000) in lieu of dried meat, eight hundred naira (#800) for tobacco, potash, cigarette and five hundred naira (#500) for the elders. When all the items have been presented and accepted by the parents-in-law or their representatives, the items except the gallons of palm wine and cartons of beer are put in a wooden platter known as *okwa*. Then, the *okwa* with its content is given to the bride who will in turn pass it or hand it over to her father or his representative who in turn offers prayers with it. He pours libation and calls on *obasi bu n'enu* (Supreme God) and *ndi ichia* (the ancestors) to come and bless the marriage. He prays for good health and fruitfulness especially of the womb, so that they (the couple) would bear uncountable children. He also prays for long life, wealth and protection from the gods, so that, they will be able to bring up their children without much pains.

When the prayers are over, the celebration begins. The rite of wine carrying is observed. First, the bride is asked to show them (the witnesses) her husband. She is given a cup of palm wine with which she goes about looking for her man. When she has spotted him, she kneels down and takes a sip and presents the cup of wine to him. He quickly drinks the wine and the two of them return the cup to the eldest member of the family who blesses them. This brief ritual ushers the bride and groom dressed in their native or traditional attire to the dance floor. Others join them as they begin to dance. The people eat, drink and make merry. The ceremony attains its climax when the bride is eventually handed over to an elder who in turn hands her over to the groom in the full glare of the public. But, before she is finally led to her new home, the groom will have to settle her friends who would insist on keeping the bride until they are settled.

As the bride leaves for her matrimonial home, she is also given some gifts known as send forth gifts or dowry by her parents. Kayode (1984) observed that a dowry is believed to be a stabilizing influence on marriage. The quantity and quality of such gifts depend on the ability of her parents. Such gifts could be in form of household items such as utensils of various





kinds and sizes, bicycles, sewing machine, electronic gadgets and even cars. These items are usually displayed outside within the compound for people to see and appreciate. However, this aspect of displaying the items was outlawed in Onicha community because this expensive dowry system has caused a lot of havoc for intending couples. Parents could now give their daughters gifts as dowry unpublished. But recent development in the marriage culture of Onicha people has seen the return of this marriage practice. During festivals, for instance, New Yam Festival, custom demands that the son-in-law (groom) gives some gifts to his parents-in-law. The gifts are normally twelve (12) tubers of yam, four (4) heads of coconut, five hundred naira (#500) and two gallons of palm wine to the father-in-law and a piece of wrapper to the mother-in-law. But all these practices have been phased out as a result of globalization. In marriage, the people of Onicha express their unified view of reality and community consciousness in the way the three segments or compartments of beings interact during the celebration of marriage. First, the officiating priest calls upon *obasi bu n'enu* (*Supreme God*) to come and take part so as to guarantee a successful marriage ceremony, then the *ndi ichia* (ancestors) are also invited to participate and the people who are physically present, that is, the witnesses to the union all unite in the celebration.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Marriage in many Igbo societies including Onicha has become rather expensive as a result of unnecessary duplications. The idea of performing church marriage vis-a-vis traditional marriage is a burden which the Onicha community has foisted on themselves. The people of Onicha should stick to Igbo traditional marriage which is their own identity as church marriage belongs to western culture.
- Since the dowry system is part of Onicha marriage culture, the community should review the system to make it less expensive and quite affordable to indigent parents. Parents do not have to go out of their means to perform this marriage rite for their children.
- The government should also come up with a blueprint on a particular marriage system that should be practiced in Nigeria based on the peculiarities of the culture of each community.
- The celebrants should remember that the huge investment on marriage only amounts to a waste if at the end of the wedding, a couple goes bankrupt.
- Proper and necessary investigations or precautions should be carried out before marriage as in the past so as to eliminate criminality, divorce and other genetic diseases in the society.
- Items required for marriage rites should be reviewed by traditionalists and community leaders to make it less expensive and to encourage persons of marriageable age to marry.

## CONCLUSION

It has been universally accepted that marriage is a lifelong and legitimate union entered into by two persons of the opposite sex for the purpose of procreation. This paper examined the traditional marriage rites in Onicha sub culture area with a view to finding out how marriage



is contracted in Onicha. Marriage in Onicha is highly interesting. It starts with the first move made by a suitor in finding his marriage partner and ends with the marriage ceremony. Like every other part of Igbo land, marriage in Onicha subculture area follows prescribed traditional rites and rituals performed in stages, starting with introduction or inquiry down to the celebration of marriage. The intrusion of western marriage system has not really diminished traditional marriage rites in Onicha, for it is in those traditional marriage rites that marriage is legalized in Onicha society. Even in the church, the officiating ministers have to be sure that traditional marriage rites have been performed before blessing a marriage. It is not a brief one-day affair, but an enduring ritual which binds people, families and communities, turning strangers into friends, kinsmen and kinswomen.

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