

Debunking African Perspectives on Early Marriage on Adolescent Girls. A Case of Cowdray Park in Bulawayo Zimbabwe

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Abstract: The study was carried out with the main objective of finding out the effects of child marriages on the girl child. In a bid to fully understand the impact of these marriages, the research needed to first understand the factors that perpetuated these child marriages. The descriptive survey research design was used to conduct the study. A sample of 25 adolescent girls who were in child marriages was selected through the snowballing to be respondents in the study. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from the adolescent girls. To get a better understanding of what the community thought about these child marriages, 5 community leaders were selected through purposive sampling to be participants of the study. Their views, perceptions and thoughts were collected through a semi-structured interview. The findings of the study from both the questionnaire and the interview data indicated that the major factors that forced girls into early marriages were issues of economic situations, such as poverty in the home, peer pressure, traditional beliefs, the undervaluing of the girl child and also issues of patriarchy. These were found to be the major drivers of child marriages. It was discovered that some of the respondents who took part in the study were less than 13 years old, meaning that girls of this age were married and running home, this is a sad scenario and a cause for concern. The effects of early marriages on the girl child were very profound. The major effects that came out of this study was that young girls were disempowered and deprived of all opportunities in all spheres of their lives, they were also found to have 'lost' their 'freedoms' be they social, emotional and psychological, this was mainly due to gender inequality and the discrepancy in ages between the marriage partners in most cases. It was concluded that the majority of the girls in child marriages were aware of the problems inherent in these marriages.

Keywords: Adolescent, marriage, culture, young girls, early marriage.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life. Sadly, the practice of early marriage gives no such cause for celebration. All too often, the imposition of a marriage partner upon a child means that a girl's childhood is cut short and their fundamental rights are compromised. The Research Advocacy Unit, (2011) notes that there is a minimum marriageable age law in Zimbabwe, under general law of the country which is 16 for girls and 18 for boys but the practice of early marriage continues as customary law, which is also part of the legal system and is followed by any in personal matters, does not have a minimum age for marriage. The practice of early marriage is in conflict with modernization and development in society as it seriously undermines a girl child's opportunities in the future because of lack of education. The study was carried out with the sole purpose of finding out the effects of early marriages on adolescent girls in Cowdray Park suburb.

Background

According to UNICEF, (2007) it is viewed that on a worldwide basis, more than 700 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday. More than one in three (about 250 million) entered into union before age 15. Boys are also married as children, but girls are

disproportionately affected. In Niger, for instance, 77 per cent of women aged 20 to 49 were married before age 18 in contrast to 5 per cent of men in the same age group. Even in countries where child marriage is less common, the same gender differences are found. In the Republic of Moldova, for example, 15 per cent of women aged 20 to 49 were married before age 18 compared to 2 per cent of men. Furthermore, girls are often married to considerably older men. In Mauritania and Nigeria, more than half of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 who are currently married have husbands who are 10 or more years older than they are. Child marriage is a manifestation of gender inequality, reflecting social norms that perpetuate discrimination against girls. Somerset, (2000), UNICEF, (2012) and Singh, (1996) all agree that child marriage among girls is most common in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and the 10 countries with the highest rates are found in these two regions. Niger has the highest overall prevalence of child marriage in the world. However, Bangladesh has the highest rate of marriage involving girls under age 15.

Moreover, South Asia is home to almost half (42 per cent) of all child brides worldwide; India alone accounts for one third of the global total. One third of girls in the developing world are married before the age of 18 and 1 in 9 are married before the age

of 15. UNICEF, (2012) reveals that in 2012, 70 million women 20-24 around the world had been married before the age of 18. If present trends continue, 150 million girls will be married before their 18th birthday over the next decade. That's an average of 15 million girls each year. While countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage are concentrated in Western and SubSaharan Africa, due to population size, the largest number of child brides resides in South Asia. Singh and Samara, (1996) highlight that in SADC, every year 14 million girls are married off before the age of 18 years, Africa, and 15 out of 20 countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage are in Africa. 39% of girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are married before age 18 and 13% by their 15th birthday. Child marriage has numerous, and serious, consequences for the health and protection of girls, such as poorer pregnancy outcomes, higher risk of HIV infection and unsafe abortion, and a higher risk of suffering from domestic and sexual abuse than non-married girls or older married women.

Nevertheless, despite laws in many countries making it illegal for girls to marry prior to reaching 18 years of age, underage marriage continues in numerous countries, due to cultural, social, and religious traditions and economic pressures, including parental consent loopholes, making child, early and forced marriage a difficult issue to tackle. Singh and Samara, (1996) opine that of these 15 countries with the highest rates are in the SADC Region, Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia. For example, Zambia has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world with 42% of women aged 20-24 years married by the age of 18. The rates of child marriage vary from one region to another, and are as high as 60% in the country's Eastern Region. Malawi has over 50% prevalence rate of child marriage, beset with conflicting marriage laws, the practice is driven by poverty and adolescent pregnancy, many families cannot afford to send girls to school or to keep them in school when they fall pregnant. Numerous studies have explained the intense suffering that these girls undergo. Most SADC Member States have formal laws that set the minimum age of marriage at between 18 and 21 years. However, conflicting and myriad laws, which include customary and religious laws have loopholes, which allow parental consent, to reduce the minimum age to as low as 14. Even where legislation is in place, mechanisms for enforcing the law are lacking, early marriages are frequent.

Ensuring protection of children will require harmonising the laws with customs and educating communities on the rights of children and the inherent risks of early marriage and child rearing.

According to the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, (2012) the median age at first marriage in Zimbabwe has been declining from 19 years for women currently aged 45-49 years to 16 years for those aged 15-19 years. Five percent of women aged 15-49 years currently in marriage or union were married before the age 15 (rural 6%, urban 2%). Marriage before age 15 years decreased with education of women and household wealth, and increased with age of woman. On the other hand, 32 percent of the women aged 20-49 years currently in marriage or union were married before age 18 years, (rural areas 39%, and urban areas 21%). Marriage before age 18 years decreased as education and wealth increased. The proportion of women aged 20- 49 years who married before age 18 years was highest in the age group 45-49 years at 40% compared to around 31% in the rest of the age groups. Child marriage remains a serious problem not only in Zimbabwe but the world over. The trend however largely remains widespread in developing countries. Current statistics on early child marriages reveal that each year 14 million girls are married off young while 39 000 girls are married off on a daily basis globally. According to Plan International, Bulawayo has the lowest prevalence rate of 16% when compared to other regions where provinces like Mashonaland Central and Mashonaland East have a prevalence rate of 63 and 56 percent respectively. In Cowdray Park there has been an influx of young girls from rural areas who were forced to drop out of school because of poverty, they have little or no opportunities for achieving much in life and have been forced to get married early.

Theoretical Framework

There are a host of theories on child marriage; these include the Marriage Timing Model, Girls not Brides Theory of change on Child Marriage. The study will be informed by the Theory of Change on ending Child Marriages propounded by the Girls not Brides Institute.

The theory advocates for a world without child marriage where girls and women enjoy equal status with boys and men and are able to achieve their full potential in all aspects of their lives. Girls Not Brides, (2013) has developed a 'Theory of Change on Child Marriage' to articulate what an effective response to child marriage entails. The

Theory of Change outlines the range of approaches needed, demonstrates how they intersect, and aims to provide a basis for identifying common indicators that could be used by diverse practitioners to monitor progress. The Theory of Change has been developed to facilitate greater partnership and collaboration among and across organisations, sectors and levels. It serves as a foundation to build consensus about actions needed to address child marriage and support married girls, in both the long and short-term. In addition, it provides a basis to understand where programming efforts are currently focused, in particular among Girls Not Brides members, and to highlight where further work is needed. In this sense, the Theory of Change offers both a mirror and a target.

The theory of change, (2013) emphasises the need to collectively develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors that determine child marriage and its consequences using a socio ecological framework, and to think of specific strategies and their interrelated outcomes at various levels in the framework that eventually impact child marriage. The purpose of this is not to find a solution to the child marriage problem. Rather, the intent is to bring together various stakeholders concerned with child marriage and to jointly conceptualize a theory of change that should serve as a framework in developing strategies, identifying goals and activities, and possibly developing monitoring and evaluation indicators to ensure that short-term and long-term goals are being met. Crucially, the Theory of Change demonstrates that there is no single solution to ending child marriage and that everyone has a role to play. Ultimately efforts to address child marriage must respond to local contexts and accordingly programmes and investments may take different forms. We hope that this Theory of Change will be a useful framework and tool for both governmental and non-governmental actors to draw from as they

develop their own theories of change to respond to child marriage in their countries. It is intended both for those who are new to the issue, as well as those who work on it through one specific approach to see how their work forms part of a broader effort.

METHODOLOGY

The approach followed in this study is qualitative descriptive research methodology as it enabled the narration and interpretation of nature/extent of the effects of early adolescent girls marriages in Cowdray park. This approach was appropriate to this study as it enabled to establish the nature and even the extent of the effects of early child marriages through studying the context/setting in which people talk and also the voices of the participants as emotions can be observed through peeped voices to show anger which cannot be heard in quantitative descriptive research methodology, (Creswell, 2014). A total of 25 participants took part in the study. A questionnaire and an interview schedule were used to collect data from the adolescent girls and 5 community leaders respectively. The collected data were presented in graphical forms (graphs and pie charts) and in tabular form. Verbatim responses from open-ended questions were captured by themes and qualitatively interpreted to establish the effects that early marriages have on the adolescent girls. Data from the questionnaire were presented first, followed by data from the interview schedule.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Presentation of Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The study sought to provide background information of the respondents by examining their age and educational level. The research asked this question to find out the age distribution of the adolescent girls. The results were captured and summarised in the table below:

Table 1.1: Distribution of the respondents by age -n=25

Age of respondents	Frequency	%
Under 13 years	3	12
13-16 Years	13	52
16-19 Years	3	12
Above 19	6	24
Total	25	100

From the figures in Table 1.1 above, it can be seen that most of the respondents were in the 13- 16 years range. The next highest was 24 %,

representing those who were above 19 years of age. Given the uneven age distribution, this study inferred that the effects of early marriages on

adolescent girls were more represented by those in the 13-16 years range. From the biographical data obtained from the respondents it was noted that in the sample of 25 'child brides' who took part in the current study, there were 3 (12%) who were under 13 years. This according to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a gross violation of human rights by the concerned parties, parents and husband to marry off girls as young as 13 years old. It means these girls have dropped out of school. The result of which will be a miserable life of lost opportunities as espoused by the Mead, (1980) who says early marriage is domesticating girls so early that they do not have a chance for a full intellectual development, they do not have a chance to give their entire time to experiment, to think to sit up all night in strong sessions, to develop as individuals. These under 13 girls must

have attained a primary school education, the researcher wonders what one can do with a primary school education in this highly technological age and given the economic situation prevalent in Zimbabwe, where university graduates are 'push-carts operators', airtime vendors, some even bus conductors, what more of one with a Grade 7 as the highest level of education?

Furthermore, the research posed question regarding levels of education to the respondents to establish their level of education. The assumption being that those with a higher level of education will understand the issues of abuse and unequal levels of decision making better and therefore be able to leave the marriage. The results were summarised in the figure below:

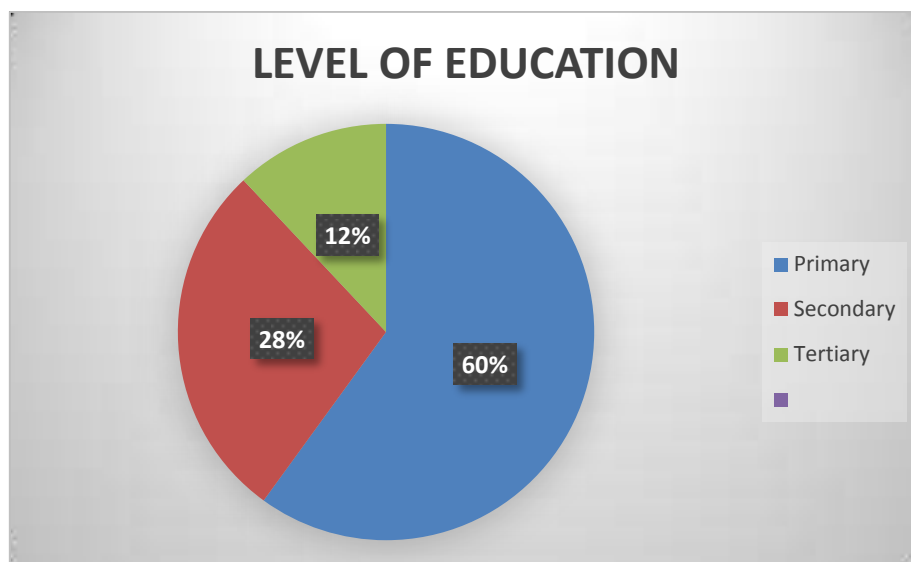


Figure 1.1: Distribution of respondents by their level of education- n =25

The results in Figure 1.1 indicate that of the sample of adolescent girls who took part in the current study, 60% of them have a primary level of education. It was surprising to note that 12% of these girls had a tertiary education, could be a college or university level of education, this was not specified or clarified. It was discovered that apart from the under 13's, there were some whose ages ranged from 13-19 years, these comprised 64% of the sample; most of these maybe the ones with a secondary level of education. Out of the 6 respondents in the over 19 years range, 3 of them (12%) had a tertiary level of education. Tertiary, could be college or university level. The researcher wonders how they got their education, if they were married before 18 years, could they have already acquired the qualification? Most literature says these girls who are married before eighteen years

of age lose lots of opportunities, some of them educational ones. But for this group 12%, seems to ascertain that the assertion does not apply to them. Maybe their husbands sent them to school, therefore they did not lose the educational opportunities.

Presentation of Data Pertaining to Research Question 1

This section of the study sought to find out the factors that led young girls into early marriages. The researcher put across a series of questions to respondents, to which they had to indicate, "Undecided", "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree". For purposes of analysing the response, "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" were aggregated to "Agree". "Strongly

Agree” and “Disagree” were also treated as one, “Disagree”.

The results were summarised in the table below: -

Table 1.2: Factors that contribute to early marriage

Statement	Undecided	Agree	Disagree	Totals
1.Lack of finances pushes girls from low income families into early marriage	4%	68%	28%	100%
2. A young girl might be regarded as a burden, so her family may decide to marry her off	12%	60%	28%	100%
3. Some families may withdraw girl from school to marry them off for the sake of monetary gain	24%	52%	24%	100%
4. Some traditional/religious beliefs strongly encourage early marriages	-	92%	8%	100%

Mean -x =68% - x=22%

The results on the table above indicate that most of the adolescent girls were in agreement with the statements that were put forward by the researcher. For instance, the first statement implied that “lack of finances in the home would force the girl into an early marriage. Sixty-eight (68%) percent of the respondents were in agreement with the statement. Twenty-eight (28%) percent were not in agreement though. This is in contrast with Mathur, (2003) who alleges that lack of money in the home might push low income families into marrying their young adolescent girls off. When a girl is regarded as a burden, she might also be married off by her parents-60% of the statements were in agreement. Those who disagreed with the statement comprised 28% of the sample under study. Twelve (12%) percent of the respondents were undecided on whether to agree or disagree with the statement. The third statement also had to do with money issues, where some parents might withdraw their daughters from school to have them married so as to make money from the transaction.

Girls Not Brides, (2013) agree with this statement when they assert that where poverty is acute, giving a daughter in marriage allows parents to reduce family expenses by ensuring they have one less person to feed, clothe and educate. In communities where a dowry or ‘bride price’ is paid, it is often welcome income for poor families.in this study, it was found that only 52% of the respondents agreed that parents withdrew their children from school to marry them off for money. It was interesting to note that 24% of the respondents could not commit themselves to either agree or disagree with the statement. Another 24% disagreed that some parents withdrew their children from school to marry them off. The researcher wonders if some of the respondents from the current study were withdrawn from school, since there were some who only had a

primary level of education. The fourth item talks about traditional and religious beliefs as some of the factors that might force girls into early marriages. The majority of the respondents, 92% agreed that traditional beliefs (such as “kuripa ngozi, or kuzvarira”) were some of the factors that led to early marriages of young adolescent girls. Looking at the percentage responses of the four items in the table above, it revealed that those who agreed with statements were more than those who disagreed. If all the “agree” responses were summed and their mean calculated, the answer was 68%, whereas the mean for “disagreed” was 22%. We can therefore conclude that the factors raised above cause children to get into early marriages. The 5th item on Research Question 1 was an open-ended question that required the respondents to supply some factors they thought contributed to early marriages of adolescent girls. Since this was an open-ended question, the researcher searched for emerging themes. 68 % of the adolescent girls in child marriages were in agreement with statements such as, ‘lack of finances push girls from low income families into early marriages’, ‘a young girl might be regarded as a burden, so she is married off’, ‘some families withdraw their daughters from school to marry them off for the sake of monetary gains’, and ‘some traditional and religious beliefs strongly encourage early marriages’. All those who agreed with these statements seem to indicate that they were against the child marriages in which they find themselves. 22% of the respondents were in disagreement with all the statements given above, this could indicate their support. For instance, a study by Nasrullah. et al., (2014) on the knowledge and attitude towards child marriage practice among women married as children in Pakistan, found out that some of these women were quite happy, and declared that they saw nothing wrong in child marriages. In the

current study it was seen that poverty and some economic issues were some of the factors that forced girls into early marriages. From the interviews conducted with the community leaders, poverty was also stated as one of the major factors that pushed parents to trade off their daughters, either for money or material gain, this view is supported by UNICEF, (2001) noting that in Sub-Saharan Africa, the bride's family may

receive valued goods from the groom or his family as the bride-price for their daughter. In northern Nigeria, the average age of marriage has fallen since 1990. In many places, economic hardship is encouraging a rise in early marriage, even among some population groups that do not normally practice it.

These themes were summarised in the table below.

Table 1.3: Other factors that force girls into early marriages

Factors	Number of items mentioned
Poverty at home	11
Peer Pressure	08
Traditional beliefs e.g kuzvarira/ngozi	07
Lack of parental guidance	05

The results on Table 1.3 indicate that most of the respondents were of the opinion that one of the factors that push girls into early marriage is the issue of poverty in the home. This seems to be in agreement with Mawere, (2012) when he talks of economic hardships as one of the factors that lead adolescent girls into early marriages. It was noted that peer pressure played a role in causing young girls to 'walk' into early marriages, this was mentioned eight times. The next theme that came up was that of 'Ngozi' where in some cultures, young girls were married off to appease an avenging spirit, if one of the family members committed murder, the family of the deceased will claim a small girl as repayment of the 'sins committed' against the family. This response was mentioned 7 times. Children from child headed families might decide to marry early to run away

from adult responsibilities they are subjected to at home. It can be construed that orphans might be forced to marry early by problems bedevilling them on a daily basis.

Presentation of Data in Relation to Research Question 2

This section of the study addressed the negative effects of early marriages on the adolescent girls. As in the first research questions, the researcher put forward a series of statements to which the respondents had to either "agree or disagree to". There was also a column to indicate their indecision, if they were not able to choose "agree or disagree". The responses from the adolescent girls who took part in the study were summarised in Table 1.4 below.

Table 1.4: Responses addressing Research Question 2

Statement	Undecided	Agree	Disagree	Total
Early marriages result in lack of freedom to interact with peers, participate in community activities, decreased opportunities for education		100%		100%
Child brides are more likely to be victims of domestic violence	16%	64%	20%	100%
Marriage without consent is a major cause of divorce in early marriages	10%	66%	24%	100%
Early marriages have negative health implications	12%	80%	8%	100%

The results of Table 1.4 show that on the average (mean) 77.5% of the respondents agreed with the given statements as opposed to 13% who disagreed with the items as the Table. Interestingly almost 10% (9.5) of the respondents were undecided on three statements. Analysis of the responses by each item reveals that 100% (all respondents) agreed that early marriages result in lack of freedom to interact with peers, participate in community activities and the child brides also face decreased

opportunities for further education. This observation is supported by Lomborg and King, (2008) who report that for adolescent girls, early marriage or an unwanted pregnancy typically curtails schooling. Delaying marriage and childbearing allows them to gain more education and perhaps more earning opportunities, as well as improved health, education, and labour market success for their future children. On the issue of domestic violence, 66 % of the respondents agreed

that child brides are most likely to be exposed to domestic violence. 16 % of the respondents seemed to be “undecided”, where as 24% disagreed that child brides might be exposed to domestic violence. One would then conclude that these 24% might not be experiencing violence in their marriages.

The last item on the Table wanted the young wives to respond to the issue that early marriages have negative health implications on the adolescent girls. 80% of the girls in the current study agree that there were health implications. Of the outstanding 20%, 12 % were undecided and 8% indicated that there were no negative health implications on them. The last question on this section wanted the respondents’ opinion on the effects of early marriages on the child brides. It was yet another open-ended question. The effects observed by the respondents were listed below: -

- Intergenerational marriages were built on unequal powerbases-the wife did not have much decision making power.
- There is a very bleak future, especially were the adolescent is a second or so wife.
- The young girl has no financial independence.
- She might be exposed to a lot of stressful situations, which might be ultimately lead to depression.

- The child bride might lose her ‘freedoms’ in all spheres of life ∅ Lastly, because she might have dropped out of school, she has lost chances of further education.
- Sometimes her social status is compromised.

All these negative effects on the life of the child bride are aptly summed by Mathur, (2003) who laments that early marriage stands in direct conflict with the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To add on, the United Nations, (2007) expresses that it threatens the achievement of the first six goals respectively, eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases.

Presentation of Data in Relation to Research Question 3

The research question was posed to find out what the community, in the case of this study, Cowdray Park Community thought about the issue of early marriages for adolescent girls. As in the earlier sections of this presentation, the research put forward a series of statement items to which the respondents were to react. The results of their responses were captured and quantitatively presented in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5: Responses addressing Research Question 3

Statement	Undecided	Agree	Disagree	Total
Early marriage has a social benefit for a girl from a poor family	28%	20%	52%	100%
In some societies early marriages are a disgrace	4%	84%	12%	100%
Early marriage is a human rights violation	16%	64%	20%	100%
Some religious sects in the community condone early marriages	4%	84%	12%	100%

Calculated means (x) = 63% Agree 24% Disagree

The results on the above indicate the calculated means for “Agree” is 63 %. Whereas that for “Disagree” is 24 %. This indicates that of all the statement items about Cowdray Park Community’s views on early marriages, most respondents were in agreement with the researcher’s given proposition. It is interesting to note that in the first statement item that marrying off a girl from a poor family had “social benefit”, 52% of the respondents disagreed, implying that there was no social benefit, for instance according to Jenson and Thorton, (2003) in African society, as in many cultures around the world, children are a gift and a means for parents to secure their own futures. In traditional African societies, children are to be protected and supported, and assisted to reach their full potential. However, child marriages point to a

different set of values that are robbing children of their future and committing them to a life sentence of misery, poverty and suffering.

Additionally, the majority of respondents were in agreement with the statement that said “Early marriages are a disgrace, and the one that said early marriage is a human rights violation”. This means that the respondents were aware of the negative implications of these early marriages, although these were in the item. 84% of the girls who took part in the current study in the item society (Cowdray Park) there were some religious sects who condoned early marriage of girls. From the respondents’ submission it can be concluded that society does not accept these early marriages, they have negative attitudes towards them, there is

a small percentage (24% of the current study) that might not see anything wrong with early marriages, these disagreed with the statements given. The last question in this section is also open-ended; it required the respondents to provide their own input from their experience in early marriages and their observations. They were required to 'tell' the researcher about their community's views on early marriage. Their contributions were synthesised and then thematically presented in bulletin form below:

- Some sections of their community accept these early marriages.
- Others out rightly condemn these marriages as taboo and a disgrace.
- The government should enforce laws that bar the marriage of children less than 18 years old.
- Some see it as a source of income.
- There are some though who think that a girl who is married off to an older man has a better sense of security than a being married to a young man.

Presentation of Data Collected From 5 Community Leaders in the Suburb of Cowdray Park

The 5 community leaders who were purposively selected for the study were the local councillor, a church minister (minister of religion), a school teacher, the leader of the local group of community care-givers and a gender activist who works with children. All the 5 were selected to take part because of their various areas of expertise in cases involving child marriages. Child marriage is a social issue that in one way or the other affects the residents of Cowdray Park. The researcher therefore thought it prudent to interview the said participants to get their views on the contentious issue of child marriages. For those who had offices, the interviews were conducted at their respective offices; those without offices were visited in their homes by the researcher. Each interview took between 15 to 30 minutes with the researcher recording the interviews using an Ipad and making a few field notes using short hand. This was done to ensure minimal disruption of the interview process. The interview schedule was organised in such a way that each interview question addressed the relevant research question, so as themes emerged, they were tailored to each research question.

Themes Relating to Research Question 1

The research question addressed the factors that predispose young girls into early marriages. 'Girls

not Brides' in a study in India, Pakistan and Africa found basically 5 predominant themes that emerged, namely girls were not valued, poverty, security, peer pressure and patriarchy. In the present study on child marriages in Cowdray Park suburb of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe the researcher found that all these items appeared in the course of the interviews carried out with the 5 community leaders of Cowdray Park Suburb. The researcher noted additional themes that 'Girls and not Brides' had not mentioned, these were marrying off children even before they were born (kuzvarira) and girls being given away as a form of dispute resolution (kuripa ngozi). Each theme was briefly explained below:

Girls are Not Valued

Girls Not Brides, (2013) state that girls are not valued as much as boys. Most of those who were interviewed indicated that were pulled out of school to be married off because society was not very supportive of them. Society undervalues the contributions of young women.

Poverty

The area councillor said that he was aware of a number of families who had faced extreme poverty and to avert that they had to marry off their young daughters. The other participant might have put it differently, but the message was basically the same that poverty was the main driver for child marriages. In agreement with the above the church minister noted, "during the distribution of food aid at the church, I have been alerted of families who married off their young child, withdrew her from school, for the sake of money". This gives credence to the fact that child marriages might be perpetuated by the need to fight poverty. In agreement, Lauro, Giovanna and Greene, (2013) allege that some families marry off their young daughters for economic security. Families might be needing money or some valuable belongings so they exchange their daughters off.

Peer Pressure

It was noted that all the 5 interviewees were unanimous on the issue of peer pressure. Parents and their daughters succumbed to peer pressure, i.e., if the community practice is to marry off their young daughters, why should they be left behind. The school teacher mentioned that she was aware of two girls in her school that had dropped out from school to go and get married due to peer pressure.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is another factor that was a major driver of child marriages. Society is patriarchal, meaning that it is male dominated, decisions that go are male decisions, so fathers do not consult family members, they can decide on their own and therefore 'sell' off their daughters to men far older than their children. Mrs Moyo, the Gender Activist was very vehement on this practice. She was aware of the patriarchal nature of the community, and vowed to fight against this practice. The researcher thought this participant was pursuing a feminist agenda.

Kuzvarira and Kuripa Ngozi

This is a traditional practice that marries off a girl child when she is still young or even when still unborn. Girls not Brides has not captured this practice in their studies. It is a practice common in some sections of Zimbabwean society. So on interviewing the 5 eminent persons of Cowdary Park, one or two were not aware of the practice. Kuripa ngozi is another factor that seems well known in Zimbabwean context. This is a practice where girls are given away as a form of conflict resolution, especially to appease a vengeful spirit. As with the earlier submission, some of the participants were not quite conversant with this practice.

Interview Data Relating to Research Question 2 The Effects of Early Marriage on the Young Brides

The major theme that emerged from this section of the interview was that of disempowerment. What came out of the participants was that the young 'brides' lacked opportunities for self-advancement, they were deprived of their fundamental rights to health and education. They were exposed to HIV/AIDS due to lack of decision making in sexual issues, child marriages enforce gender inequalities. The participants here were of one accord in that by being married early, the young girls were deprived of a variety of 'freedoms' and opportunities, such as economic opportunities. One of the participants brought up the issue of maternal morbidity and mortality as a consequence of child marriages.

Violation of Human Rights

This was raised by all the participants who were interviewed. The Councillor, the teacher, minister of religion and the Gender Activist were all aware of the issue of human rights. The leader of the local care-givers was not well versed on these issues but was aware to a certain extent that one's

rights were being violated by being married off young. It was agreed that the girls 'freedoms' were curtailed by being tied down to men who were (in most cases) twice their age. Health wise, the 'child brides' lack the power to negotiate for safer sex practices due to gender inequality and the age variance, where the man 'calls all the shots'. Issues of HIV/AIDS surfaced here.

The Issue of 'Lost Freedoms' For the Girl Might Expose Her to Domestic Violence and All Form of Abuse

In agreement with these submissions, Michelle Bachelet, M.D, Executive Director of UN Women says "no girl should be robbed of her childhood, her education and health and her aspirations. Yet today millions of girls are denied their rights each year when they are married as child brides. In summary child marriage is increasingly recognised as a violation of the rights of the girl child for the following reasons:-

1. Effectively ending their education and future prospects.
2. Blocking any opportunity to gain vocational and life skills.
3. Exposing them to risks of early pregnancy, child bearing and motherhood before they are physically and psychologically ready.
4. Exposing them to sexual violence and HIV/AIDS.

Interview Data in Relation to Research Question 3 Society's Perceptions and Attitudes towards Early Marriage

This section of the study presented data that were collected with respect to the attitudes of society towards child marriages. The 5 people who were interviewed categorically spelt it out in their opinions that child marriages should never be condoned or encouraged. From the responses of the 5 participants to the interview, their views were summarised below:

- Society's attitude was that child marriages were a taboo.
- Child marriages have negative outcomes, these negatively affected social relations.
- Girls should be given a chance to make their own choices 'Educating a daughter means educating the whole family'.
- Society sees these marriages as evil, so there should be advocacy against them, support groups, the church, civil society and the

community at large should take a stand against these social evil.

- The interviewees said that it was unfortunate that while the majority members of society were against child marriages, there was a small section of the residents of Cowdary Park who were supportive of child marriages, that is why there are girls who are in such child marriages in the community.

The attitude of the community is that child marriages are a human rights violation. This statement is supported by UNICEF, (2006) in a report that states that child marriage is a violation of human rights whether it happens to a girl or a boy, but it represents perhaps the most prevalent form of sexual abuse and exploitation of girls. The harmful consequences include separation from family and friends, lack of freedom to interact with peers and participate in community activities, and decreased opportunities for education. Child marriage can also result in bonded labour or enslavement, commercial sexual exploitation and violence against the victims. The rights of the young girls are violated if she is sent into an early marriage, she has no way of fighting her parents and society that is why she might end up committing suicide because she may feel hopeless and helpless. 64% of the Cowdary Park girls agreed that these marriages were a human rights violation, meaning that although they are in such marriages, they are now aware that their rights were violated. The same sentiments were echoed by the 5 interviewees. Interestingly, 20% of the respondents were not in agreement, they did not seem to agree that these marriages were a human rights violation. They might not have understood implications of the question or seriously thought this was not a violation of human rights. This gives credence to Nasrulah. et al., (2014) assertion that subjects when asked about their rights, the women claimed they were quite happy, 'the majority of the women married as children (13 out of 19) were satisfied and felt that their parents made the right decision of marrying them off prior to 18 years of age'. Such an attitude by the girl brides will see no violation against her. Maybe the 20% in the current study have the same perception.

Moreover, Hanzi, (2006) states that, in Zimbabwe child marriages are prevalent among the Johanne Marange Apostolic sect. This is a church commonly known as 'vapostori' that is believed to constitute approximately 1.2 million members in the country. It was interesting to note that 12% of the respondents did not agree that there were

religious sects that condoned child marriages, the researcher can only assume that they maybe this was a defence mechanism.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings that were subject of discussion in this article, the research concluded that child marriages have negative impacts on the life girls in cowdray park in Zimbabwe. Since some of the marriages involve girls who are less than 13 years old. Nevertheless, most of the girls are aware of the negative and damaging outcomes of these marriages. However, there are some (few though) who saw no wrong in being in a child marriage and most of the child brides were school drop outs, who have been deprived and disempowered of opportunities for self-advancement. The cowdray park community just like other modern communities condone early marriage of adolescent girls.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

- There should be concerted efforts to enforce legislation so no girls are married before attainment of 18 years of age.
- A more rigorous enforcement of existing laws and policies is required to discourage early marriage. Allow anonymous reporting, work with the police and others; make it clear that early marriage is a major violation of the rights of children.
- Urgent need to re-align Zimbabwe criminal law with the January 2016 Constitutional ruling that outlawed child marriages.
- There is need to harmonize marriage laws in order to make it easy to prosecute offenders. The new constitution defines children as persons below the age of 18 years. However, the customary act is silent about marriage issues and this makes it difficult to handle child marriages. In addition, children should be issued with birth certificates as this will assist in the prosecution of offenders.
- There should be a provision of equal access to quality primary and secondary education for both girls and boys.
- Girls, boys, parents and leaders should be mobilised to change practices that discriminate against girls, civil, social and economic opportunities for girls should be created.
- Girls who are already married must be provided with options for schooling, employment and livelihood skills, sexual reproductive health information and services

and offering recourse from violence in the home.

- Efforts must be made to convince community leaders of the importance of girl's education by stressing its positive impact at the household level especially on the well-being of mothers, children, and the family.
- Root causes of child marriages need to be addressed, these include poverty, gender inequality and discrimination, the low value placed on girls and violence against girls.
- The study findings indicate that cultural and traditional values and norms are important determinants of early marriage. As child marriage is a tradition that has been maintained through generations, sometimes parents may be unaware of the dangers, or may feel that the dangers are justified for cultural or economic reasons. Even where parents and children understand the negative implications of early marriage, societal pressure to conform may be great. Therefore, traditions promoting early marriage need to be challenged.
- These elements of communities that oppose early marriage, such as women's organizations, need support to ensure that they have the capacity to act effectively as advocates against it. Work jointly with religious, health, and educational leaders to develop an information and education strategy about the negative effects (social, economically, health, etc.) of early marriage.
- The adolescent girls, families, communities, institutions and policy makers should strategies and come up with measures to curtail child marriages.
- Suggestion for further studies, research on early marriages as a social issue could also be investigated.

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