



CAUSES OF EARLY MARRIAGES IN RURAL AREAS. A CASE STUDY OF NCHELENGE DISTRICT

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Abstract- Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of sustainable national development. In rural Zambia, particularly Nchelenge District, accessing quality education is fraught with challenges. This study uses a mixed-methods approach combining surveys, interviews, and document analysis to identify core barriers including poverty, infrastructure deficits, geographical isolation, and limited community participation. Findings call for holistic, context-sensitive interventions to enhance educational outcomes. Child marriage, defined as the union of individuals under 18, represents a profound violation of human rights and severely hinders educational opportunities for young women. This practice is particularly prevalent in impoverished households and is linked to poverty and low economic development, with cultural norms in rural Zambia further perpetuating it.

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data through a cross-sectional design in Nchelenge, Luapula Province, with a sample of 102 participants, including 100 randomly selected respondents and 2 purposively selected key informants. Data were collected via self-administered questionnaires for participants and an interview guide for key informants, with quantitative analysis conducted using SPSS version 16.0 and qualitative data analyzed manually.

Findings highlight the negative impact of early marriage on youth in rural areas and suggest strategies for mitigation. The study calls for coordinated efforts among stakeholders, particularly emphasizing the Ministry of Community and Child Development's role in enforcing measures against child marriage.

Keywords- Child marriage, educational attainment, rural communities, Zambia, youth empowerment.

I. Introduction

Background of the Study

- Child marriage remains a critical issue in rural Zambia, defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a union involving individuals under 18. This practice disrupts the transition from adolescence to adulthood for girls, compromising their rights and leading to adverse health and developmental outcomes. Historically prevalent, early marriage has seen increasing scrutiny, yet continues, especially in rural Zambia, exacerbated by cultural norms and economic pressures. Reports indicate that two out of five girls globally marry



before 18, with Zambia experiencing a 42% prevalence rate according to the Zambia Demographic and Health Survey. Despite legal prohibitions, customs surrounding early marriage persist, driven by poverty, bride wealth considerations, and traditional practices. The Zambian government has begun prioritizing initiatives to combat early marriages, engaging local communities and traditional leaders to implement effective strategies.

Statement of the Problem

- The rise of early marriage in Zambia, particularly in rural areas, poses significant challenges to education and health, with girls being disproportionately affected. While boys are also impacted, statistics reveal higher educational dropout rates among girls. The situation is concerning in regions like Nchelenge, where economic hardship leads families to marry off daughters before they reach adulthood.

General Objective

- The study aims to investigate the causes of early marriages in rural areas, particularly in Nchelenge.

Specific Objectives

- To assess community perceptions of early marriages in Nchelenge.
- To identify challenges faced by early marriage victims in Nchelenge.
- To evaluate governmental measures implemented against early marriages in the region.

Research Questions

- What are the community perceptions regarding early marriages in Nchelenge?
- What challenges do young girls facing early marriages encounter?
- What actions has the Zambian government taken to combat early marriages in the area?

Significance of the Study

- This study seeks to uncover the underlying causes of early marriage in rural Zambia, linking the issue to higher school dropout rates and adverse living conditions. Findings aim to inform policy interventions and contribute to academic literature, aiding stakeholders and communities in addressing these critical issues.

Formulation of Hypothesis

- Early marriages in rural Zambia result from interrelated factors, including social and cultural influences, poverty, limited educational opportunities, and entrenched gender norms.



Scope of the Study

- Focusing on Nchelenge in Luapula Province, the study examines the rural context surrounding early marriages, emphasizing cultural factors while excluding urban influences.

Delimitation of the Study

The scope of this research is limited to rural areas and contemporary influences on early marriages, intentionally excluding historical perspectives and focusing primarily on the experiences of girls and young women.

Definition of Terms

- **Early Marriage:** Union involving individuals under the age of 18.
- **Bride Wealth:** Exchange of property or money to the bride's family.
- **Poverty: State of lacking essential resources for basic needs.**

Theoretical Framework

- This study employs radical feminist theory to analyze the patriarchal structures underpinning early marriage in rural Zambia, contributing to female subordination and limited educational opportunities for girls.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews key literature relevant to early marriage, organized into sections such as Age at Marriage, Marriage and Culture, Awareness of Child Marriage Effects, Poverty and Economic Transactions, Denial of Education, and Characteristics of People Involved in Child Marriage.

Age at Marriage

- The age at which individuals marry influences their educational and social prospects, with early marriage correlating to increased fertility complications.

Marriage and Culture

- Cultural attitudes can perpetuate child marriage, as societal norms often place girls in subordinate roles, leading families to prioritize early marriages.

Awareness of Child Marriage Effects

- Lack of awareness regarding the detrimental impacts of child marriage limits community capacity to address the issue effectively.

Poverty and Economic Transactions

- Economic hardship often drives families to marry off daughters as a financial strategy, underpinning the transactional nature of early marriages.



Denial of Education

Early marriage frequently obstructs girls' access to education, negatively impacting their long-term potential and societal contributions.

Characteristics of People Involved in Child Marriage

- Child marriage predominantly affects girls, driven by socio-economic dynamics and cultural pressures.

Research Questionnaire

- The questionnaire aims to assess perceptions, knowledge, and experiences related to early marriage in Zambia, contributing valuable data to support the research objectives.

Study Design

- Utilizing a cross-sectional design, data were collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Sample Size and Technique

- The study engaged 100 randomly selected respondents and two key informants, employing purposive sampling for relevant insights.

Instruments of Data Collection

- Data collection involved using questionnaires for respondents and interview guides for key informants, enabling both qualitative and quantitative insights.

Data Analysis Tools

- Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 16.0, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis for thematic insights.

Limitations of the Study

- Logistical challenges, including budget constraints and transport difficulties, impacted data collection and access, while some participants expressed reluctance to engage.

Ethical Considerations

- The study emphasized participant confidentiality, informed consent, and the avoidance of harm, maintaining integrity throughout the research process.

This comprehensive exploration of early marriages in rural Zambia aims to illuminate the issue's complexities and foster informed interventions aimed at reducing the practice, ultimately encouraging a shift in societal attitudes and policies.



IV. DISCUSSION AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter discusses and presents the key findings from the study on early marriage in Nchelenge, Luapula Province, focusing on demographic characteristics and critical data insights obtained from respondents.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study involved 100 respondents, of whom 63 were female and 37 male, highlighting a predominance of female participants. The age distribution showed that the majority (39%) were aged 21-26, with a significant number marrying under 18 years. All respondents were mostly Zambian, with the Bwile tribe being the largest group. Christianity was the predominant religion. Most respondents were married (74%), and a substantial number married post-18 years, indicating over half married before or during teenage years. Financial problems and family influence were the primary reasons for early marriage.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis underscores that early marriage predominantly affects girls, who often face economic pressures and cultural norms that prioritize marriage over education. A considerable number of respondents indicated a desire to pursue education if not for early marriage, emphasizing its adverse impact on educational attainment. While awareness of early marriage is high, cultural and familial pressures often override individual choices. The normalization of early marriage in the community suggests a need for community-based interventions tailored to address challenges and attitudes towards early marriage.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the key conclusions drawn from the study's findings and offers recommendations for addressing issues surrounding early marriage in Zambia.

Conclusions

The findings affirm that early marriage is a substantial challenge for young girls in rural Zambia, shaped by entrenched cultural and economic factors. Inequalities prevail, leaving girls with limited agency in marital decisions. Effective government interventions and awareness programs are essential to combat this issue and its consequences, including gender-based violence and emotional distress. A multi-faceted and context-specific approach is necessary to dismantle the drivers of early marriage and offer viable alternatives to young girls.

Recommendations

1. Government Policy Initiatives: Recommend implementing clear policy measures at local and national levels to combat early marriage.



2. Long-Term Community Engagement: Suggest consistent interaction with rural communities to change attitudes and behaviors towards early marriage.
3. Utilization of Media: Advocate for media campaigns to raise awareness about the negative impacts of early marriage.
4. Education and Economic Empowerment Programs: Promote programs that enhance girls' access to education and financial opportunities to delay marriage.
5. Policy Enforcement Against Child Marriage: Encourage strict enforcement of laws prohibiting marriage before the age of 18.
6. Financial Support Schemes: Propose establishing financial assistance for economically disadvantaged girls to support their education.
7. Engagement of Community Stakeholders: Involve local actors in awareness efforts, providing them with training and resources.
8. Cultural Practices: Call for the reassessment of cultural practices that promote early marriage.
9. Integrated Intervention Strategies: Encourage concurrent implementation of interventions to maximize effectiveness.
10. Law Enforcement: Strengthen legal consequences for early marriage offenders to deter the practice.
11. Education Curriculum Guidelines: Advocate for age-appropriate reproductive health topics for younger students.

These recommendations aim to foster a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach to combat early marriage, prioritizing education and community involvement as pivotal strategies for lasting change.