



Factors Attracting Early Marriages among Adolescents in Learning Institutions: A Case Study of Three Selected Day Public Secondary Schools In Kasama District, Northern Province, Zambia

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Abstract- This study investigated the social, cultural, and economic factors contributing to early marriages among adolescents in three selected public day secondary schools (Lua Luo , Milenge, and Mubanga Chipoya) in Kasama District, Northern Province, Zambia.

Keywords: CRC : Children’s Rights Commission, DEBS :District Education Board Secretar, EENET : Enabling Education Network, FAWEZA: Forum for African Women Educationalist in Zambia, MDG: Millennium Development Goals, MOCTA: Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, PEO: Principle education office, UN: United Nations, UNIFPA: United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF: United Nations International Children’s fund, USAID : United States Agency for International development , WHO: World Health Organization, ZDHS: Zambian Demographic Health Survey

I. Introduction

Marriage is a key social institution, but when it occurs before age 18—especially for girls—it violates children's rights to childhood, education, health, and self-determination. Early marriage remains widespread globally, particularly among poor girls. In Zambia, it is most prevalent in rural areas but receives little policy attention. Girls married early face severe psychosocial, health, educational, and freedom-related consequences, perpetuating cycles of poverty. This study investigated the factors driving early marriage among adolescents in three public day secondary schools in Kasama District, Zambia (Lualua, Milenge, and Mubanga Chipoya), aiming to examine social, cultural, and economic contributors and develop evidence-based recommendations.

Background

Early marriage before age 18 is a widespread reality, especially for girls in poor socioeconomic situations in rural Zambia. Parents often marry off young daughters for financial and social relief, but this violates children's rights to childhood, education, health, and self-determination. The consequences include denial of psychosocial wellbeing, reproductive health issues, and lost educational opportunities, affecting families and society at large.

II. Statement of the Problem

Despite its profound impact, child marriage in Zambia receives limited attention. Many girls aged 14–15 are forced into marriage by parents or relatives, particularly in rural



areas. This study therefore investigates contributing factors at Lualua, Milenge, and Mubanga Chipoya day secondary schools in Kasama district, Northern Province.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose is to critically examine major factors behind early marriages in rural Zambia, establish ways to minimize the practice, and unveil key contributors.

Objectives: Determine various factors contributing to child marriages; examine social, cultural, and economic factors; analyse the role of tradition and culture; and suggest recommendations to reduce these factors.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in this research:

- What are the underlying factors contributing to early marriages in Kasama villages?
- What roles of traditional and cultural factors contribute to early marriages in Kasama villages?
- What roles of Socio-Demographic factors contribute to early marriages in Kasama villages?
- What are the social, cultural and economic factors contribute to early marriages in Kasama district.

II. Literature Review

1. Defining Child Marriage

Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) defines a child as "every human being below the age of 18 years." The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) adopts identical language. Early marriage thus constitutes marriage of children and adolescents below age 18, often without valid consent rendering it effectively forced marriage.

2. Drivers of Early Marriage

Research indicates that child marriage is legitimized by patriarchal family structures ensuring marriage transfers a father's authority over his daughter to her future spouse (Barnes et al., 1998). In many contexts, child marriage consolidates power relations between families, seals property deals, or settles disputes. Social pressure on families to conform is immense; non-conformity invites ridicule, disapproval, or family shame. Poverty emerges as a primary driver, with dowry pressures and parental concerns about pre-marital pregnancy accelerating marriage timing. According to the Population Council's analysis of UN data, girls married before age 18 demonstrate low educational attainment, earning power, and social mobility. In some settings, married girls show higher HIV infection rates than their sexually active unmarried peers due to frequent unprotected sex with older, more sexually experienced partners.

3. Consequences of Early Marriage

Marriage marks for many girls the beginning of frequent, unprotected sexual activity and increased social isolation as they leave natal villages. First-time mothers younger than 16 face elevated maternal and infant mortality risks. Married girls demonstrate less



household decision-making power, reduced mobility, limited media exposure, and constrained social networks compared to unmarried peers. Analysis of DHS data from nine countries found young age at marriage significantly increased domestic violence risk in Egypt, Haiti, India, and Nicaragua.

4. Protective Factors

Education emerges as the most significant protective factor. Assuring girls' school attendance even when not age-appropriate delays marriage, delays sexual debut, and increases contraceptive use. Successful programs in Bangladesh and Mexico improved schooling outcomes for girls through economic incentives. Community-based interventions in Nepal changed traditional attitudes by improving opportunities for unmarried girls.

III. Methodology

1. Research Design

The study employed a survey approach utilizing predominantly qualitative methods with quantitative elements for empirical substantiation. The design was highly descriptive, appropriate for the complex social phenomena under investigation.

2. Study Site

Research was conducted in Kasama village along the main Kasama-Mbala road in Kasama District, Northern Province, Zambia. The district borders Mungwi, Mporokoso, Luwingu, Lupososhi, and Mbala districts, with fertile land and rivers providing fishing livelihoods.

3. Population and Sample

The target population comprised 400 individuals across the three schools and surrounding communities. The sample of 50 respondents included:

- 21 pupils
- 3 guidance and counseling teachers
- 3 school administrators
- 3 deputy heads
- 5 senior civil society officials
- 10 parents
- 5 early marriage victims

4. Sampling Techniques

Cluster sampling identified target schools (Lualua, Milenge, Mubanga Chipoya). Purposive sampling selected specific respondent categories. Simple random sampling selected the 50 final respondents from the 400-person target population.

5. Data Collection Instruments

Instruments included two interview schedules and three questionnaires featuring opinion-type questions, five-point Likert scales, and ranking scales. Questions addressed demographics, perceptions of educational goals, attitudes toward early marriage, and perceived obstacles to career options for married adolescents.



6. Data Analysis

Data were manually analyzed through editing, coding, and transcription using extended worksheets. Analysis focused on socio-demographic and explanatory variables including sex, age group, marital status, and education level. Findings were presented using tables, charts, and graphs with descriptive elaboration.

IV. Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents findings on factors contributing to early marriages at Lualaba, Milenge, and Mubanga Chipoya day secondary schools and nearby villages.

Factors Contributing to Early Marriages

Contrary to some scholars (e.g., Zyede 2010), the study found that lack of parents had little impact on early marriages. At Lualaba and Milenge, 54% of respondents had both parents alive when starting school, 38% grown single-parent families, and only 8% had no parents. Girls living with parents were still heavily involved in early marriages.

Educational Attainment of Parents

Most parents had very little education, contributing significantly to early marriages due to lack of role models and low value placed on education. Only 6% of fathers had secondary education, while 0% of mothers reached secondary level. These findings confirm studies by Mwansa (1995) and Kelly (1984) that children of uneducated parents tend to remain uneducated.

Educational Attainment of Respondents

Among adolescent mothers surveyed: 40% had only lower primary education, 26% upper primary, 20% no education, 10% junior secondary, and only 4% senior secondary. None attended college/university. Early marriage severely diminishes educational opportunities.

Reasons for Low Educational Attainment

Distance to school (44%) and early marriage (42%) were the primary reasons for dropping out. Girls walking 4-8 km daily arrived tired, performed poorly, and became discouraged. Teachers (86%) confirmed distance contributes to low completion rates. Pregnancy, arranged marriages, and lack of school fees (4%) were additional factors.

Age at First Marriage

Fifty-six percent of girls married at age 16 or below (legal age in Zambia is 21). Thirty percent married between 17-20 years, and only 12% at 21-25 years. These figures align with national census data showing 52% of Zambian women marry between 15-19 years.

Role of Tradition and Culture

Eighty percent of marriages were arranged by parents, often motivated by *icuma/lobola* (bride price). Virginity commands higher payments, making early marriage economically advantageous for parents. All 50 respondents underwent initiation ceremonies, which influenced sexual debut. While some women disagreed



with ritual/sexual cleansing, they were forced into it. Arranged marriages cause girls to lose interest in school.

Recommendations

Education Sector Intervention

- Build more rural schools to reduce travel distances.
- Strengthen re-entry policies to prevent dropout repetition for pregnant girls.
- Extend compulsory education to keep girls out of marriage longer.
- Deploy female teachers to rural areas and promote them as role models.
- Provide recreation facilities as constructive leisure alternatives.
- Engage chiefs, headmen, councillors, and MPs to sensitize girls on valuing education over early marriage.
- Discourage parental messaging that conditions girls to believe their place is only in the kitchen.

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