

Voices In Dilemma: A Study Into Factors That Contribute To Girl Child Marriages In Mbare Suburb Of Harare, Zimbabwe

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Abstract : This study sought to discover the factors that contribute to girl child marriages in the Mbare suburb of Harare. The qualitative research design was used to conduct the study with 18 women who got married when they were girl children. The women were selected using Purposive Sampling method. Semi structured interviews were used for data collection. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. It emerged from the study that all the women were married to older, rich men and that the majority of them came from poor family backgrounds. The majority had consensual sexual relationships with their boyfriends who would give them material gifts. They were then forced to marry by their caregivers. The study also revealed that most of the children had to drop out of school because of marriage and that they suffered different forms of abuse. The aspiration of this paper is that, future research should focus on the psychological effects of girl child marriages in Mbare.

Keywords : Abuse, Adolescences, Child marriages, Girl child, Marriage

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I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a social institution that unites people in a special form of mutual dependence for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2014). As a social practice entered into through a public act, religious or traditional ceremony, it reflects the purposes, character, and customs of the society in which it is found. Many societies have norms that limit the age of young girls to enter into marriage, but in some cases the age limit does not take into consideration their physiological readiness for childbearing. Marriage often takes place at ages much earlier than the legally ratified minimum age United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2012). Early marriage is the marriage of children and adolescents below the age of 18 (Nguyen & Wodon, 2015).

According to the International Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2013), the practice of early marriage is most common in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In specific parts of West Africa, East Africa and South Asia, marriage before puberty is not unusual. In North Africa, the Middle East, and other parts of Asia marriage shortly after puberty is common among those living traditional lifestyles. Marriages of female adolescents between sixteen and eighteen years of age are also common in parts of Latin America and Eastern Europe (Sanchez, 2015).

Among those marrying early, some are forced into this union, others are simply too young to make an informed decision. In most cases, the child does not have the opportunity to exercise her right to choose. Early marriages are also referred to as forced marriages. In its most extreme form, forced marriages are the result of abductions (Raj et al., 2011).

Throughout the developing world, millions of girls are married while they are still children (UNICEF, 2014). The practice of child marriage spans diverse cultures, and each child bride has her own unique story. However, those who suffer its indignities, share a common thread that transcends circumstances, culture and continents.

In Ethiopia, abduction and forced marriages were widely practiced in rural areas until they were outlawed in 2004 (Sanchez, 2015). South Africa has a liberal constitution and many laws protecting child marriages, but the traditional practice of "ukuthwala" often supersedes modern laws (Sanchez, 2015).

Carla Mendonca, a UNICEF child protection specialist in Mozambique commented that Mozambique has no laws preventing child marriages and the existing child protection laws are full of loopholes. He said that if those in power in a community decide to marry a girl off in a traditional ceremony, with or without her consent, lawmakers cannot intervene (Sanchez, 2015).

In Zimbabwe, it is estimated that 31% of girls are married before their 18th birthday. Child marriages predominantly affect girls who live in poverty and mostly in rural areas. This is also influenced by the discriminatory laws against girls. For example, the Marriages Act allows 16 year old girls to marry whilst the

minimum age for boys is 18 years. The Customary Marriages Act does not specify a minimum age of marriage which has led to having 12 year old girls being married off to older men (Mavhinga, 2015).

In a 2014 survey by Zimbabwe's National Statistics Agency, one in three women aged 20 to 49 years married before age 18, an estimated 4 percent married before the age 15. Since most child marriages are unregistered customary law unions, the survey is the best indicator of the scale of the problem in Zimbabwe (Mavhinga, 2015).

A study carried out by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) in 2014 revealed that Zimbabwe along with Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Mali, Nigeria, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Niger and Chad had the highest prevalence of child marriages (UNICEF, 2015).

According to a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report (2015), Zimbabwe ranks among the top ten on the continent. The prevalence of child marriage indicates that Mashonaland Central leads with Fifty percent, followed by Mashonaland West, Forty-Two percent, Masvingo-Thirty-Nine percent, Mashonaland East- Thirty-Six percent, Midlands- Thirty-One percent, Manicaland- Thirty percent, Matebeleland North-Twenty-Seven percent, Harare- Nineteen percent, Matebeleland South-Eighteen percent while Bulawayo has the least prevalence with about Ten percent.

In another study carried out by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in (2012), Zimbabwe's prevalence of child marriage was at Thirty-One percent and was among Forty-One nations with the highest rates of child marriages and sits at number Thirty-Nine in the world.

These findings come amid fears that if child marriages are not curbed through legislative measures, the figures could escalate with girls continuing to be deprived of their childhood. It is also important to note that Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe with a high literacy level is contributing Nineteen percent of the national statistics in child marriages

II. METHODOLOGY

The Qualitative Research approach was adopted in this study in line with the objectives of the study which included: the identification of men who marry girl children in the Mbare Suburb of Harare. It was also exploration of factors that contribute to girl child marriages, describing the effects of child marriages on the girl child as well as to suggest strategies for reducing child marriages in the Mbare suburb of Harare. It is an exploration of what is assumed to be a dynamic reality and it does not claim that what is discovered in the process is universal, and thus replicable. Purposive sampling was used in this study. Thomas & Silverman (2012) posit that the main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest to the researcher. Eighteen women were identified as the sample to be used. These women were drawn from the Mbare community only. The phenomenological approach was adopted in this study because it captures lived experiences of people in textual expression. It examines human experiences through the descriptions provided by the people involved, in this case the girl children who are already in marriages or those who have been in the marriages in the Mbare suburb of Harare. After the selection of the sample, the researcher decided to use semi-structured interviews as the data collection tool. This is mainly because they allowed the researcher to use open ended questions which provided a wider depth into the responses given by the respondents.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Factors that contribute to girl child marriages in Mbare

The theme had 4 sub-themes which include: forced into marriage after being raped, forced into marriage after having consensual sex with their boyfriends, forced into marriage by church doctrine, married because of poverty in the home.

Forced into marriage after being raped

Some of the respondents claimed that they were married after being raped. The perpetrators were forced to marry the children after being threatened by the caregivers with prosecution. This finding is supported by the following responses:

"Both my parents died when I was in grade 5. I lived with my maternal grandmother and uncles. We survived from rentals of my grandmother's house. I had dropped out of school after completing grade 7 because no one was able to pay my school fees. I used to do house hold chores for a tenant at our house in return for money to buy food. One day the tenant came home whilst I was alone and raped me. He threatened to kill me if I told anyone about the rape. I did not tell my grandmother and the rape continued until I got pregnant. When I was confronted by my uncles about the pregnancy, I then told them about the rape. They confronted the man and demanded that he should marry me or else they would report the case to the police. He complied and paid lobola to my uncles and I became his wife even though he was married". (Respondent 1)

"My mother passed away when I was in grade 3 and my father remarried and had 6 children. As a school caretaker my father could not afford to cater for all of our needs. He used to send me to buy food on

credit from a church member who owned a tuck shop. He would repay him at the end of the month. I was only 14 years when this man lured me to his room and raped me. He told me that he had already paid lobola to my father. He also threatened to kill me if I told anyone about the rape. I then fell pregnant and I revealed what had been happening to me. The man was summoned by church elders and it was agreed that he should marry me. I then went to live with him as his wife although he already had a wife and 5 children". (Respondent 5)

"My mother passed away and I lived with my father, who is a soldier and my step mother. I was in grade 7 when I visited a friend who lived next door to borrow a book. A man at the house told me that my friend was not at home. He lured me to his room promising to show me some books. He then locked the door and raped me. He detained me for the whole night and released me in the morning telling me that I should not tell anyone about what had happened. When I got home, my father was very angry with me. He beat me up until I told him about the rape. He confronted this man and demanded that he should marry me if he did not want to be prosecuted for rape. The man then paid lobola to my father and I went to live with him as his wife". (Respondent 8)

"My parents are in a polygamous marriage. My father did not provide for the family. My mother was a vegetable vendor and managed to give us the basics. I had dropped out of school after completing grade 6 and my father's friend who was 52 years old offered me a job in his tuck-shop. I looked upon him as a father and some of his children were much older than me. One day he visited the tuck shop and ordered me to shut down since he wanted to conduct a stock take. He then raped me and threatened me with death if I disclosed to anyone. He also said that he had already paid lobola to my father. When I confronted my parents about the issue, they confirmed that they had received lobola from this man in order to send my siblings to school. They said that they were waiting for the right opportunity to break the news to me. I was then given to this man as his wife". (Respondent 18)

Forced into marriage after having consensual sex with boyfriend

The majority of the respondents, that is, 50% were engaged in early sexual activities with their boyfriends which led to either pregnancy or the affair being discovered by the caregiver. These children were then chased away from home thus leading to early marriage. These findings are supported by the following responses:

"My parents divorced whilst I was in grade 4. I used to live with my mother and siblings. My mother was a vegetable vendor and could afford to give us at least one decent meal per day. My father did not contribute to our upkeep. I was in form 2 when I fell in love with my mathematics teacher. He used to give me pocket money and presents. We got carried away and I got pregnant. When I told him about my situation, he asked me to withdraw from school and quickly arranged to marry me before it was discovered by the school authorities. He explained that he might lose his job. My mother was very happy about this move since she said I would have brought shame upon her if I had not been married. I was sent to live with my in-laws in the rural areas". (Respondent 2)

"My parents divorced and I lived with my mother who is a vegetable vendor. I met my husband when I was 15 years old and in form 1. He used to give me a lift to school in his commuter omnibus. He proposed and we started going out. I no longer had to pay for my transport to and from school. He used to give me pocket money, buy clothes and other goodies. I slept over at his house and when I went back home, my mother send me back to my boyfriend's house. He accepted me and we ended up living together as husband and wife. I had to drop out of school even though I was not pregnant". (Respondent 4) "Both my parents passed away when I was in grade 6. I lived with my uncle who is a till operator in a grocery store. I fell in love with my husband when I was 14 years old and in form 1. I fell pregnant and I was chased away from home. I went to live with my husband and his family. I had to drop out of school to become a house wife". (Respondent 6)

"Both my parents passed away when I was in grade 3. I lived with my uncle who had 6 children in a 3 roomed house. My uncle was a vendor and we used to sell water and freezits to supplement the family income. At the age of 14, I fell in love with my husband. He used to give me money to buy food since life at my uncle's place was tough. I was grateful to him. I decided to elope after spending a night at his house". (Respondent 9)

"My parents were divorced and I stayed with my father and step-mother. My father is a communal farmer and we used to survive by working in other people's fields. My step-mother used to make us work like slaves and most of the time we went to bed hungry. I decided to run away from home with my brother. We came to Harare to look for our mother. We were stranded at Mbare until a well-wisher took us in. We decided to look for work. My brother got a job as a gardener and I was employed as a house maid. My boss started bringing different men home and forced me to sleep with them while she collected money from these men. I met a man who I told about my situation and he felt sorry for me. He arranged for me to run away from my boss and I ended up living with him as his wife". (Respondent 10)

"My father passed away when I was in grade 5 and I lived with my mother who is a cross boarder trader. She was able to provide for me and my young sister. She managed to extend our house and we had a

tuck-shop which sold food items to the community. We lived a comfortable life. Since my mother was away most of the time, I used to smuggle my boyfriend into the house. He was 19 years old and a student whilst I was 16 years and in form 3. I fell pregnant and when my mother discovered this, she chased me out of the house. I had to drop out of school. I went to live with my boyfriend and his family". (Respondent 11) "I lived with both my parents. I was 15 years old and in form 2 when I fell in love with my boyfriend who was 17 years old and in form 4. We attended the same school. I fell pregnant and tried to terminate the pregnancy but failed. I fell very sick and that is when my parents discovered that I was pregnant. They send me to live with my boyfriend and his family. My boyfriend's parents helped him to pay lobola and I had to drop out of school whilst my husband continued with his education". (Respondent 14)

"I lived with my father and step-mother after the death of my mother. My father was a welder and my step-mother was a house wife. I was 13 years old and had just started my form 1 at a local school. I fell in love with a man who operated a grocery store nearby. He was 36 years old and he used to give me money and shower me with gifts. He was married with three children and this did not bother me. I fell pregnant and my father wanted to have him arrested for sleeping with a minor. I stood up for him and he paid lobola. Since he could not take me to his house, he rented a room for me and I became his "small house". (Respondent 15)

"I lived with my father and step-mother. My father is a caretaker at our church. I fell in love with my boyfriend who was 20 years old and worked as a commuter omnibus tout. I was 14 years and in form 1. I went to a New Year's Eve party at my boyfriend's house. I spend the night there and when I returned home the following morning, my father beat me up and told me to go back to my boyfriend's house. Although my boyfriend's parents initially rejected me, they were forced by neighbours to take me in and I lived with my husband". (Respondent 17)

Forced into Marriage by church doctrine

Four of the children were forced into marriage by the doctrines of their respective churches. These children had no say in their marriages but they had to comply with church regulations. This finding is supported by the following responses: "My family attended the Johane Marange weChishanu Apostolic Church. My father had 3 wives and we were 21 children. We were at a church gathering when one of the elders claimed that the holy spirit had instructed him to take me as his wife. It was church doctrine that once the holy spirit had spoken, no one should dispute the instruction. After this meeting, my father arranged with the elders for my marriage. I was sent to live with my husband at the age of 14 years and he was 55 years old with two wives and several children" (Respondent 3)

"My family were members of the Johane Marange weChishanu apostolic sect. My mother was the third wife out of six wives. I was 15 years old and I had never been to school. My mother had taught me how to be a wife from an early age. An elder at our church announced that the holy spirit had instructed him to marry me. My father received lobola from this man. He was 52 years old with two wives and several children. I went to live with him as his wife". (Respondent 7)

"I lived with my mother and we used to attend the apostolic sect veNguwo Tsvuku. One elder at our church claimed that he had dreamt that I had become his wife. The church elders endorsed this dream. I was married to this businessman who was 47 years old whilst I was 14 years old. I became the 7th wife and I had to be taken under the wings of his first wife so that she could train me on how to manage a home. After I had graduated, I was given my own room and kitchen utensils and I became a wife to my husband". (Respondent 12)

"My parents were divorced and I used to live with my mother. My father was a business man. He remarried and had 6 children and my mother also remarried. I fell in love with a man from our church. He was 27 years old and had completed a degree in Engineering and I was 16 years and in form 4. He had promised to marry me after I had completed my studies. The affair was discovered by the church elders and they asked us about our intentions. When we told them that we will marry after I had completed my studies they pointed out to us that it was church doctrine that we cannot date for a year without getting married. They arranged for my husband to pay lobola and they sponsored the wedding. Our parents were not consulted. Since we were in love, we went ahead with the plans". (Respondent 13)

The Effects of child marriage on the girl child in Mbare

The theme had 4 subthemes which include: effects of child marriage on education, physical health, psychological health and social life.

Effects of child marriage on education

Fourteen out of the eighteen respondents indicated that they had to leave school in-order to get married. The other four had never been to school because of their parents' religious beliefs. This finding is supported by the following responses: "I left school in grade 5 after my grandmother failed to raise money for my school fees. I was already out of school when I got married". (Respondent 1)

- “I had to drop out of school due to pregnancy and marriage to my Mathematics teacher”. (Respondent 2)
- “I have never been to school. When I got married I was already at home”. (Respondent 3)
- “I slept at my boyfriend’s house and my parents chased me away from home and I had to drop out of school in form 1 to get married”. (Respondent 4)
- “I had to drop out of school after I had been raped and impregnated by the man who became my husband. I had gone as far as grade 7”. (Respondent 5)
- “I dropped out of school when I was in form 1 after falling pregnant and getting married”. (Respondent 6)
- “I was not in school when I got married because my parents do not believe in sending children to school”. (Respondent 8)
- “I was in grade 7 when I was raped by a man who became my husband. I had to drop out of school to get married”. (Respondent 8)
- “I had to drop out of school in grade 3 after the death of my parents. I got married whilst I was out of school”. (Respondent 9)
- “I dropped out of school in form 2 and later got married”. (Respondent 10)
- “I fell pregnant whilst I was in form 3 and I had to drop out of school in order to get married”. (Respondent 11)
- “I dropped out of school after being married off to a member of our church”. (Respondent 12)
- “I had to drop out of school whilst I was in form 4 to get married to my boyfriend”. (Respondent 13) I dropped out of school in form 2 after falling pregnant and I had to get married”. (Respondent 14)
- “I dropped out of school soon after completing grade 7. I fell in love with my boyfriend and I got pregnant and had to get married”. (Respondent 15)
- “I dropped out of school in form 3 when I was forced to marry my rapist”. (Respondent 16)
- “I was in form 1 when I slept at my boyfriend’s house and was forced to drop out of school in-order to get married”. (Respondent 17)
- “I had already dropped out of school in grade 6 when I was forced to marry my father’s friend”. (Respondent 18)

Effects of child marriage on physical health

All the respondents interviewed claimed that child marriage destroyed their physical health in various forms. This finding is supported by the following responses:

- “I am beaten up for slight mistakes and he denies me food. When I fall sick, I am not allowed to visit the clinic. My child is always sick and we are treated with herbs which do not seem to help”. (Respondent 1)
- “I am in poor health due to giving birth. I developed what they call fistula and I can no longer control my bladder which is embarrassing to me”. (Respondent 2)
- “My husband raped me and he would beat me up if I refused to sleep with him”. (Respondent 3)
- “My husband sleeps out most of the time and if I question him, I am beaten up”. (Respondent 4)
- “I am failing to balance the duties of being a mother and a wife. I am always tired”. (Respondent 5) “Whilst I was heavily pregnant, I was overwhelmed with household duties at my mother-in-law’s house. This led to me going into pre-mature labour. I gave birth to a premature baby at 7 months and he only survived for a few days before passing away. When I fell pregnant again, my mother-in-law forced me to take some herbs which led to an abortion. The doctors said that I will not be able to conceive again. My life was ruined”. (Respondent 6)
- “Since I went into a polygamous marriage, I am now HIV positive and was physically abused by the core wives. I had 2 miscarriages and now I am a mother of 6 children at the age of 25 years”. (Respondent 7)
- “My husband raped me and I fell pregnant. I had to have an operation in order to give birth. I became very sick and could not look after my child. He later died and my husband beat me up blaming me for the death of our child. The doctors said that my uterus was damaged and I could not conceive again. I ran away from him and I am now divorced at the age of 18 years and working as a commercial sex worker”. (Respondent 8)
- “My husband used to beat me up for questioning him about his infidelities. He would not buy me food for several days and I would end up begging from neighbors. He refused to give me money to register for ante-natal care at the local clinic and I ended up having a home delivery. I lost a lot of blood and became very sick. When I went to the hospital, I was diagnosed with anemia and I was HIV positive. I contemplated suicide. I could not breast feed my baby. The baby developed pneumonia and died. My husband moved out and I turned to prostitution”. (Respondent 9)
- “After giving birth to a baby girl, my husband started accusing me of infidelity and he would beat me up every time he came home drunk. He did not buy food for us and I had to beg from neighbours. I was not allowed to engage in any income generating projects. I am also HIV positive and my child and I are on anti-retroviral tablets. My husband refuses to use any kind of protection when having sex and I am sick most of the time”. (Respondent 10)
- “I was treated like a slave by my in-laws. Food was rationed and I was subjected to verbal abuse. I was sent home to deliver my baby. My mother had to go to South Africa leaving me with the new born baby. I did not

know what to do. My baby developed pneumonia and died. My husband and his family accused me of killing my baby". (Respondent 11)

"I had my first child at the age of 15. I had a home delivery and fell sick later on. I could not breast feed my baby. When my child was 1 year old I fell pregnant again. I now have six children and my husband passed away. I am now a cross boarder trader in order to fend for my children". (Respondent 12)

"I was beaten up for discovering my husband's infidelity. One of my eyes was damaged and I was send back to parents". (Respondent 13)

"I tried to have an abortion but failed. I fell sick and my husband send me to live with his parents in the rural areas. I had to do all the house hold chores as well as plough the fields. My husband neglected me since he left for the United Kingdom. I returned to my parents' house with my child". (Respondent 14)

"I was diagnosed with HIV but my children are HIV negative. My husband succumbed to HIV and I was left with nothing since I was the small house. I turned to prostitution in order to feed my children". (Respondent 15)

"My husband raped me and I was pregnant and HIV positive at the age of 16 .My husband used to beat me up most of the time and my in-laws reminded me how useless I was as a wife and daughter-in law. It was difficult for me to balance the roles of being a wife, mother and daughter-in-law". (Respondent 16)

"I fell pregnant after 2 miscarriages. I gave birth to a baby boy and I am now HIV positive. I am failing to cope with the demands placed upon me by my in-laws and society". (Respondent 17)

"I was raped by my father's friend and fell pregnant at the age of 13 years. I was subjected to insults and beatings by my husband's other wives. I had a caesarian section and gave birth to a premature baby who only survived for a month. I fell pregnant again six months after losing my first baby. I am now a mother of 4 children at 18 years". (Respondent 18)

The Psychological effects of child marriage

All the 18 respondents interviewed cited having psychological problems due to child marriage. This finding supported by the following responses:

"I was forced to marry my rapist and I lived in fear because he had threatened to kill me. He also reminded me that I was useless as a wife". (Respondent 1)

"My husband stopped communicating with me and my in-laws always reminded me that their son married me because he felt sorry for me. The fistula destroyed my confidence and the divorce took a toll at my emotions". (Respondent 2)

"I was forced into marrying a 55 year old man by church doctrine. I fell pregnant at the age of 15 and my first child died soon after birth. I did not get an opportunity to grieve for my baby. I fell pregnant again after 3 months of losing my baby". (Respondent 3)

"I have two children and my husband openly engages in extra-marital affairs and I am not supposed to question him. I have no decision making power in the house". (Respondent 4)

"I was forced to marry my rapist. I was scared of him because he had threatened to kill me. I was verbally abused by the core wife. I lost my baby at 3 months and I had no one to console me. I fell pregnant again and gave birth to twin boys. I am not allowed to make any decisions in the home and my husband treats me like a child". (Respondent 5)

"I had a premature baby at the age of 15 and he died after a few days. Instead of consoling me, my in-laws blamed me for killing my baby. When I fell pregnant again, my in-laws forced me to take some herbs and I had an abortion. I fell sick and the doctors told me that I will not be able to conceive again. My husband send me back to my uncle's house. My uncle also rejected me so I ended up engaging in prostitution". (Respondent 6)

"I married a polygamist and had to endure insults from the other wives. I had a miscarriage and now I am a mother to 6 children at the age of 25 years. I rely on my husband's income which is not enough to feed three families". (Respondent 7)

"I was forced to marry my rapist. I got pregnant and had complications during delivery. I became sick and my baby died. I had no one to console me since my mother is dead and my father and step-mother did not want me at their house. My husband blamed me for the death of our child and he resented me. He would beat me up for no apparent reason. The pregnancy damaged my uterus and I can no longer conceive. I ran away from him and I am now a sex worker. (Respondent 9)

"I married at the age of 14, was diagnosed with anemia and HIV. I gave birth to my child who later died of pneumonia. At one point I contemplated killing myself since I felt rejected. My husband went to live with his girlfriend. I was introduced to prostitution by a woman in my neighborhood". (Respondent 9)

"I ran away from my father in the hope of looking for my mother. I ended up being used as a prostitute by the lady who employed me as a house maid during the day. I was rescued by the man whom I later married. I was diagnosed with HIV and I gave birth to an HIV positive child. My husband refused to be tested and blames me for contracting the disease. He does not support me and the child and I have to beg for food from neighbours". (Respondent 10)

“I married at the age of 16. I lived with my in-laws who verbally abused me. I was send back to my mother’s house to deliver the baby. My husband did not come to see his child. This hurt me so much. Since my mother had to work, she left me in charge of my new born baby who contracted pneumonia and died. My husband and his parents accused me of killing my baby. They took over my baby’s funeral and did not allow me to see where they buried my child”. (Respondent 11)

“I was forced to marry a polygamist and I was the 7th wife at the age of 15. I gave birth to my first child after a complicated delivery. I am now a mother to 6 children and my husband passed away. I am now struggling to look after my children. I am now a cross boarder trader”. (Respondent 12)

“I left school before completing my O levels in order to marry the man I loved. He cheated on me and beat me up damaging one of my eyes. I am now a divorcee at the age of 17 years”. (Respondent 13)

“I fell pregnant at the age of 15 and got married to my 17 year old boyfriend. He continued with his education whilst I was send to live in the rural areas. My husband abandoned me and our baby and I had to return to my parents. I am now a vegetable vendor whilst all my friends have good jobs”. (Respondent 14)

“I became a small house at the age of 13. I had three children and was diagnosed with HIV. My husband succumbed to the disease and died. I had no-one to take care of me and our children so I turned to prostitution for survival”. (Respondent 15)

“I was forced to marry my rapist and I became pregnant and was diagnosed with HIV. My in-laws constantly reminded me how useless I was as a daughter-in-law. I felt lost and lonely”. (Respondent 16)

“I was forced to marry my boyfriend because I had spent the night at his house. I had to drop out of school. My in-laws expected me to have a baby. I finally had a baby after two miscarriages. My in-laws feel that I am not good enough for their son. I am also HIV positive”. (Respondent 17)

“I was pledged for marriage to a 52 year old man who was my father’s friend without my knowledge. I only discovered that my parents had married me off to this man after he had raped me. He told me that I was his wife. I lost my first child and did not get time to grieve. I fell pregnant again and gave birth to a baby boy. I am now a mother of 4 children and the pressures of being a mother, a wife and running a home are taking their toll on me. I am not happy in my marriage and I feel like killing myself”. (Respondent 18)

The effects of child marriage on the social life of the girl child

All the 18 respondents interviewed claimed to have lost their social life due to the marriages. This finding is supported by the following responses:

“I have become an outcast. All my friends no longer want to play with me. I lost my childhood. I am not allowed to visit my family and I feel very lonely”. (Respondent 1)

“I lost my life and all of my friends. I am a divorcee at the age of 15 years and I have brought back home an extra mouth to feed”. (Respondent 2) “I miss my friends and family. My core wives treat me like an outcast and I did not get an opportunity to play with my friends”. (Respondent 3)

“My dream of becoming a lawyer flew out of the window. I lost my childhood and my friends. I am not allowed to engage in income generating projects”. Respondent 4)

“I did not get a chance to play with children of my age. I miss school and my family”. (Respondent 5)

“I was rejected by my husband and I lost all my friends. I was isolated from my family and I am now into prostitution”. (Respondent 6)

“I lost my childhood and I cannot read or write and this makes me sad”. (Respondent 7)

“I lost my childhood and did not get an opportunity to be with my friends. I was rejected by my husband and my family. I feel so lonely and empty. I cannot realize my dream of becoming a nurse. Instead I am now a full time sex worker”. (Respondent 8)

“I did not get time to socialize with my friends. I was rejected by my family and I am a divorcee at 16 years”. (Respondent 9)

“I was isolated from friends and family and my husband treated me like a child”. (Respondent 10)

“I lost my childhood and as a divorcee at 19 years, society looks down upon me”. (Respondent 11)

“I became a widow at the age of 23 years. My core wives rejected me since they blamed me for causing the death of our husband”. (Respondent 12)

“I failed to complete my O levels. Early marriage deprived me of my childhood and I lost my friends. As a divorcee, society looked down upon me”. (Respondent 13)

“Most of my school friends have good jobs and I envy them. I have to sell vegetables to feed my child”. (Respondent 14)

“I lost my childhood and I have no education. I am shunned by society because I have resorted to prostitution in order to feed my children”. (Respondent 15) “Early marriage ruined my future. I dropped out of school and I miss my friends”. (Respondent 16)

“I lost my childhood and I am isolated from my family and friends”. (Respondent 17)

“I did not get an opportunity to play with my friends, I have no education or life skills. I am failing to cope with the demands of marriage and motherhood”. (Respondent 18)

IV. LIMITATION

Due to the small sample used the findings of the data are not extrapolable to a larger population sample. Child marriages are usually dealt with in a secretive manner hence it was difficult for the researcher to get the women involved to come forward. However through the use of Community Case Care workers, the researcher managed to identify the girls and women for the research. It also took a lot of convincing to have them to open up and tell their story because some of them were still in the abusive marriages and needed assistance.

The other limitation is that instead of interviewing 24 women and girls that had been identified, the researcher managed to talk to 18 respondents because the other 6 feared retribution from their spouses and families.

V. CONCLUSION

Prioritizing education for the girl child

Most of the girls interviewed wished they had completed their education. This finding is supported by the following responses:

“I wish the government would make education free from primary school up to high school so that all young girls can continue with their education. If I had gone to form 1, I would not have worked for this man and I would not be in the situation that I am now”. (Respondent 1)

“Girls who make mistakes should be given a second chance to live a normal life and men who marry young girls should be arrested. Facts of life should be taught in schools from an early age”. (Respondent 6)

“The government should arrest parents who force their children into marriage before they are mature enough and schools should allow girls to continue with their education even when they are pregnant”. (Respondent No.4) “Girls need to be educated so that they can be able to make choices regarding their lives and men who marry young girls should be arrested”. (Respondent No. 7)

“Girls should be educated so that they can be able to make choices in their lives and men who marry young girls as well as parents who marry off young girls should be arrested”. (Respondent No.8)

“Girls should stay in school so that they can have a better future and men who marry young girls should be arrested”. (Respondent No.9)

“Girls should stay in school so that they can have a better future. Parents should also stay together so as to protect their children from abuse. The government should put in place laws that protect the girl child from abuse”. (Respondent No.10)

“Girls should stay in school so that they can have a better future. The school curriculum should include issues of sexual reproductive health from primary school level”. (Respondent No.11)

“The girl child should be given priority in education because they are the ones who end up raising families when the husbands abandon them and churches should not force children into marriage. (Respondent No.12)

“Sexual reproductive health lessons should be taught from primary school and awareness raising should be carried out in schools so that children can learn about the dangers of early marriage. Parents should be encouraged to send their children to school even after they have fallen pregnant and the parents should be educated on the dangers of marrying off young girls”. (Respondent No. 14)

“Children should be educated about sexual reproductive health at an early stage in life and parents should be encouraged to keep their children in school no matter the circumstances. Older men who marry young girls should be arrested”. (Respondent No.15)

Parents who marry off their young girls and men who marry these young girls should be arrested

Some of the girls interviewed were advocating for the arrest of parents who force their girl children into marriage as well as the men who marry these girls. This finding is supported by the following responses:

“I wish the government would arrest older men who sleep with young girls and put in place programs in schools which help to raise awareness on the consequences of engaging in early sexual activities”. (Respondent No.2)

“Girls who make mistakes should be given a second chance to live a normal life and men who marry young girls should be arrested. Facts of life should be taught in schools from an early age”. (Respondent No.6)

“The government should arrest parents who force their children into marriage before they are mature enough and schools should allow girls to continue with their education even when they are pregnant”. (Respondent No.4)

“Men who marry young girls should be arrested and parents who marry off young girls should also be arrested”. (Respondent No.5)

“Men who marry young girls as well as parents who marry off young girls should also be arrested”. (Respondent No 18)

“Girls should be educated so that they can be able to make choices in their lives and men who marry young girls as well as parents who marry off young girls should be arrested”. (Respondent No.8)

“Girls should stay in school so that they can have a better future and men who marry young girls should be arrested”. (Respondent No.9)

“Children should be educated about sexual reproductive health at an early stage in life and parents should be encouraged to keep their children in school no matter the circumstances. Older men who marry young girls should be arrested”. (Respondent No.15)

The government should put in place legislation to protect girl children from early marriages:

One respondent felt that the government should put in place legislation that protects the girl child from marriage. This finding is supported by the following response:

“I wish there were laws that protect children from being forced into marriage”. (Respondent No.3)

Government should include sexual reproductive health in the school curriculum:

Some of the respondents felt that sexual reproductive health education should be introduced from primary level. This finding is supported by the following responses:

“Children should be educated about sexual reproductive health early in life and girls who fall pregnant should be allowed to continue with their studies”. (Respondent No. 16)

“Children should be educated about sexual reproductive health at an early stage in life”. (Respondent No.17)

“Children should be educated about sexual reproductive health at an early stage in life and parents should be encouraged to keep their children in school no matter the circumstances. Older men who marry young girls should be arrested”. (Respondent No.15)

“Sexual reproductive health lessons should be taught from primary school and awareness raising should be carried out in schools so that children can learn about the dangers of early marriage. Parents should be encouraged to send their children to school even after they have fallen pregnant and the parents should be educated on the dangers of marrying off young girls”. (Respondent No. 14)

Awareness raising in schools, churches and the community:

The other respondent felt that awareness raising about the effects girl child marriages in the schools, church and community will help to curb the practice. This finding is supported by the following responses: “Churches should not force children into marriage and awareness raising campaigns should be carried out in schools so that children can learn about the dangers of early marriage”. (Respondent No.13)

“Sexual reproductive health lessons should be taught from primary school and awareness raising should be carried out in schools so that children can learn about the dangers of early marriage. Parents should be encouraged to send their children to school even after they have fallen pregnant and the parents should be educated on the dangers of marrying off young girls”. (Respondent No. 14)

“I wish the government would arrest older men who sleep with young girls and put in place programs in schools which help to raise awareness on the consequences of engaging in early sexual activities”. (Respondent 2)

Ways of reducing child marriages:

The practice of child marriage spans diverse cultures, and each child bride has her own unique story. However, those who suffer its indignities, share a common thread that transcends circumstances, culture and continents (Sanchez, 2015). This is shown by the contributions made towards ending of child marriages in Mbare which correspond with the global and regional suggestions on how to end child marriages.

All the respondents in the Mbare study contributed towards ways of reducing child marriages. This is a clear indication that the women in Mbare need to see improved living conditions for the girl child in Mbare. Some suggested that any man who marries a girl under the age of 18 years should be prosecuted and parents who marry off these young girls should also be prosecuted. Others suggested awareness raisings in schools and communities on the causes and effects of child marriages on the girl child. The other group suggested that the government should put in place laws that protect the girl child from early marriage and that sexual reproductive health should be included in the school curriculum at primary school level. Others suggested that the girl child should be allowed to go back to school after giving birth so that they can be able to look after themselves and their children. Some wanted churches to stop the practice of forcing underage girls to marry older men.

Global and Regional suggestions on ending child marriages:

However, ending Child Marriage requires the consent of all those involved including fathers, religious, community and tribal leaders as well as the government (United Nations Population Fund, 2012).

To break the cycle of poverty, programs are needed to educate and empower women. Education is a key factor for delaying first sexual activity, pregnancy, marriage and child birth. Girls' empowerment, social, cultural, legal reform and policy action are needed in-order to end girl child marriages (UNFPA, 2012). Married girls need access to sexual reproductive health services, including family planning and maternal health services (UNFPA, 2012).

In some countries, child marriage has been declining. Increasing average age for marriage often results in part, from the overall advancement of an economy. For example, in such countries as Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand, decreasing poverty effectively decreased child marriage by enabling these countries to improve education, increase employment and provide better healthcare for the whole nation (Marthur et.al 2013). Successful programs have provided economic and educational opportunities to young women and their families by employing girls with the specific goal of delaying marriage, giving financial incentives to parents who keep their daughters in school, feeding children during school to decrease family expenses (Marthur et, al. 2013).

Keeping girls in school or vocational training not only helps to protect them from HIV infection, pregnancy, illness and death, but also enhances their earning potential and socio economic status. Educated girls can contribute to the health and welfare of their family and marry men of their own choice and age (Dube, 2013).

Lack of enforcement renders laws against child marriage ineffective hence governments need to take responsibility through media campaigns and educational outreach programs. Local, regional and national governments can also implement health outreach programs for both boys and girls and include comprehensive sexual reproductive health studies in their curriculum starting from primary school (Nguyen et, al.2015).

Finally, culturally appropriate programs that provide families and communities with education and reproductive health services can help stop child marriage, early pregnancies, illness and death of young mothers and their children (Sibanda, 2011).

Current situation on ending child marriages in Zimbabwe:

Studies have found that issues such as poverty, limited access to education and harmful cultural norms are the key factors that drive child marriages in Zimbabwe.

“UNICEF is assisting the Government of Zimbabwe in implementing the Harmonized Cash Transfer programme to assist poor households with additional income. Preliminary findings show that households who are benefitting from the programme are less likely to marry off their girls,” said Reza Hossaini, UNICEF Representative (UNICEF, 2015). This is a clear indication that poverty plays a substantial part in perpetuating child marriages in Mbare. If the parent or caregivers of the girls in Mbare were rich, they would afford to send their children to school as well as feed them thus delaying the need for the children to seek boyfriends who would supply them with material needs.

Section 78 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe amendment (No.20) Act of 2013 prescribes the minimum age of marriage as 18 years. The section further stipulates that no person may be compelled to enter into marriage against their will and that “children are not pledged in marriages”. However, marriage laws such as the Marriage Act and the Customary Marriages Act are still to be aligned with the constitution.

In 2014, two former young brides, Loveness Mudzuri and Ruvimbo Tsopodzi filed an application asking the Constitutional Court to declare the Marriage Act and Customary Marriage Act a breach of the new Constitution. The judges reserved judgement on the matter. However due to pressure from the Civic society and the International community, the constitutional Court of Zimbabwe gave a landmark ruling which declared 18 years to be the legal minimum age of marriage, while all forms of child marriage have been deemed unconstitutional (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The law to increase the legal age of marriage to 18 in Zimbabwe will allow more girls to reach their potential. Previously, girls could get married at the age of 16, while boys could marry at 18. On Wednesday 20 January 2016, the court ruled that section 22 of the Marriages Act is unconstitutional and therefore “no person, girl or boy should be married before the age of 18” (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The Government of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Education has proposed to introduce feeding schemes in schools for all children in the second term of 2016. This may help to curb hunger as well as entice parents to keep their children in school so as to prolong early marriages.

These efforts are a major breakthrough for the girl child in Mbare and the country as a whole. If implemented properly, the initiatives will remove Zimbabwe from being in the top 10 countries in Africa as well as from being number 39 in the world list of countries with the highest prevalence rates of girl child marriages.

Reflections

The results from the Mbare study revealed that most of the girl children in Mbare enter into early marriages because of their family backgrounds. Although most of them had some exposure to some level of education, they still found themselves entering into early marriage unwillingly. All of the respondents were married by older men who could supply them with material things that they could not get from their families. This is supported by the theory of marriage which postulate that economic success, which increases with age

and physical health, which declines with age are complimentary for the gains realized from marriage. This would lead to a pattern of age gap between the marriage partners. In the theoretical model, being young corresponds to the period between the onset of physical maturity for girls and active employment for men, roughly between the ages of 14 and 18 years. Men's economic capabilities are only revealed after they enter the workforce while women's abilities in their traditional tasks of childbearing, childcare, and household labour are fully known by the time they reach physical maturity. However, in the case of the girls in Mbare, all the marriages were forced upon them due to poverty in their families. Even those who had been raped were not spared. The parents and caregivers of the girls in the study saw an opportunity to make money as well as off load the responsibility of taking care of their children. This is supported by studies in the Sub Saharan region, which state that poverty plays a central role in perpetuating child marriage. Parents want to ensure their daughters' financial security, however, daughters are considered as an economic burden since the upkeep of girls is higher and they will eventually leave the household. Hence, a family's only way to recover its investment may be to have the child married off in exchange of a dowry.

Although religious practices played a part in contributing to child marriages in Mbare, the percentage was not that significant compared to other areas in the country. The majority of the girls in the study were in consensual relationships with their boyfriends and engaged in early sexual activities which led the parents and caregivers to force them into marriage. This could have been a result of lack of guidance from the parents and society as well as societal norms. This is collaborated by the findings from a research which documented discriminatory social norms that links a girl's perceived sexual purity to her family's honour. For example, if a girl becomes pregnant, spends the night outside the family home, is seen with a boyfriend or returns home late after seeing a boyfriend, her family may force her to marry for the sake of honour. In some cases, girls who become sexually active or become pregnant decide to enter a customary marriage because they fear being rejected, beaten or abused by their families.

Mbare is highly populated and has diverse cultures hence the lack of proper direction for the children in Mbare. On the other hand, the majority of households in Mbare live below the poverty datum line hence marrying off of their girl children could be another source of income for them.

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