

# Investigating the Causes and Consequences of Child Marriage on Girls: A Case Study of Primary Schools

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**Abstract:** Marriage is one of society's most significant institutions because it establishes familial relationships. Adults should contact this institution. A girl under 15 can now marry an adult guy. Worldwide, especially in Africa, child marriage is a major concern. Zambia is one of the twenty global hotspots for child marriages, like many African nations. Thus, this study examined the consequences of child marriage on girls in Mangamu, Katongo, and Nakatindi elementary schools in Sesheke. A qualitative case study was performed to obtain data from 60 female participants 45 grade six girls. Five female instructors from each school participated. We employed questionnaires, depth interviews, and conversations to gather data. The findings showed that poverty, economic difficulty, cultural beliefs, and susceptibility of some youngsters induce girl-child marriages. The study also found that early marriages cause pregnancy and health issues. Educational rights are also taken away by child marriage. The report advised communities to educate each other about the effects of child marriage on girl children's academic advancement and stakeholders to warn the community.

**Keywords:** Child and Adolescent; Child Marriage, Education and Poverty; Teenage Pregnant; Development Issue; Quality of Life; Negative Consequences; Academic and Health; Health Rights.

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## 1. Introduction

Marriage between minors, defined as those who are less than 18 years old, violates the human rights guaranteed by numerous international treaties and deprives young girls of access to reproductive health care, as well as their chance to reach their full potential as human beings. Teenage females should be able to enjoy a high standard of living, safety, dignity, education, and nondiscrimination. Adolescents must be protected, encouraged, and granted these rights if they are to mature into adults who are fit, capable, autonomous, and responsible. But teenage girls in Zambia lose these rights due to the high rate of child marriage. It is important to understand the factors that contribute to the practice of girl-child marriage in order to eradicate it and ensure that the rights of teenage girls are protected, promoted, and fulfilled [7]. One of the biggest problems with development in many developing nations is the prevalence of child marriage [8]. The practice has been associated with several dangers, including health problems, an increased risk of having children, and lower levels of schooling, particularly among girls. Many countries have passed legislation against child marriage because of the widespread harm it causes. That is why the new SDGs (Health, Nutrition, and Population Global Practice) include the abolition of child marriage [9].

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When girls marry at a young age, it has a more detrimental effect on their health, education, and overall well-being. One well-documented effect of child marriage is its detrimental effect on educational enrolment and completion rates [12]. A girl's likelihood of dropping out of school and having a low level of education increases in direct proportion to the age at which she marries [14]. This will have long-term detrimental effects on her and her children's ability to work and earn a living wage, among other things [15]. Consequently, this research provides some reasons and impacts of child marriage on the academic growth of girl children, after reviewing the works of others [16]. In order to contain the vice, it also suggests measures that the government and other interested parties should adopt.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

On 8th April 2016, the Government of Zambia joined other countries in adopting a national strategy to end child marriage. This is because child marriage disempowers millions of girls and women each year of their potential. Zambia has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world, with 42% of girls who are married before the age of 18, a rate that has evolved since 2002.

The practice of child marriage impacts both young men and young women, with the former being more affected. Although 1% of males in this age bracket get married at a young age, 17% of females in this age bracket are married at a young age. A consensual but informal union can also be defined as living with a partner, according to the 2013–2014 Zambian Demographic Health Survey (ZDHS). Among women aged 15–19, the percentage of married women is 17%; among women aged 30–34, it peaks at 79%.

According to Ashifa [5], child marriage poses a great challenge to the academic progress of the pupils forced into it. Stigmatization, health risks, low attendance to class, minimal time for reading and learning, digressed attention from academia to social care, withdrawal, and bad time management. All the above problems have been described as the effect of early child marriage on female academic success in many existing literature. In 2017, for example, the Demographic Council reported that early marriage decreased by 10.2% from 41.6% to 31.4% among women between 20 and 24 years of age who confirmed being married before they were 18 years old in Zambia, which was still one of the highest in the world. Moreover, there were about 10,684 young girls in primary school who became pregnant, and in 2011, there were about 13,929 young girls who became pregnant while in primary school.

## **2. Literature Review**

Efforts to end child marriage have not been successful in Zambia, as they have in many other African nations. According to a report by the Ministry of Gender and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), titled "National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage in Zambia: 2016–2021," the prevalence of child marriage in Zambia is alarmingly high. According to the survey, the vice decreased in 2014, but it is still listed among the greatest in the world [17]. The Eastern Region of the country has one of the highest rates of child marriage at 60%, though it varies greatly from rural to urban areas. Zambia ranks among the world's 20 most child-marital-intensive countries, according to 2013's key figures on the subject. Two out of five females in Zambia are child brides, according to the data, as 42% of girls under the age of 18 get married. Among the married population, 9% were wed before the legal age of fifteen [18].

Muchinga, Northern Province, and portions of the Copperbelt Provinces have a high rate of child marriage, according to another data analysis from the Policy Brief from June 2017. The regions of Isoka, Chama, Mpika, and Chinsali in Muchinga Province are particularly notorious for child marriage [6]. Child marriage is also very common in the Copperbelt Province towns of Masaiti, Mpongwe, and Lufwanyama. The districts of Kaputa and Chilubi in the province's northern region follow. It is common for a female to tie the knot before turning 18 in these areas [11].

In contrast, underage marriage is less common in the Western region of Zambia, specifically in the districts of Shangombo, Mongu, Lukulu, Senanga, and Sesheke. Nevertheless, at 41%, Western Province boasts the nation's highest rate of adolescent pregnancies [12].

A study was carried out in 2015 by the Population Council and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to determine the areas of Zambia most prone to child marriage. This study followed the 2013–2014 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS). Their research confirmed that the prevalence of underage marriage in Zambia is significant [2]. In spite of a 25% decrease, from 41.6% to 31.4%, among women aged 20–24 who reported getting married before the age of 18, Zambia continues to rank among the world's nations with the highest rates of child marriage. More girls than boys are affected by child marriage, according to the 2013–14 ZDHS [7]. It has been observed that child marriage affects 16.5% of girls and 1% of boys in the age bracket of 15–19. Just 2.2% of men in the 20–24 age bracket said they were married before the age of 18, but 31.4% of women did [5].

### **3. Methodology of The Study**

Methodology is a system used in a particular area of study or activity to obtain information. This section discusses the research design, study area, target population, sampling design, sample size, and ethical considerations.

#### **3.1. Research Design**

A research design is defined by Daraz [10] as an investigational strategy, plan, or framework developed with the intention of addressing research issues. The research strategy for the study will be a hybrid of qualitative and quantitative techniques. The benefits of quantitative research methods can compensate for the drawbacks of qualitative research methods in a mixed-methods study. A case sequential explanatory design will be used to investigate the impacts and causes of child marriages. Gathering and analysing quantitative data comes first in this approach [10]. Then, qualitative data comes next. This research will employ a sequential explanatory design to delve into the causes and effects of child marriages in Zambia, specifically in the primary schools under study, and to offer methods for stopping early marriages in the Sesheke district.

#### **3.2. Study Area**

The study was conducted in Sesheke District in the three primary schools, namely, Mangamu, Katongo, and Nakatindi. The three primary schools were chosen because they were easily accessed as they are in the hometown of the researcher.

#### **3.3. Target Population**

All instances that meet a certain set of criteria make up a population. If the results can be applied to a specific group of people or things, then we say that group is the target population [10]. One definition of population given by Rubin and Babbie [1] is the "set of individuals (or objects) having some common characteristics as defined by the sampling criteria established for the study" [1]. The participants in this study were female sixth graders from three of the schools studied, together with fifteen female educators and forty-five female students.

#### **3.4. Sampling design**

This study required specific groups of people who provided specific information which had value to the study. Thus, purposive sampling was used to identify participants with certain useful information for the study. Purposive sampling is defined as a type of non-probability sampling in which the participating units are selected on the basis of the researcher's judgment about which ones are the most useful representatives.

#### **3.5. Sample Size**

A sample is proportional to a population. It is the subset of the whole population that is actually investigated by a researcher and whose characteristics will be generalized to the whole population. In this study, the sample size will be 60 participants, comprised of fifteen teachers and forty-five pupils from the three primary schools under study. Sixty questionnaires will be produced and distributed to participants.

#### **3.6. Sampling Procedures**

In this study, access to participants was done by first getting permission from the three headteachers of the primary schools under study. After receiving permission, a purposive sampling procedure was used to recruit the participants. As earlier mentioned, the study participants comprised teachers and pupils from the schools mentioned above. The rationale behind choosing a group of teachers and pupils as participants was to understand the causes and effects of early marriages in Zambia, particularly in the Sesheke district.

#### **3.7. Instrumentation**

This study used questionnaires to collect data. Mann and Fischer [3] argue that a questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting information. They consider questionnaires to be advantageous because they can be answered quickly by the participants, with little misinterpretation and misleading responses. This study also chose to use questionnaires because it caters to a large number of participant and assures them of their anonymity. Questionnaires can be administered without the presence of the researcher and often being comparatively straightforward to analyze. The questions focussed on eliciting data through the perception of the participants on the causes and effects of child marriage on the girl child.

### **3.8. Data collection procedures**

The researcher used questionnaires, which were distributed to the 60 participants in the three schools. Sixty respondents, which comprised 15 teachers and 45 pupils, were targeted as participants. This means that 20 questionnaires were distributed to each school. The questionnaires were given only to the participants. As such, not all teachers and pupils from each school participated. The participants were given detailed information about the study. They were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wished and also to withdraw their information.

### **3.9. Data Analysis**

Creswell [4] alludes that data analysis is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study. In this article, a review of different documents and scholarly journals was done by the researcher. Themes from the literature review were used to form questionnaires and questions that were used for interviews. The information from questionnaires, interviews and document reviews were collected, put together, and analyzed using a thematic approach. It is through data analysis that conclusions are drawn and recommendations made.

### **3.10. Data Collection Methods**

Apart from the teachers and pupils from the three primary schools named above, other methods of collecting data were used, such as face-to-face interviews in the same three primary schools. This enabled the researcher to ask a great range of questions and to probe in order to get clarifications on ambiguous responses and to seek more elaborate answers. During the interviews, the researcher, with permission from the participants, took notes.

### **3.11. Ethical considerations**

Ethical consideration is a vital aspect of every research. This means that which the researcher ought to do or ought not to do. The researcher introduced himself to the participants. This helped them to be open and give the required information as honestly as possible. Considering that the study needed personal information from the participants, before conducting the interviews, the researcher informed the participants about the nature of the interview and the purpose of the study. The researcher informed participants that any information that was availed was kept confidential in a laptop that was locked with a password. Anonymity was assured to participants by letting them not avail vital information such as their names, National Registration Card numbers and phone numbers. With this assurance, no force was used by any participant to get information but they were encouraged to give information voluntarily. Plagiarism is a criminal offence in the academic circles.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The purpose of the study was to explore the causes and the effects of child marriage on the girl child. The finding of causes of child marriages are economic hardships, the chance to gain materialistically, means of escaping the economic hardships, the practice of protecting a girl's sexuality, and avoidance of bringing the family name to shame. On the effect of child marriages, the following have been found: early pregnancy and health risks.

### **4.1. Causes of Child Marriage from Literature**

Child marriage and its effects on children's well-being have been the subject of much research on a global and national scale. In six districts in Zambia—Lusaka, Eastern, Copperbelt, Luapula, North-Western, and Western—Fernandes [11] studied for UNICEF.

According to the research, parents and guardians often marry off their daughters due to financial difficulties. The practice is seen as a way for them to earn money, specifically a bride price called 'lobola.' The National Assembly of Zambia, 2022 also discovered that some Fernandes families do in fact marry off their members. Child marriage is often seen by girls as an opportunity for money gain and a way out of economic difficulties in their families, according to research [11]. This is particularly true when girls are kept by step-parents. Also along these lines, the National Assembly of Zambia in 2022, stepchildren and orphans are particularly at risk. As a means of easing financial strain, marriage may be considered in some households. Some abused youngsters may also see marriage as a way out of their situation.

Engaging in sexual activities before marriage is seen as a source of shame for families in certain cultures. Girls are expected to maintain their virginity in these societies since it is highly valued. To keep their daughter's innocence and honour intact, many

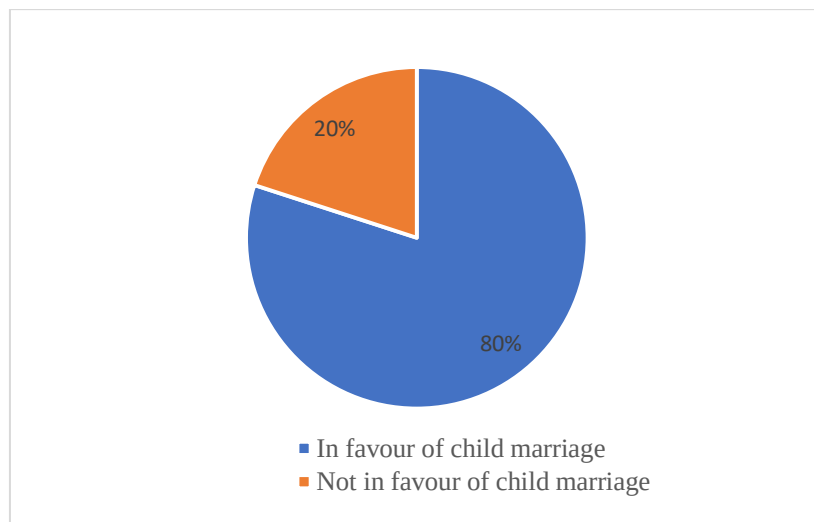
families choose to wed her off at a young age [6]. Twenty percent of the female participants gave a yes response when asked if they agreed with this concept, proving its validity. Parents may think that by marrying off their daughters at an early age, they can ensure that they will only engage in sexual relations with their husbands and that their family's reputation will be protected. dowry to be paid to the young daughter or daughters. They are greatly relieved financially by this dowry.

#### 4.2. Pupils in favour and not in favour of early marriage

Asked whether the girls were in favour of being forced into early marriage, 36 (80%) girls said they were not in favour, while 9 (20%) girls were in favour of early marriage (Table 1 and Figure 1).

**Table 1:** The number of respondents and percentages

| Pupils                          | Number of Pupils | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------|
| In favour of early marriage     | 36               | 80%        |
| Not in favour of early marriage | 9                | 20%        |
| TOTAL                           | 45               | 100%       |



**Figure 1:** The percentage of respondents in favour of child marriages, which is represented by 80%, while those in favour of child marriages are represented by 20%

One of the participants, Purity by name (not real name), during the interview, has this to say, "It is good to get married early because this will help me not to be having sexual relations anyhow. I will always be faithful to my husband. Child marriage is not wrong. Another girl, Lungowe, by name (not real name), in a discussion, said, Child marriage is bad because it deprives young girls of their educational aspiration. In 2015, the *Girls Not Brides* noted that in many communities, the persistence of child marriage is a result of the tradition of marrying off girls when they reach the adolescent stage, which has been practised for many generations. These traditions are harmful cultural practices that define the rite of passage to womanhood. There is a school of thought that holds that marriage is a means to rein in young people whose actions are morally questionable.

Symptoms of this disorder include an increase in rudeness and disobedience at home, frequent late-night drinking, and having several sexual partners. Rather of putting a child at danger of contracting HIV and other STDs or, in the instance of girls, becoming pregnant outside of marriage, this perspective favours monogamy through marriage.

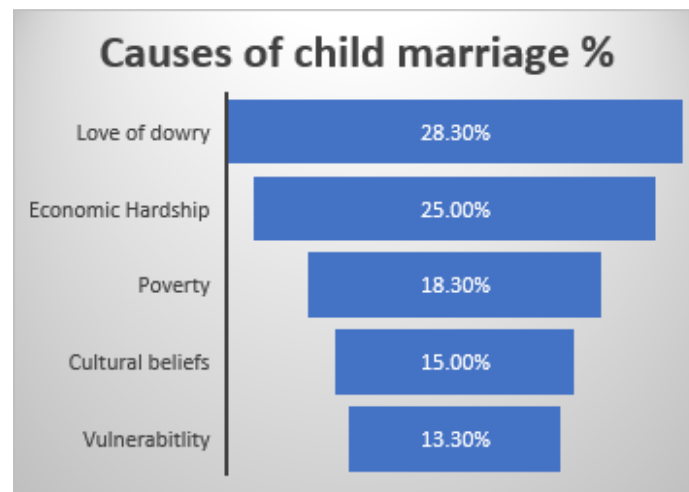
#### 4.3. What the respondent said about the causes of child marriage

Questionnaires were distributed to 60 participants, which comprised 45 students and 15 teachers, on the causes of child marriages. The table below shows the responses from the respondents (Table 2).

**Table 2:** The causes of child marriages

| Causes of Child Marriages | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|---------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Love for dowry            | 17                 | 28.3%      |
| Poverty                   | 11                 | 18.3%      |
| Vulnerability             | 8                  | 13.3%      |
| Economic Hardship         | 15                 | 25%        |
| Cultural beliefs          | 9                  | 15%        |
| Total                     | 60                 | 100        |

From the table above, the statistics showed that 17 respondents mentioned love of dowry as the cause of child marriage. 11 mentioned poverty as the cause of child marriage. In comparison, eight respondents saw vulnerability to be the cause of child marriage. Fifteen respondents said economic hardship is the cause of child marriage, while 9 said cultural beliefs (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** The causes of child marriages in percentage

Love of dowry is the highest cause of child marriage with 28.30%, followed by Economic hardship with a rate of 25%, while poverty is rated third at 18.30%. Poverty is followed by cultural beliefs with a rate of 15% and vulnerability with a rate of 13.30%. The participants also discovered this during focus group discussions from the three primary schools where the study was conducted. Girls participants felt that their parents, for the love of money, sold them to men to be married. This man ends up abusing the girls. Another reason was that in larger families, marrying off the eldest daughter provides the parents with the financial capacity to educate the young children, especially the boy child. This was supported by a few girls who came from low-income families. They supported the idea because they confessed that, some of them are kept by their elder sisters who were given in marriage while she was a child to help in keeping her young sisters.

#### 4.4. Effects of Child Marriage from literatures

The high rate of health problems associated with pregnancies brought about by child marriages is well-documented. Child marriage has well-documented health concerns to girls, including an increased risk of maternal death, STDs (including HIV), cervical cancer, and other illnesses. Compared to older mothers, girls have a far higher risk of dying during childbirth from complications like haemorrhaging and obstructed labour. Along the same lines, Fernandes [11] states that females who are married off at a young age often experience severe physical pain during sexual intercourse due to the physiological immaturity of their reproductive systems. Injuries like HIV/AIDS and bladder or bowel perforation during protracted delivery are common complications of adolescent pregnancies.

The girl will not be able to handle the changes that come with being pregnant unless she has adequate awareness about the sexual changes and physical changes that happen with puberty. Even middle-aged women nowadays are ill-equipped to mentor young women. Traditional midwives would keep a careful eye on things before, during, and after giving birth. However, modern-day women of advanced age are neither revered as women of yesteryear nor do they have the confidence to seek out the help of qualified medical professionals [11].

On the effects of child marriage, the majority of the participants pointed out that child marriages robs of the young boys and girls of their right to be educated. They also pointed out that child marriages accelerate poverty in families because, in most

cases, girls who are married when young and before they finish school remain illiterate. One among the participants said there is nothing wrong with child marriage. If your husband loves you, then he has to educate you. She cited the example of her elder sister, who was married at the age of 16, and her husband took her to school. And now the same lady is a teacher in a government school. Girls are also vulnerable to developing fistula, a condition that can cause feelings of humiliation and embarrassment because it leads to a leakage of urine. As a result, girls can become stigmatized and may be rejected by their husbands [13]; [2].

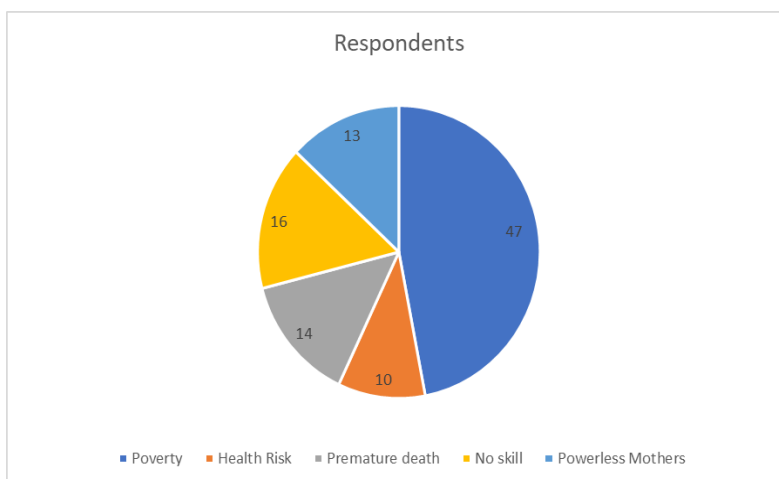
There is a lack of agency and decision-making capacity among young girls when it comes to their children's diet, healthcare, and household administration. This renders them unable of managing the family or making plans for it [11]. In most weddings, the bride and groom are quite young compared to one another. It is more common for the bride than the bridegroom to be under the age of eighteen in child weddings. Obviously, a bride-to-be has no voice in family matters while she is a young girl, and she must blindly follow her husband's commands. This effectively removes her voice from any decision-making or domestic matters [11].

#### 4.5. Responses from the respondents on the effects of child marriages

Out of 60 respondents, 47 (28.2%) indicated 'poverty' as the major effect of child marriages, and 10 (6%) of the respondents indicated that healthy risks are another negative outcome of the practice of child marriage. In contrast, 13 (7.8%) of the respondents affirmed that young mothers are powerless rather than liabilities to their husbands and the country. Premature death was also stated as a negative effect of early marriages by 14 (8.4%) of the respondents, while 16 (9.6%) indicated 'No skills & less productivity' (Table 3 and Figure 3).

**Table 3:** The effects of child marriages

| Effects of Child Marriage     | Number Respondents | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Poverty                       | 47                 | 28.2%      |
| Health Risks                  | 10                 | 6%         |
| Premature death               | 14                 | 8.4%       |
| Powerless mothers             | 13                 | 7.8%       |
| No skills & less productivity | 16                 | 9.6%       |
| TOTAL                         | 60                 | 100%       |



**Figure 3:** The number of respondents and their responses

#### 5. Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the causes and effects of child marriages on the girl child in Sesheke districts in the three primary schools (Mangamu, Katongo, and Nakatindi). From the findings, it is perceived that child marriage is a big problem in most of the schools in Zambia. The study concludes that many families marry off their daughters due to poverty. In other societies, some families marry off their daughters because of their traditional and cultural beliefs regarding sexuality. Boys and girls are also forced into early marriages as a way of controlling their unruly behaviours, such as having multiple sexual partners, hanging

out in bars, repeatedly staying out of home late, and becoming increasingly disrespectful and uncooperative at home. The fear of HIV/AIDS of some parents to their girls forces them to marry them at a very tender age. This is to make sure that they should fear their husbands so as not to involve themselves in immoral acts. The effects of child marriages are many. Child marriage has harmful effects on a girl child. Not only does it rob a girl child of her basic human rights, rather it also has profound effects on her emotional, social, physical, and financial wellbeing. Young girls in marriage exercise less influence and control over their children and have less ability to make decisions about their nutrition, health care, and household management. Child marriage affects both young women and young men, although the practice is more prevalent among young women.

### 5.1. Recommendations

Though some measures have been put in place, seeing that this vice is on the increase in some places, the research puts forward the following recommendations:

- The government should monitor the implementation of policies such as free education, re-entry programs, provision of effective menstrual sanitation facilities, and provision of comprehensive sexuality education.
- Members of Parliament should continue to urge the Government to report regularly to Parliament on the implementation of laws and programs on ending child marriage.
- Work closely with organizations that create “safe spaces” for girls to address the underlying causes of child marriage.
- Governments and NGOs should provide the required funding for the education of girls, including free books, uniforms, scholarships, and boarding houses.
- Communities should sensitize and educate one another about the effects of early marriage on the academic progress of the girl child.
- The government should provide girls with fair and stable work opportunities.
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local leadership, and teachers should seriously warn the entire community about the effects of early marriages on young girls.

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**Data Availability Statement:** The data utilized in this study were obtained from publicly available sources, including academic journals, government publications, and official reports from the school education department website. All data supporting the findings of this study are properly cited and can be accessed through these public domains. For further inquiries, the corresponding authors can be contacted at [mpundu.peter@gmail.com](mailto:mpundu.peter@gmail.com) and [v.nithyanantham@faculty.unicaf.org](mailto:v.nithyanantham@faculty.unicaf.org)

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**Ethics and Consent Statement:** The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

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