

Child Marriage in Girls, a Cause for Concern in Africa a Literature Review

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Abstract:- This paper presents a discussion on the child marriage in Africa. It is a literature review paper which outlines the level of child marriage in Africa as it compares with other continents in the world. The paper explained concepts of marriage in general and child marriage specific. Different factors which are major causes of child marriage in Africa were discussed. Furthermore, effects of the child marriage on individual, society, State and globally have also highlighted. The paper concluded by giving several approaches/strategies which can be adopted in Africa to mitigate the effects of child marriage.

I. INTRODUCTION

Child marriage has become an issue of concern globally. It is even more worrying in less developed regions including African continent. Researches are revealing alarming statistics on the level of child marriage in Africa. In fact, Africa is one of the continents with very high cases of child marriage, especially girl child marriage. Questions have been raised on the reason behind this. However, though no concrete answer can be put forward, it provoked some researchers who went on to identify what they termed the major factors influencing the child marriage in Africa. These factors include but not limited to poverty, low literacy rate, traditional and cultural beliefs. The effects of child marriage have hampered development, especially as it affects a girl child in Africa. Despite the presence of some international laws on child marriage, the cases continue to rise in Africa. However, some researchers have suggested several approaches/strategies which are meant to mitigate the effects of child marriage in Africa,

II. DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF CHILD MARRIAGE

➤ *Examining Marriage*

Child marriage can be traced to ancient times when marriage was allowed from a younger age for both boys and girls respectively (Coontz, 2005; Syrett, 2016, & Dolan, 2017). However, unpacking the construct of marriage itself would make it easier to understand what will be discussed as 'child marriage'. The Convention to Regulate Conflict of Laws in the Matter of Marriage was drafted by 12 European countries in 1902 (later liquefied), and the Havana Convention on Private International Law, drafted by 15 Latin American countries in 1928 sought legal agreement to

define marriage (Schwelb, 1963). In addition, the 1926 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices alike to Slavery ensured that individual's freedoms that form the foundation of marriage only happen upon individual's consent (Sarich, 2016). The above legal frameworks were set as precursors in understanding the contemporary legal concepts around the universal meaning of marriage, precisely child marriage (Efevbera & Bhabha, 2020).

The legally-binding international conventions and treaties that were signed by countries were set to protect human beings against ill-treatment. The same way these conventions and treaties were formed is the same way the legal construct of marriage was formed and supposed to be protected. The first agreed-upon international legal framework on marriage was the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Article 16 of the same declaration states that 'all men and women of full age have the right to marry and found a family, thus stating to marriage as the union that can be designed under the obligation of 'free and full consent' of individuals and is liquefied. Article 16 therefore indicates that there are rights and protections for married persons.

The 1962 Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages echoes the 1948 procedures and calls for the registration of marriages and abolishing of 'child marriages and the betrothal of young girls before the age of puberty'. However, there was no explanation of what the unions entail in the Convention. The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriage was revisited in 1965 where the 'full age' was completely defined as 15 years (UN General Assembly: Recommendation on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, 1965). This was used as a yardstick for persons who wanted to marry among member countries.

The coming of these conventions and treaties, and many international agreements created legal frameworks to define marriage. For instance, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966 provide a supplementary guiding principle for safeguarding human rights, mostly those for women and children (UN General Assembly: ICCPR & ICESCR, 1966).

However, the ICCPR and ICESCR were not binding laws until 1976.

Article 23 of the ICCPR explains the marriageable age with consent in all marital unions. Additional protected rights such as economic and social exploitation of young people. Article 10 of ICESCR and Article 13 of ICESCR explains education. The conventions emphasize on violation of rights in marital unions.

A more specific women's rights convention, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1981 stipulates women's rights, especially to younger ages that will be defenceless in marital issues. CEDAW further forbids discrimination against women, and child marriage and those women and men have distinct rights that need to be treated separately. Furthermore, the Convention encourages countries to have a minimum age for marriage and have formal registration of such unions.

To date, various legal frameworks have defined marriage in its simplest terms, however, according to anthropological and demographic literature, marriage is a complicated concept. Marriage is a union that symbolizes meanings in a different understanding of backgrounds. Bell (1997) indicates that marriage 'is a construction in a social space whose dimensions are defined by an articulation of rights and responsibilities. In the inherently uncomplicated understanding, 'marriage involves the entry of a man into a woman's domestic unit'.

In our modern society, 'entry' could be metaphorical rather than factual as marriage no longer wholly mean male-female relationships in all settings. Nevertheless, marriage is an institution, or a recognized social connection, that provides rights to those in this promise, and in traditional communities, will often include others outside the individuals themselves. The rights with which marriage is associated are different according to society as a result of their existence in relationships with others (Bell, 1997).

Haberland et al. (2003) as supported by Chinwuba (2016) postulate that when one looks at marriage within the traditional society, the socio-cultural and economic contexts shape marriage. The meaning of marriage in this context means two families are joined together, rather than two individuals who have agreed to marry each other. More so, marriage in many societies is rooted in religious beliefs. For instance, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism have a great impact as it expects marriages to be rooted in these religious principles. A good example is drawn from the context of the 1890s Hindu religion of India as described by Roy:

Marriage is expressly said to be a divine union. Christ said 'What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.' We find Solomon calling the wife a 'gift from the Lord,' and in the marriage service appointed by the Church of England someone [sic] is required to stand as the donor of the bride, as is the case in every Hindoo marriage.

'Marriage,' says an eminent doctor (Hindoo) of law, 'is viewed as a gift of the bride by her father or other guardians to the bridegroom.' The marital union is thus divine; it is an act of God and not of man. It is apparent that marriage is not a civil contract, and consent is not the essence of it. The Roman Catholics regard it as a sacrament; so, do the Hindus (Roy, 1888).

Even today, the writings of Roy remind people that the colonial legacy and mixed culture have affected how marriage can be interpreted. A study that was carried out in Uganda shows that words like 'love' and 'faithfulness' are used interchangeably within the marriage discourse, hence, realities of marriage are often articulated differently (Agol et al., 2014). Haberland et al., (2003) present arguments to emphasize that perhaps marriage can be seen as a course with a sequence of proceedings, choices, and rites instead of a dichotomous classification of an individual's relationship status.

A key aspect of marriage is some relationships that are considered to be married in other local contexts will not end in legal union (Haberland et al., 2003). This will result in challenges on whether to document such unions as marriage mostly in research. Neither common nor civil law has legislation that supports such kinds of marriage based on age and consent between the marrying individuals whereas, customary law and religious teachings might have unions that do not correlate with the common or civic laws on marriage (Black, 2001).

Due to the challenges that people are facing, cohabitation has become another form of marriage that is taking its course in different societies. Nowadays, the majority of both women and men have once stayed with a woman/man like married couples (Rindfuss & VandenHeuvel, 2019). Some prefer cohabitation to legal unions and some end up cohabiting due to various reasons that might include a lack of sustainable livelihoods (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) (2019) one of the international recognised sources of nationally-representative household data, asks women: 'Have you ever been married or lived together with someone as if married?' or whom you can refer to as 'husband/partner'. The design of marriage had an understanding of customary laws and local norms, which gives an overview of how people define their relationship status. As noted, before, marriage has been built from a legal and socio-culturally point of view.

Looking at the legal frameworks presented herein, they perhaps use the top-down approach in coming up with marriage definition which has resulted in a broad spectrum of international policy agreements on the creation of peaceful regional agreements and national legislations on marriage (Megan et al, 2017; Parsons, 2015 & Sagade, 2011). The formation of marriage definition has created an understanding of marriage civilly on all geographical borders which have helped in coming up with a more

conclusive agreement on marriage's conceptualization, practice, and enforcement.

Since marriage definitions have been agreed upon, however, due to the intricate and multifaceted societies, today civil law only helps in constructing marriage and being understood; marriage cannot be condensed to its lawful meaning alone. More so, the legal perspective has helped people to understand marriage, however, marriage has lost its customary, religious, and wider socio-cultural backgrounds in which people comprehend and participate in the exercise of marriage.

➤ *Defining Child Marriage*

The term 'child marriage' began to be known between 1955 and 1957 from scientific articles published in PubMed. PubMed is one of the major databases for health-related research. Publications wherein the context of Israel and England (Efevbera, 2018; Efevbera & Bhabha, 2020; Smyth, 1957; Gruenberg, 1955). As from 1957 to 1977 there were no publications on child marriages. It was until 1978 when the concept of child marriage publications emerged with few articles on India, neighbouring South Asian countries, and the advantages of stopping child marriage as a population control measure (Efevbera, 2018).

The year 1984 gave birth to the first PubMed publication on child marriage which was for sub-Saharan Africa (Mati et al., 1984). Research on child marriage remained sluggish for decades until a slight increase was noted in 1995 in the context of India (Efevbera & Bhabha, 2020). The slow increase in child marriage research in the mid-1990s gained a noticeable momentum that increased discussions on safeguarding girls' and women's rights and protecting their sexual and reproductive health (United Nations, 1995). The World Summit for Children held in 1990 made world leaders for the first time in entire history prioritize the protection of girls and boys.

Following this, child marriage received traction as the main term. Procedural discussions across organizations were undertaken. In 2003 and 2005, UNICEF and other partners worked together to measure five indicators to have an in-depth understanding of the concept. This resulted in UNICEF expanding the definition of child marriage (UNICEF, 2005). According to UNICEF's report titled 'Early Marriage: A Harmful Traditional Practice', the word 'child marriage' was used so many times in the text. They meant that 'child marriage' referred to 'both formal marriages and informal unions in which a girl lives with a partner as if married before she reaches 18 years (UNICEF, 2005).

Although there was no agreement on the inclusion of 'informal unions' in the definition of child marriage, organizations such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), the Forum, and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) continued to work on the definition of 'child marriage'. They maintained the age of

18 because of the human rights agenda and its, health, social, and economic costs (Braeken et al, 2006).

A lot of publications on 'child marriage' augmented over time. Raj (2010) seems to be the first author to use the words 'girl child marriage' as indicated in her paper on child marriage and health (Efevbera & Bhabha, 2020). Even though she provided no rationale for her use of this revised terminology, it makes sense as a framing tool, because her research focuses on the consequences for only women married as children (Efevbera & Bhabha, 2020).

All things considered, publications on health-related and girl-child marriage started to gain momentum. A remarkable increase in scholarly research was overwhelming which was supported by global impetus in the last decade. It also marked the birth of highly recognized profiles such as Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage, the launching of United Nations International Day of the Girl promoting the call against child marriage, and the incorporation of child marriage pointers to keep track of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals plan (Efevbera & Bhabha, 2020).

III. PREVALENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGE

➤ *Global and Regional*

Child marriage prevalence varies accordingly and, in some countries, data is not readily available due to countries not being willing to present statistical data and information (Raj, 2010). This, however, has affected the representation of the phenomenon globally. International organizations like UNICEF, UNFPA, World Health Organisation (WHO), The ICRW, and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division among others have worked tirelessly to come up with substantiated data on child marriages across all nations (World Health Organization, 2016).

Some countries do not have readily available data on child marriage and this does not mean child marriages are non-existent as mostly women and children will be enormously affected without any recorded information available (World Health Organization, 2016). This, however, pose a negative impact on the well-being of children, families, the community, and the country. Not only does it harms the country and its people but contributes to less development in the region and the whole world. For example, all efforts to reduce the practice as stipulated by sustainable development goal (SDG) 5, Target 3 to eliminate all harmful practices including a child, early, and forced marriage will go unnoticed.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development shows willingness for change in social, economic, and environmental by the international community. Adopting the SDGs, showed oneness and having the same mind-set to the challenge by all nations to complete the unfinished business which began with the millennium development goals (MDGs) in areas such as combating inequality, building

peaceful societies, and protecting human rights (UNICEF, 2018). For the sake of this paper, goal 5 of the SDGs will be the centre of reference. The goal seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, admitting that gender disparities are a persistent reality and a barrier to global development. Embraced in SDG 5, target 5.3's objective is to abolish all harmful practices against women and girls. Harmful practices include female genital mutilation and child marriages. During the era of MDGs, it did not address the issue the SDGs seek to address. The target sets to eliminate child marriages by 2030 and this practice has gained much momentum across the whole globe and no tolerance has been welcomed in all endeavours (UNICEF, 2018).

UNICEF report (2018) indicates that the practice of child marriage has shown a decline around the whole world. According to UNICEF's 2018 report which explains the recently collected data from each country, 21 percent of young women between the ages of 20 to 24 were married as children. A decrease was shown by 25 percent over 10 years ago in which India has revealed considerable progress. As a result of continued efforts to end child marriages, UNICEF (2018) has projected 25 million child marriage cases have been prohibited in the last decade. UNICEF (2018:2)

postulates that out of 25 million, 7 million were predictable based on the previous trends and 18 million were due to fast-tracked progress.

Statistics indicate that, out of girls and women who are currently alive today, approximately 650 million were married before they reached their 18th birthday (UNICEF, 2020). This shows how deadly child marriage was two decades ago. With tremendous efforts carried out, child marriages have shown a progressive decrease; however, this should not make countries relax but increase measures to eliminate child marriages across all nations.

The practice of child marriage has shown a progressive decline around the world. In the previous decade, the proportion of young women married as children declined by 15 percent, from 1 in 4 (25%) to roughly 1 in 5 (21%) (UNICEF, 2018). Global distribution of child marriage by region is as follows; South Asia 285 million, 44 percent; Sub-Saharan Africa 115 million, 18 percent; East Asia and Pacific 75 million, 12 percent; the Middle East and North Africa 35 million, 5 percent; Latin America and the Caribbean 60 million, 9 percent and other regions 80 million, 12 percent (UNICEF, 2018; Plan International Asia Hub, 2018).

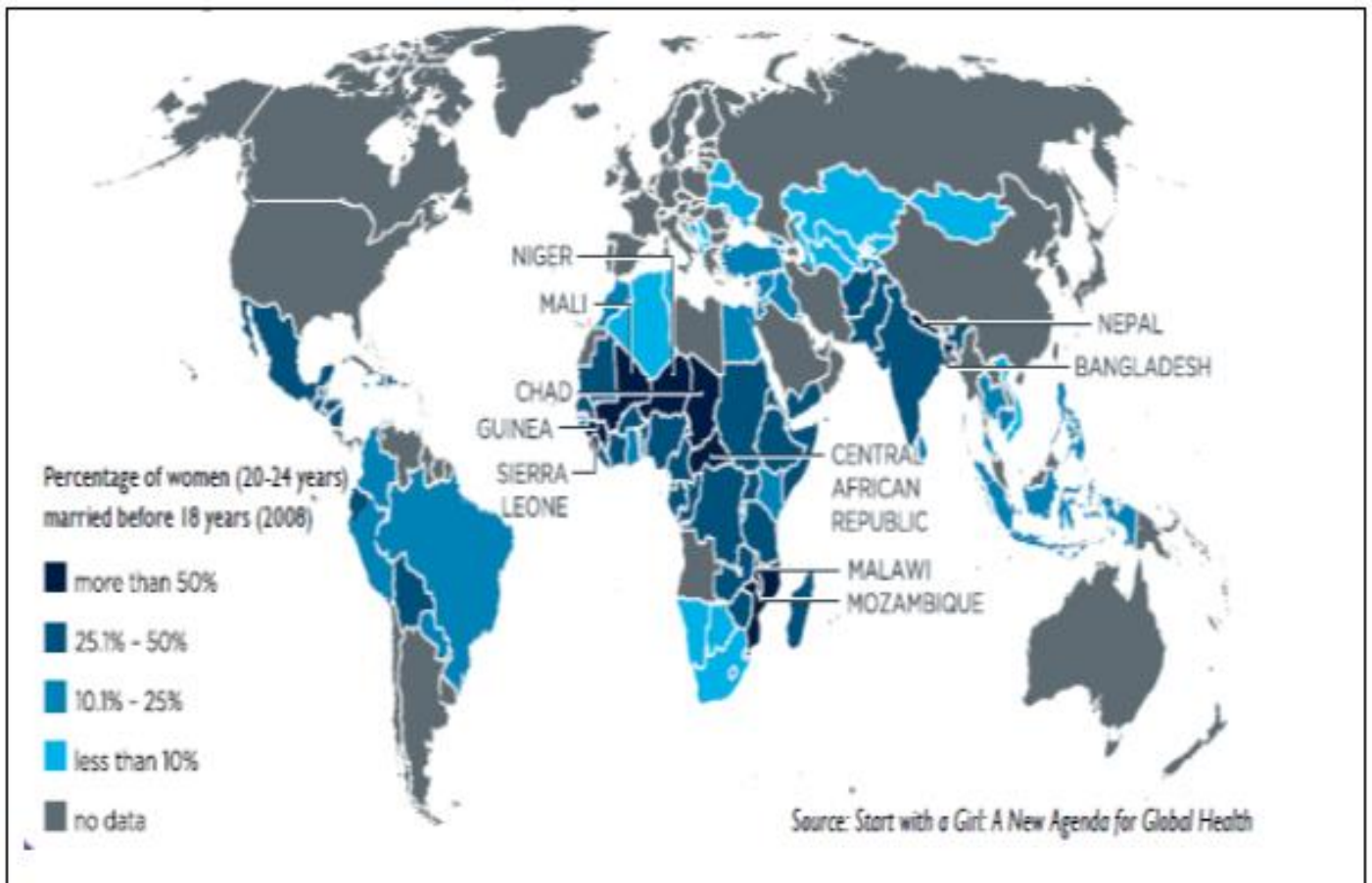


Fig 1 Below is a Map Showing the Prevalence of Early Child Marriage Around the World. Source: PMNCH Knowledge Summary 22 – Reaching child brides. The Partnership for Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health, 2012

A remarkable decline has been shown in South Asia where a girl's risk of being married in childhood was more than a third, which almost reached 50 percent 10 years ago to 30 percent today (UNICEF, 2018). The reduction was as a result of great efforts put forward to reduce child marriages in India. Since there is a great improvement, South Asia is still home to the biggest population of child brides, constituting 40 percent of the global problem. This was caused by the tolerance of child marriages by earlier generations and the region has an enormous population (McCleary-Sills et al., 2015; Paul, 2019; Raj, 2010, & Raj et al, 2009).

Having realized a substantiated decrease in child marriages, the global challenge is shifting from South Asia to sub-Saharan Africa. To the newly married child brides globally, 1 in 3 are now found in sub-Saharan Africa contrary to 25 years ago when it was 1 in 7 (UNICEF, 2018). With a reasonable decrease in child marriages in sub-Saharan Africa, in precisely West and Central Africa, the region has the uppermost occurrence of child marriages with the progress that is sluggish in the whole world (UNICEF, 2018). Not that sub-Saharan Africa is better than West and Central Africa, but the incredibly growing population in sub-Saharan Africa will increase the prevalence of child marriage during the coming years (UNICEF, 2018).

Population growth in sub-Saharan Africa is inevitable, progress is possible. This is evidenced by Ethiopia which used to be among the top 5 countries with the highest prevalence of child marriages in sub-Saharan Africa and has decreased by a third during the past decade (UNICEF, 2021). UNICEF report (2017) shows that girls in West and Central Africa encounter a lot of challenges of being married in their childhood, 4 in 10 young women were married before they reach 18 years. Of all the child marriages in the region, 1 in 3 was married before the age of 15. West and Central Africa incorporate 6 out of 10 countries with the uppermost occurrence of child marriage in the world (UNICEF, 2017).

In West and Central Africa, the progress to reduce child marriage is quite different with some countries showing a better decline whereas others have no progress at all (UNICEF, 2017). For instance, statistics show that in Angola, Burkina Faso, and Cabo Verde there is no indication of a decrease in the historical quarter of the century (UNICEF, 2017), whereas Central African Republic, levels of child marriage practice seem to be increasing. UNICEF (2017) alludes that if the occurrence of child marriage keeps on dropping at the detected rate, 1 in 3 girls will be married in their childhood by 2030, and more than 1 in 4 by 2050. These are alarming figures that need prompt action to lessen the levels of the practice.

Over the past 25 years, the Middle East and North Africa have shown remarkable progress in reducing the prevalence of child marriage. However, the past decade has shown slow progress (UNICEF, 2018), whereas in Latin America and the Caribbean no evidence has been shown of the progress of child marriage. This region's levels of child marriage are as high as they were 25 years ago whilst in East Asia and the Pacific and Eastern Europe and Central Asia prevalence of child marriage remains low. However, girls from less privileged populations are still in danger (UNICEF, 2019).

It has been noted that child marriage in Latin America and the Caribbean is a result of informal union and child brides which are commonly found in rural areas in poor households in which the level of literacy is very low or non-existent (Svanemyr et al, 2015). Women who were married during their childhood stage gave birth before they reach their 18th birthday, and 8 in 10 did so before they turned their 20th birthday. A significant change in child marriage prevalence has been noticed in other countries across Latin America and the Caribbeans (UNICEF, 2019), however, the occurrence of child marriage in Latin America and the Caribbean has continued not to change for 25 years. UNICEF's 2019 reports state that by 2030, Latin America and the Caribbean will be among the world's leading regions with the highest levels of child marriage if the noted trends continue which will make it to be stream behind sub-Saharan Africa.

IV. CHILD MARRIAGE IN AFRICA

➤ Below is map showing child marriage prevalence across Africa.

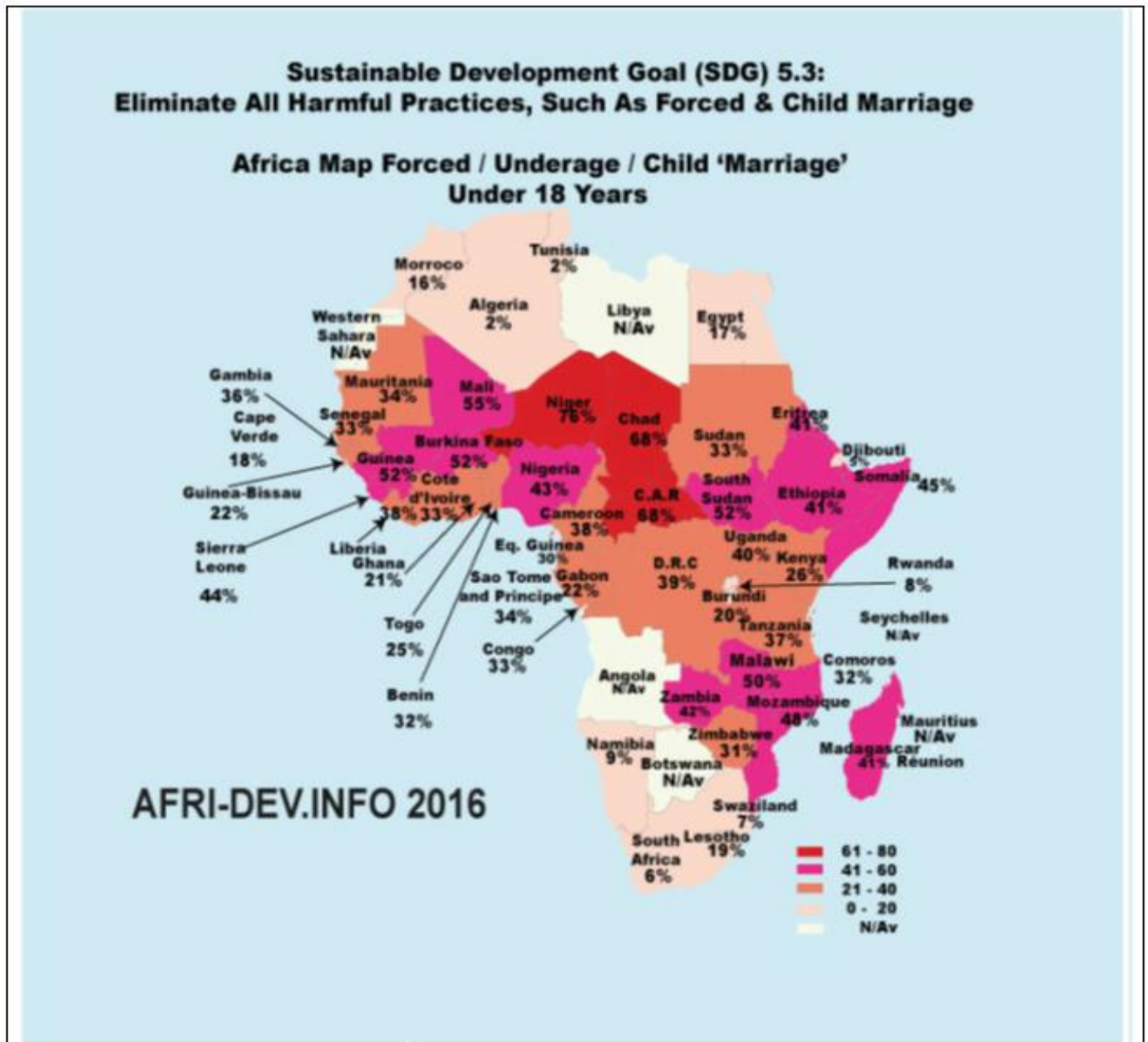


Fig 2 Child Marriage Prevalence Across Africa¹

Having noticed a global reduction in child marriage, no region is on track to meet the SDG target of eradicating this detrimental practice by 2030. Malhotra and Elnakib (2021) advocate the view that to meet the 2030 SDG target for child marriage reduction, rates of reducing child marriages need to increase 11 times to their existing trajectory. Globally and regionally, there is still more work to be done to reduce the occurrence of child marriage. Not only the country has to fight against child marriages as a result of SDGs or any other influential external forces; all countries have to put all their internal efforts to eliminate factors that increase the occurrence of child marriages. Child marriage is a defilement of women's and children's livelihoods, human rights, and well-being across all nations.

¹ Map derived from the Afri-Dev. Info 2016 Report, 'Multisectoral Information. Data, Research & Evidence for Health, Population, Human & Sustainable Development'.

➤ *Drivers of Child Marriage in Africa*

Organisation Girls Not Brides (2017c) and Centre for Human Rights & African Commission Special Rapporteur on Rights of Women (2018) supported the view that the common drivers of child marriage in Africa emanate from a number of factors which include poverty, limited or a lack of access to education, the fear for a daughter's safety, cultural/traditional and religious beliefs and the stigma associated with straying away from them. Unaligned legal frameworks, inadequate birth and marriage registration procedures, armed conflict and sexual violence, and an overall underlying situation of gender inequality whereby girls have a low value placed on them are some of the top influencers of girl child marriage in Africa.

➤ *Gender Inequality*

Centre for Human Rights (CHR) and the African Commission Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women (ACSRRW) (2018) commented that child marriage mostly affects young girls who usually get married to older men. Furthermore, it is challenging to understand the social, cultural, and economic aspects of the drivers of child marriage without mentioning the inferiority status when these young girls marry an older man. Marrying of young girls by older men was and still is practiced in many African societies as a result of many factors such as poverty, and being unable to send girl children to schools. Due to cultural diversity across Africa, no one culture can be said to be better than the other, however, many groups share the similarities when it comes to the structure of family relations and gender roles (CHR & ACSRRW, 2018).

Some of the factors that cause gender inequality include religious beliefs and practices, customs, and formal and informal laws and customs that date back to the colonial era (CHR & ACSRRW, 2018). These factors can control women and girls' social and economic roles. Hodgkinson (2016) indicates that in most cases women and girls are incapacitated to voice out their voices, unable to choose what they want thus increasing underdevelopment in girls and women whereas boys will be encouraged to excel in life and are credited to a higher value.

In some circles, girl child is regarded as 'property' hence they are not prioritized to attend and reach an advanced level of education by their biological and legal guardian families. Many African families therefore, do not recognize girls as important as boys as they will often leave their parent's houses to get married. Lack of knowledge and good advice for most African families make them to abandon girl child as they have the barbaric belief that the girl's work revolves around the kitchen and the bedroom (private dichotomy) (Shakya et al., (2022); Ahonsi et al., 2019). More so, girls are socialized in a manner that does not allow them to see the future outside the kitchen and the bedroom. Because of that, a girl child cannot aim for a better opportunity in life, hence their livelihood always revolve around their husband and make sure they have done their wifely roles all the time.

➤ *Traditional, Cultural, and Religious Beliefs*

There are some traditions, cultures, and religious beliefs that undermine women's and girl child's rights while at the same time perpetuating child marriages in their practice (Psaki et al., 2021). The respect that is put in those traditions, cultures, and religious beliefs by societies worsens the situation of the girl child and, in most cases, the beneficiaries of it are men opposed to the girl child who is always the victim of the system. From the literature gathered, child marriages have been deeply rooted in traditional, cultural, and religious beliefs across Africa (Montazeri et al, 2016). Issues like beliefs about sexuality, gender roles, and women's subordination are found in many customary practices, traditions, cultures, and religions which put women and girls in a difficult position (CHR & ACSRRW, 2018).

One of the well-known practices is seeing girls and woman's lives revolving around the house and society see no need to invest in them or encourage them to fulfil their dreams and life goals. It also increases incidents of girls getting in child marriage as it can be seen as the only achievement they can have in their lives (Sayi, & Sibanda, 2018). Another practice is the payment of bride price which is made important in most African societies, and this puts a girl child in a difficult position. This system has taken a girl child to be an economic resource which families can opt to raise money. Sending off the girl child for early marriage and also for bride price is used by most African families as a way to sustain themselves from poverty, hunger, and starvation (Hodgkinson, 2016; Smaak & Varia, 2015).

Church doctrines brainwash church followers to believe child marriage is right. Some of churches in Africa such as the white garments, Zionist, Islamic, and Moslem are among religious sects that believe in the doctrine which consider child marriage as a source of preserving virginity to future husbands (Le Roux & Palm, 2018). Most girls in these churches are forced to marry early to prevent premarital sex and preserve family honour. African countries with a sizeable number of churches that encourage child marriage have also increased cases of child marriage. For instance, Gambia with 95% of the population being Muslims do not consider child marriage as a violation of children's rights, instead, it is perceived as appropriate (CHR & ACSRRW, 2018). In Zimbabwe, the white garment and Zionist church have a sizeable number of followers and Zimbabwe is amongst 41 nations with the highest cases of child marriages (UNFPA, 2015; Sloth-Nielsen, 2016).

➤ *Poverty*

Girls Not Brides (2017c) states that children from marginalized families and communities, especially families that cannot sufficiently feed themselves are more into child marriage practice. Statistics indicate that children especially girls from such families are more than three times more likely to marry before they reach 18 years, and 50 percent of girls who came from poor families in underdeveloped countries are married as children. Poverty in Africa is a stumbling block to so many girls' opportunities. It is

believed that eradication of poverty can reduce child marriage in Africa.

Many African countries are receiving aid from international organizations to assist in reducing poverty levels and this has helped many girls to successfully overpower early marriage (Lee-Rife, 2012). However, humanitarian aid at some point has failed to reach the targeted population due to many reasons including civil war, corruption, and socio-economic and political challenges affecting the African countries (Walker, 2012; Mpilambo, 2017). As a result, poverty persists and lot of girls suffer thus end up getting married early. This could be avoided if more effort could be put to eradicate poverty in Africa. More so, authorities of both state and none state institutions can focus on the welfare and protection of girls and women (Walker, 2012).

From the literature, poverty is the main driver of child marriage. The decision that lies behind the marrying of young girls could be self-serving and centralization of the well-being of the girl herself (Madzivire, 2019). The payment of the bride price is seen as a way reducing poverty by extremely poor families. In this system, girls are given to husbands who are considered to possess resources which can make the family better off. It is seen as a source of 'income-generating project' by the bride's family, hence the bride's family consider giving young girl for them to be able to sustain their livelihoods through the paid bride price and continue receiving support from the husband (Girls Not Bride, 2019c; Smaak & Varia, 2015; & CHR & ACSRRW, 2018).

Issues of consent and age of the girl are not important and this has affected many girls as they cannot choose or make informed decisions in marriage process. Girls are also married off to older husbands that control every decision of their lives and in most times, decision does not favour their (girls) health and wellbeing. For instance, family size is determined by the husband, whether to take family planning methods or not will be the husband's decision. There will be a lack of respect from the husband's family as the bride will be very young among the husband's family members, more so the newly married bride in most cases will be the second or third wife and expected to do all house chores by the older wife(s) (Chirowa et al, 2013; Batist, 2019; Shoola, 2014).

➤ *Lack of Education*

Child marriage and school dropouts are closely interrelated in Africa (Madzivire, 2019). Studies on school enrolment revealed that girls' enrolment outnumbers boys during their primary education level. However, most girls do not reach or complete secondary school as compared to boys (Psaki et al, 2021). In most African countries, girls from poor backgrounds do not have the chance to complete secondary school due to many reasons such as parents' being unable to pay school fees. In a family with both boys and girls going to school, the boy child will be prioritized to go to school at the expense of the girl child (CHR &

ACSRRW, 2018). This is because many African families believe that supporting a boy child will benefit the family as he will take up the family name and honour compared to the girl who is believed that she will be married and enrich the family that she will get married to (Hodgkinson, 2016).

Girls Not Brides (2017c) states that over 60% of women who failed to receive proper and appropriate education were married before they reach 18 years. Furthermore, girls with no education are 3 times as likely to marry before 18 as compared to those with secondary or higher qualifications. Lack of education is therefore one of the factors considered to harm girls as they fail to prioritize and follow their dreams. Such girls cannot see the disadvantages of marrying young, and they cannot challenge decisions made upon them due to the lack of knowledge.

Access to education is very important and necessary to girls as it reduces the likeliness of being married young. This is supported by the studies undertaken by Parsons et al (2015); Vogelstein (2013); Plan UK (2011) & Malhotra et al (2011) show that taking children, especially girl child to school reduces the chances of getting married young. School children are treated as minors as such going to school sounds a protective measure to a girl child. Making girls stay at home increases their chance of married young as perpetrators of child marriage will treat them as adults and ready for marriage.

Lack of adequate education also increases their chances of getting less empowered. Currently, they are empowerment projects going on in African countries dedicated to empowering girls and women. However, those who have not completed their secondary education are finding it difficult to comprehend such empowerment projects as they are considered to be illiterate (Male & Wodon, 2018). It has been proven that gaining a skill when one lacks basic education is challenge and this is the situation of most African girls who abandon school at early stages for marriage.

Lack of basic education increases the inability to appreciate empowerment programs, projects, and skills thus increasing the girls' likelihood to become poor for the rest of their lives (McCleary-Sills et al, 2015). When these girls do not have anything to change their lives, it creates economic and social dependence on their husbands and families who already have caused them to get into child marriages (Hodgkinson, 2016). The inability of most African governments to increase favourable and conducive environments for girls to remain in school has an indirect influence on promoting child marriages.

For instance, in remote areas where schools are far from villages, girls are likely to discontinue schooling as a result of distance (Mabemba, 2020). House chores that the girls are supposed to do affects their school schedules and in most cases they end up abandoning school due to overwhelming domestic duties. Their only focus will be in the house and taking care of the family and seeing it as their

only life achievement (CHR & ACSRRW, 2018; McCleary-Sills et al., 2015 & Girls Not Brides, 2017c).

V. CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage has been declared by United Nations and other global agencies as a violation of human and children's rights (Bengesai et al, 2021; Sloth-Nielsen, 2016). Failure to protect the children against this practice will result in their well-being and livelihoods being negatively affected. The consequences of child marriage are more health and socioeconomic as these two have an influential impact on the well-being and future of the children. Below is a discussion of the consequences of child marriage, which this paper has grouped into two categories; health and socioeconomic consequences:

➤ *Health Consequences*

• *Isolation and Depression*

Child marriage affects children and young adults with both devastating long and short-term effects (Irani & Latifnejad Roudsari, 2019). Children married young or forced to enter into marriage have no idea on how to handle or what it is all about due to immaturity. It is in the marriage when they realize that it is a whole lot of things that they cannot deal with. For instance, assuming wife duties at an age of 15-year is deadly to the girl's health and socioeconomic well-being. When a child is married, she leaves her family and at times the community she is used to.

Beginning a new lifestyle elsewhere is highly depressing to a child, with no friends, relatives, and even community members (Parsons et al, 2015). As discussed previously, in most cases children are married to an older man who already has enough resources to pay for the bride's wealth. Parents, as a result of poverty at times forcefully marry their children to get rid of their circumstances and the girl feels rejected, and isolated and ends up being depressed. Ways to cope with the new environment is to bear children and comply with the new family arrangements (Irani, & Latifnejad Roudsari, 2019).

➤ *Risk of Sexually Transmitted Infection and Cervical Cancer*

The available literature shows that girls are forced to enter into early marriages when they are young and still require to be protected against premature sexual activities. In fact, they should engage in activities which should get rid of poverty, and maintain family honour. However, young girls who enter into early marriage are at risk of getting human immunodeficiency viruses (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) related diseases (Kashyap et al, 2019). This is because of a lack of enough relevant information on when and how to be sexually active and to get tested. As a result, they will not be able to challenge unprotected sex and lack knowledge on the advantages and disadvantages of practicing safe sex. Sometimes due to childish, they even fail to notice any physical signs and symptoms of a person who is suffers

from sexually transmitted diseases (Mahato, 2016). For instance, in Uganda, the HIV occurrence rate of married girls and single girls between the age of 15 and 19 years is 89 percent and 66 percent correspondingly (Okwi et al, 2017). Mostly, married girls are infected by their older husbands.

Influence from the community, relatives, and parents that the husband is always correct harm girls. This is as a result of patriarchal ideologies that have been supported since time immemorial. These patriarchal beliefs harm girls and societies as they shape and influence the treatment given to men as compared to women. Child marriage also intensifies the risk of human papillomavirus transmission and cervical cancer (Mwaka et al, 2016), and other sexually transmitted diseases like herpes simplex virus type 2, gonorrhea, and chlamydia make girls vulnerable to HIV (Mwaka et al, 2016).

➤ *Complicated Pregnancy*

Efevbera et al. (2019) and Black et al. (2013) supported the fact that 10 percent of women in sub-Saharan Africa are underweight regardless of the efforts put forward to rectify this from 1980 to 1995. A remarkable drop was noticed from 18 percent to 11 percent. Being underweight harms childbearing women and more specifically, pregnant women as this becomes risk to both mother and child which is likely to result in premature death, and child mortality.

Young girls who became pregnant at an early age have a higher risk of having severe pregnancy complications such as giving birth to premature babies, mothers or babies dying during or soon after giving birth and suffering from obstetric fistula (Ahmed, 2015). Pregnancy has its complication and for children whose bodies will be weak and immature to carry the pregnancy worsens the risk of severe complications. More so, in countries with higher cases of malaria infections, girls who become pregnant are also at-risk during pregnancy as a result of malaria infections (Paul, 2020; Mahato, 2016 & Adedokun et al, 2016). In Africa, this situation is worsened by lack of appropriate infrastructure, medical personnel and medicine in health institutions.

➤ *Risks During Child Delivery*

Young girls who are pregnant are exposed to many risks including loss of blood during and after delivery, obstetric fistula, fluid embolism, maternal mortality, and preeclampsia (Paul, 2020; Adedokun et al, 2016). Some of the contributing factors include lack of prenatal care visits as soon as they know they are pregnant, failure to have prenatal care check-ups, unable to eat healthily, and psychological, verbal, and emotional abuse (Kabir et al, 2019). These risks usually emanate from a lack of adequate information about the importance of maternal health care (WHO, 2017; International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), 2018). Death rates are secondary to eclampsia, postpartum, hemorrhage, sepsis, HIV infection, malaria, and obstructed labour (WHO, 2016).

➤ *Risks on the Part of Infants*

Not only young mothers are affected by a pregnancy, but also their newborns. WHO (2016) states that risks for infants include stillbirths, newborn deaths, severe neonatal conditions, and premature births which have a double impact on the baby and the mother. Girls Not Brides (2022) postulates that, stillbirths and newborn deaths are 50 percent higher in mothers below the age of 18 years. An estimated 21 million girls in developing countries between 15 to 19 years become pregnant and 12 million give birth; 777,000 births happen to be adolescent girls below the age of 15 years in developing countries (Darroch et al., 2016; UNFPA, 2015). Early pregnancy as a result of child marriage is among the leading causes of death among girls aged 15 to 19 years which negatively affect the life of the newborns as they will grow up without parents (Neal, 2015).

➤ *Intimate Partner Violence*

Child marriage is a form of violence against young girls (Amin 2014; Solotaroff & Pande, 2014). Intimate partner violence might be a result of the age difference, and gender norms that seek to undermine a girl thus promoting violence in marriage. Parents who have force or allow their children to marry at early age usually have the belief that they will be securing economic security and safety for their children especially in countries affected by war, encountering economic hardships, and poverty (Plan International, 2020).

However, in most cases, this is opposite as pointed in Girls Not Brides (2022) who contends that girls who are marry below the age of 15 have 50 percent chances to have experienced sexual, psychological, or physical violence from their partners which situation is unlikely in girls married at 18 years when they are mature. Not only do they receive intimate partner violence, but girls also go through sexual, physical, emotional, and psychological violence and abuse at the hands of their in-laws and relatives of the husband (UNICEF, 2014b). This is because of their dependability on their in-laws, family, and husband.

Gender norms, in this case, have a contributing factor, for instance, high respect and honour to the husband, and the belief that the husband is always right and cannot make any decision without him knowing escalates violence against girls married young (Kabir et al, 2019; Mahato, 2016). A study by ICRW in India's two states revealed that girls married below the age of 18 were twice likely to report being slapped, beaten, or threatened by their husbands unlike girls married above 18 years. This reveals that intimate partner violence is more in child marriage.

Kidman (2017) postulates that girls who marry at a tender age are more likely to experience intimate partner violence and have higher chances of having unintended pregnancy, induced abortion, pregnancy complications, low birth weight of children, and sexually transmitted diseases. Intimate partner violence affects the mental well-being of girls thus resulting in depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Ahinkorah et al, 2021; Tenkorang,

2019 & Yount et al, 2016). Data from the Afghanistan government reveal that, 2 400 women who go through suicide every year, the chief causes include early and forced marriage; sexual and domestic violence (Qamar et al, 2022).

This shows that intimate partner violence has a lot of negative impacts on the well-being and livelihoods of girls married young. Not only do girls who are married young suffer from intimate partner violence, but children born from families that go through intimate partner violence are also exposed to both the long- and short-term effects of violence (Ellsberg et al, 2015 & UNICEF 2014b). Howell et al (2016), WHO (2012), and Anand et al (2012) support the view that children who are exposed to violence at home will not attend school regularly thus resulting in them having low grades in school, and their physical health deteriorates. More so, children who witness abuse tend to abuse their partners when they become adults and abuse other children at school or in their communities.

VI. SOCIOECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

➤ *Education*

ICWR (2018) noticed that, 10 to 30 percent of girls dropping out of school is as a result of early child marriage or pregnancy. Parsons et al (2015) indicate that the girls are removed from social networking and support systems that the school provide if married or falls pregnant. This therefore, reduces their chances of having a better future. ICWR (2018) and Nguyen & Wodon (2015a) hold the position that each year marriage to girls below the age of 18 decreases their possibility of completing secondary school by 4 to 6 percent. This makes girls unable to solve global problems as stipulated by SDG4 on quality education (Kwauk, 2017).

Bengesai et al. (2021) state that, lack of education in girls also makes them lack adequate knowledge and skills that could carry them through life to become industrious in their communities and households. More so, most of these girls are unable to access adult education even after marriage, as they will be having extended responsibility of taking care of their husband, new family, and bearing children. In terms of their employability, they are likely to earn low to no wages and continue to live in poverty which becomes a miserable life for the rest of their lives. It is known that education enlightens children and allows them to make informed decisions. It helps every individual to continue to pursue their dreams even after getting married and limit chances of vulnerabilities (Wodon et al, 2020).

Child marriage is more visible in poor families who are unable to send their children to school and end up marrying their children to better-off man for economic gain (Wodon et al, 2020). The Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) is a human treaty that explains the civil, political, economic, social, health, and cultural rights of children. Countries that are indorsed to this convention are bound to international law and the amenability is observed

by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

Despite the fact that the right to education is among the rights found in CRC, however, this right seem not fully exercised in countries with high cases of child marriage. The right is being violated as seen in many girl children getting married before acquiring basic education. More work has to be done to safeguard this right, especially in countries with high levels of child marriage, which can see as the only way to protect children against child marriage practice. Education should be extended to families and communities for them to see its importance thus winning support from all angles (ICRW, 2018). Education is helpful to advance individual's social skills and networks which help build strong support systems. These support systems will help girls to participate in community affairs, national-level discussions, debates, and engage in the political process and events (Parsons et al., 2015). It is unfortunate to note that girls who do not get the opportunity to go to school are marrying early (UNICEF, 2014b).

Inability to access proper education has an effect of denying girls important information on health and welfare for young ladies and their children (Mabemba, 2020). A study by Mabemba (2020) on access to maternal healthcare among women of childbearing age in resettlement areas of former white-owned farms shows that women who were married young could not complete primary and secondary school, and were unable to read and write. If they could have completed primary and secondary school, they could have received basic knowledge and understanding of what is important for them and their immediate family. It was observed during this study that maternal healthcare challenge experienced by girls was as a result of illiteracy in them.

Parson et al. (2015) noted that mothers of children who received relevant education (primary, secondary and tertiary) are in a position to spend more time and resources on the health and wellbeing of their children. Due to this knowledge, their children are well-nourished and immunized unlike those who lack basic education. This alone is a weapon to child marriage.

➤ *Labour Force Participation*

Parsons et al. (2015) are of the view that child marriage also reduces labour force participation as it increases the barriers to employment which are contributed by fertility and early reproduction. Additionally, ICRW's (2018) findings show that child marriages reduce wages in adulthood by 9 percent. In countries where labour markets are mostly informal and many women work to sustain their households, labour force participation is negatively affected by high child marriage. Due to their low education, girls who married at tender aged usually receive wages lower than the expected earnings and they offer cheap labour as a result of a lack of required skills (Smith & Haddad, 2015).

➤ *Women's Decision Making*

Decision-making comes with the question of whether girls have a say in deciding whom to marry and when to marry. Literature has shown that minor girls who are victims of child marriage cannot decide whom to marry, the number of children, financial decisions and managing finances in the family, use of contraceptive methods, and when to get married (Miedema et al, 2020). Parsons et al. (2015) remark that lack of decision-making is highly influenced by being poor, young, and uneducated which will hurt what they will contribute to the family and even the treatment they will receive from the husband, family, and in-laws.

The majority of those who are victims of child marriage usually leave school early and they have little to say in decision making even to return to school thus lessening their literacy, numeracy, and financial levels (de Groot et al, 2018; Abdullah et al, 2015 & McDougal et al, 2018). This lack of decision-making in girls who married early goes as far as to the children, their health and economic, psychological, and material wellbeing. As a result of that, child marriage strengthens unfair gender standards among the upcoming generation. This also affects the community as there will reduced investment in social services and programs that should upsurge the children's chance of a better future (Abdullah et al, 2015 & McDougal et al, 2018).

For those who maybe fortunate to get employed, they have no control over the earnings of their hard labour as their husbands and in-laws control the money. Furthermore, they have no access to social life which makes them unable to receive external support networks in case of critical decisions to make or stop the ill-treatment they will be receiving. Children married young lack the power in decision-making autonomy which usually has a negative impact even on their wellbeing and livelihoods (Parsons et al, 2015).

Studies have shown that allowing girls who are victims of child marriage to make decisions in their family may be considered good influence to change girls' future and prioritizes important issues like health, education, and finances for themselves and their children (Jones et al, 2020 & Heath and Mobarak (2015). In addition, the lack of women's decision-making or reduced voice and agency has a high negative impact on productivity and long-term development goals (Klugman et al., 2014). This also limits a girl's input in the community and national decision-making. Munemo (2017) and Okafor & Akokuwebe (2015) support the view that when women and girls are given the chance to participate in socio-economic and political decision-making, they invest more in social services that have a direct link to the socio-economic growth of everyone.

VII. APPROACHES TO MITIGATE CHILD MARRIAGES

As a result of the negative impact that surrounds child marriage practice, the practice has gained national, regional, and international community attention as a human right violation. It has been classified as a grave problem, and a stumbling block to the growth of young girls and boys. Various donor-funded programs, awareness campaigns, amendments to laws and policies, interventions, and advocacy electorates pledge obligation, resources and action have been put forward to reduce and where possible, eliminate the practice. This paper discusses different approaches that have been suggested and implemented worldwide to reduce and end child marriage practice. Some of the strategies include empowering girls with information, skills, and support networks; educating and mobilizing parents and community members; enhancing the accessibility and quality of formal schooling for girls; offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families, and fostering an enabling legal and policy framework .

➤ *Empowering Girls with Information, Skills, and Support Networks*

This approach involves equipping girls with the right and relevant information, skills, and support networks. This would assist young girls to fully know what is right and what is wrong, when to do and when to stop doing it, they will know themselves better, know their world and the options according to choices they make (Malhotra et al, 2011; Lee-Rife et al, 2012 & Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021). Empowering girls with information, skills, and support networks help to end the social and economic isolation that normally surrounds child marriage. The majority of studies taken around the globe on child marriage reveal that, equipping young girls with social and human capital that creates jobs and promote enterprises has an effect of reducing their chances of getting married at an early stage.

More so, empowering girls would even make community and families realise the importance of a girl child as such she will be valued and throw away the belief that marriage is the only solution available (Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021). Empowering girls changes norms and values that support child marriage thus protecting and safeguarding children's rights against child marriages. The duration of programs and activities will also guard girls against child marriage something that is lacking in societies with high cases of child marriage.

Empowerment programs include life skills training which involve teaching girls about health, nutrition, money, finance, legal awareness, communication, negotiation, and decision-making. These programmes also include vocational and livelihood skills to equip girls with income-generating projects; provide information, education, and communication (IEC). Mentoring and training of youth leaders, adults, and teachers is important as a way of

providing ongoing information and support to girls against child marriages (Karam, 2015).

Creation of safe environment or opportunities which would enable youth to meet such as formation of clubs, and assemblies would promote networking where individual share ideas and encourage socializing of girls outside their homes. This will enable them to share important ideas of life and information, discuss their future aspiration and support each other (Amin et al, 2016). The advantage of these programs is that they are community-based programs that encompass the members of the community and all the institutions found in the community. Programs that empower girls with information, skills, and support systems have revealed a great change in the behaviour, attitude, and knowledge of child marriage of all the recipients who received them.

➤ *Educating and Mobilizing Parents and Community Members*

Another effective way of solving child marriages is the provision of education to children, parents and the whole community. It creates an enabling environment that will allow everyone to actively participate in the decision-making against child marriage. This will also enable girls to decide if they want to get married or not (Parsons et al, 2015; & Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021).

The provision of education to parents and community members will contribute to the change of social norms, ideologies, and gender stereotypes that support child marriage (Chandra-Mouli, et al, 2013). It is worth to note that societies that are deep-rooted in culture and tradition, penetration of education to such communities will assist in reducing child marriage. If the situation is left unattended, it is likely to pose as punishment to a girl child.

Some of the programs employing this strategy can use intercessions such as face-to-face meetings with parents, community and religious leaders to gain support. Some other strategies can involve group and community education sessions on the consequences of and alternatives to child marriages; parental and adult committees and forums as guides to life skills and sexual and reproductive health curricula; information, education, communication (IEC) campaigns; public announcements and pledges by influential leaders, family heads and community members (Sundaram et al, 2018; & Rasmussen et al, 2021).

Studies have shown that making education accessible to girls lessens their chances of getting married early. Bengesai et al. (2021) state that girls who have finished secondary school are six times less probable to get involved in child marriage as opposed to girls who never received basic education. Education has therefore an effect to protect girls against early marriage and school is seen as a 'safe space' for girls as it protects girls against violence and sexual harassment. School helps girls to develop social networks that will help them to better their well-being and livelihoods as they grow (Rasmussen et al, 2019).

School as a 'safe space' for girls is however underutilized in many societies and even governments are not investing in children's education which put them at high risk of child marriage (Psaki et al., 2019). As noted in this paper, child marriage affects girls who are not going to school more, poor families who cannot afford to send their children to school, and communities without enough school infrastructures.

It is therefore believed that increasing primary and secondary schools in both rural and urban areas could reduce child marriage in Africa. Available evidence shows that girls who cannot access education tend to be married before they reach 18 years as it is a case in Africa (Avogo & Somefun, 2021; Sah et al., 2014; Prakash, 2019; Glynn, 2018; Petroni et al., 2017 and Jones et al., 2014).

Programs using this strategy can employ interventions such as preparing, training, and supporting girls for enrolment in school; improving the school curriculum and training teachers to deliver content on topics such as life skills, sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, and gender sensitivity; building schools, improving facilities for girls, and hiring more female teachers; and cash, scholarships, fees subsidies, uniforms and supplies as incentives for girls to enrol and remain in school.

➤ *Offering Economic Support and Incentives for Girls and their Families*

As discussed in this paper, poverty is among the causes of child marriage, and poverty is caused by many factors including a lack of economic support and incentives for girls and their families. Duty bearers like state and non-state institutions have the mandate to provide economic support and incentives to girls and their families to reduce child marriages. Poverty is also a push factor for families to marry off their girls to an older man in return for the bride's wealth and economic support. The justification behind this method is that instant economic prospects can offer a suitable substitute for marriage and upsurge the worth and input of the daughter to her biological family (Malhotra et al, 2011; Lee-Rife et al, 2012; & Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021).

Furthermore, when parents are given cash, it may increase their sense of economic security and this can as well decrease both the economic and social burden to marry their daughter early. At times, cash incentives might be abused hence, a better way might be to invest in their daughter's education or make a condition not to marry until 18 years. Programs that might employ this strategy might make use of interventions such as microfinance and related training to support income generation to adolescent girls and cash and non-cash incentives, subsidies, loans, and scholarships to families or girls.

There is also a need to train families on ways to manage finances; offering basic business skills and age-appropriate economic activities such as agriculture and farming, craftsman, tailoring and sewing, finance and

banking. This will also help girls in managing their economic support systems and incentives. Offering sustainable support is far much better than giving them money which might contribute to dependency syndrome thus preventing them to work for themselves. More so, girls will not be motivated to go to secondary school because they will be working for themselves which will affect their schooling, also banks do not give minors loans or even girls as they will get married and stay with the new family leaving no security for loan reimbursement.

➤ *Fostering an Enabling Legal and Policy Framework*

Megan et al. (2017) postulate that majority of countries across the whole globe have changed the minimum age for marriage to 18 years for girls thus prohibiting and protecting girls against child marriage practice. Furthermore, many policies have been put forward to reduce child marriage practices and tough sentences have been given to perpetrators of child marriage to scare them into committing such crimes. However, policy and legal initiatives have encountered challenging circumstances, for instance, religion, culture, and tradition that support child marriage (Mwambene, 2018). It is, however, becoming a challenge to eliminate child marriage when culture, religion, and tradition are left unresolved to eliminate child marriage practice.

The 1962 Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the 1995 Beijing Platform and Declaration for Action, are some of the indications that world's administrations agreed to take procedures to remove the exercise of child marriage. The birth of human rights was an addition to the mitigation to child marriage practice by making sure that countries that signed human and children's rights adhere to them by including them into their laws and policies which deals with the protection of children against harmful practices such as child marriage.

The CEDAW and CRC committees have lately restated and elucidated States' duties to stop and abolish detrimental practices such as child marriage, through their initial ever-shared General Recommendations. The Committees suggested that States Parties approve or modify the law to confirm that 'A minimum legal age of marriage for girls and boys is established, with or without parental consent, at 18 years' (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2014).

The article additionally elucidates that when marriage is permitted at a younger age under exceptional conditions, the minimum age should not be below 16 years and the marriage and should only be legalized by a court of law founded on firmly distinct grounds and complete, unrestricted, and informed consent of the envisioned child spouse(s) (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination

against Women and Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2014).

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper unpacked the literature that surrounds child marriages. Literature shows that girls who are subjected to child marriages are mostly mistreated by their husbands. Child marriage is a practice that violates an individual's human rights and harms the socio-economic, physical, and psychological well-being. This paper revealed that child marriage has long-term effects on an individual, family, society, and the country. As pointed in the literature reviewed, child marriage is a practice that affects children, especially girls below the age of 18 years. The discussion reveals that child marriage is high in Africa due to poverty, cultural beliefs and high illiterate rate.

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