



Analysis on The Effects of Early Marriages on a Girl Child's Education: A Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Solwezi District of North-Western Province, Zambia

Chanda Chansa Thelma, Lufeyo Chitondo, Memory Mumbi & Christian Kamwengo

*Corresponding Author: *Chanda Chansa Thelma*, Rockview University, Lusaka, Zambia

Co-author 1: *Lufeyo Chitondo*, Twin Palm Leadership University

Co-author 2: *Memory Mumbi*, Chreso University, Lusaka, Zambia

Co-author 3: *Kamwengo Christian*, Rockview University, Lusaka, Zambia

Abstract: *Child marriage refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child. It refers to an infringement upon internationally agreed human rights, diminishing young people's ability to realize their rights to education, health, quality of life, safety and dignity. Child marriage and girls' lack of access to quality education are both rooted in gender inequality and the belief that girls and women are worth less than boys and men. The Children's Code harmonizes this by defining a child in line with the provisions of the Zambian Constitution. A Child is now defined as any person who is the age of 18 or below. Hence, this study analyzed the effects of the early marriage practices on the education for girls in some selected secondary schools of Solwezi district in North-western Province, Zambia. The study employed both the qualitative and quantitative methods and a descriptive survey design that sampled an officer from DEBS office, head teachers, teachers and pupils. Data were collected using the questionnaire, interview, focus group discussions and documentary review methods. Data collected were analyzed by using Special Package for Social Science (SPSS) and presented in frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations while qualitative data were subjected to content analysis. The findings revealed that early marriages in Solwezi district is rampant. The findings further revealed that early marriages in Solwezi district are caused by many factors one of them is low level of education among the community members. School drop-out was reported to be the leading effect of early marriages in the area of study. The study also reported that there are efforts made to combat early marriages in the area despite of a number of challenges. Different stakeholders have to work together in making sure that this practice is ended. The study concludes that early marriage is a real problem in Solwezi district.*

Keywords: *Child, Early Marriage, Education, Practice, and Reproductive Health, School Drop-out.*

INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is a public health issue as well as a human rights violation. Child marriage has long been a public health concern around the world, because it has the potential to deprive adolescent girls of their sexual reproductive health rights and limits their ability to reach their full potential in life. The prevalence of child marriage has been consistently higher in sub-Saharan Africa than elsewhere. Girls married early are more likely to experience violence, abuse and forced sexual relations. Child marriages jeopardize girls' rights, such as the right to education, because new brides are usually forced to drop out of school to bear children and to provide household labor (Bayisenge, 2010). In addition, married girls have few social connections, restricted mobility, limited control over resources and little or no power in their new households and are thus especially vulnerable to domestic violence (UNICEF, 2005). According to the International Planned Parenthood Federation (2008) about 14 million girls under the age of 18 marry each year in the world. One in every 5 girls in the developing world is married by the age of 18 and one in nine girls marries before they reach the age of 15. In countries like Niger, Chad, Mali, Bangladesh, Guinea and the Central African Republic (CAR) the rate of early marriages is 60 percent and over. Child brides are particularly prevalent in South Asia (46 per cent) and in sub-Saharan Africa (38 per cent) (Amin, 2012). Countries with the highest rates of early marriages in Europe include Georgia (17 per cent), Turkey (14 per cent) and Ukraine (10 per cent). At least 10 per cent of adolescents marry before the age of 18 in Britain and France (Ibid, 2005). Child marriage is most prevalent in places where birth and death rates are high, where there is greater incidence of conflict and civil strife, and where there are lower levels of overall development, including education, employment and health care. It is especially prevalent in rural areas. Those most affected are among the most vulnerable and powerless: they are young, rural, uneducated, poor and female and their voices are rarely heard. The effects of child marriage on children, especially girls, are tremendous (UNFPA, 2006).

Child marriage, defined as a legal or informal union between two people before they turn 18 years old, is a practice that disproportionately affects girls and is linked to several unfavorable social and developmental outcomes. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals acknowledges that Child marriage has long been a public health concern around the world. This is because it has the potential to deprive adolescent girls of their sexual and reproductive health rights. Furthermore, child marriage can limit their ability to reach their full potential and enjoy their human rights as guaranteed by several international treaties. Child marriage remains a burden in developing regions with sub-Saharan Africa having the highest prevalence of 37%, South East Asia at 30% and Latin America at 21%. According to Girls Not Brides in 2018, one out of every five girls is married before the age of 18, with Africa accounting for roughly 67–76 percent of child marriages. Apart from Africa, Asia has a high rate of child marriage, with around 46 percent of women aged 20–24 in South Asia marrying before the age of 18. Despite global declines in child marriage rates, its persistence in particular places has led to a growing acknowledgment that ending the practice requires a detailed knowledge of the factors that drive it. Several studies on child marriage have revealed a number of socially complex, interconnected, and context-specific variables that vary in importance across and even within nations. Married girls face many practical barriers to education, including household responsibilities, stigma, forced exclusion from school and gender norms that keep them at home (WHO, 2011). Child marriage often results in adolescent pregnancy. A pregnant adolescent girl may drop out or be excluded from school because of national laws, a lack of support for re-enrolment and stigma. The younger the age at marriage, the greater the impact. Once married, a girl is very unlikely to remain in or return to school. Most existing research seeking to explain why child marriage persists has focused on understanding how factors manifest at the individual and household levels. In recent years, there has also been a growing interest in understanding and changing drivers that sustain the practice at the community level. However, few studies have

explored how the drivers of child marriage manifest across both micro (individual and household) and macro (community) levels, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Understanding the intersection of drivers across levels and to what extent drivers work separately or jointly to sustain the practice is critical for designing and implementing effective policies and programs aimed at preventing child marriage. However, we are still learning about factors that influence early marital decision making, particularly about girls' beliefs and circumstances and about the social context in which they live. Even though literature shows that the environment has a significant impact on marital and reproductive health behaviour of young individuals, mainly due to peer pressure and other social factors, no study has attempted to examine both individual and community level factors associated with child marriage in Zambia. An earlier study by Mulenga and others, conducted in Zambia found that residence, age at first sex, education level of women and their partners, and family size had a significant influence on prevalence of child marriage (Mulenga et al, 2018). The study, however, ignored the influence of community-level factors on child marriage. There is a paucity of knowledge on how community-level factors influence early marriage in Zambia. In view of this, we conducted this study to bridge the knowledge gap that exists in the literature. Examining both individual and community-level factors associated with child marriage is an important step to inform relevant government and non-governmental organizations to have an in-depth understanding of factors that explain why girls fall into a trap of child marriages in Zambia. Despite many efforts by government and stakeholders to address social and economic factors that predispose young girls to marry early, the prevalence of child marriage is still high in Zambia (Mwanza, 2014). In 2013, 31.4% of women aged 20–24 reported to have been married before age 18. Child marriage is a truly global and complex issue, impacting girls and communities across cultures. There are, however, common threads that drive child marriage and can influence its prevalence in a community. There has been significant progress on bringing to an end the harmful practice of child marriage. Ten years ago, 23% of women aged 20 – 24 were married before they were 18. That figure has dropped to 19% today. But if this progress is not accelerated, the world will not meet the Sustainable Development Goal 5 of gender equality by 2030.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Throughout the world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life. Sadly, the practice of early marriage gives no such cause for celebration. All too often, the imposition of a marriage partner upon a child means that a girl or boy's childhood is cut short and their fundamental rights are compromised. Young girls are robbed of their youth and required to take over roles for which they are not psychologically or physically prepared. WHO (2012) comments that many have no choice about the timing of marriage or their partner. Some are coerced into marriage, while others are too young to make an informed decision. Premature marriage deprives them of the opportunity for personal development as well as their rights to full reproductive health and wellbeing, education, and participation in civic life. The literature identifies many interrelated factors almost similar worldwide with small variations between societies that interact to place a girl child at risk of early marriage. (UNICEF 2005). In Zambia, a survey conducted by Children's Dignity Forum (2008) acknowledged early marriage, Coast, Mwanza and Mara regions. In Dar es Salaam and coastal regions the tribes found are among the ethnic groups in Zambia where initiation practices for young girls are still strong. During the initiation ceremonies young girls and boys are taught how to live as wives and husbands respectively (Katapa, 2010). These ceremonies particularly for girls are used as advertising occasions to inform the community that the girl is ready for marriage and therefore marriage proposals are welcome. This practice forces girls to marry at an early age consequently affecting their educational progress. Studies on early marriage in Zambia are well documented; mainly focusing on the causes and general consequences of early marriages, which include complicated childbirth, death of both

newborn child and mother, becoming an economic burden to parents, with frequent marital disputes, broken marriages, poverty for the couple or for one of the spouses in the marriage, loss of educational opportunities, poor family planning and risky abortions (UNESCO, 2014). Therefore, this study sought to find out reliable and more accurate information concerning the effects of early marriages specifically on girls' education in Solwezi district, Zambia.

1.3. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effect of early marriages on a girl child's education at the selected secondary schools in Solwezi district of North-western province, Zambia.

1.4. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Identify the causes of early marriages among girls in selected secondary schools in Solwezi district of North-western province in Zambia.
- Establish the effects of early marriage practices on a girl child's education in selected secondary schools in Solwezi district of North-western province in Zambia.
- Recommend strategies to curb early marriage practices on a girl child's education in selected secondary schools in Solwezi district of North-western province in Zambia.

1.5. Conceptual Framework

UNFPA (2012) says that adolescence is frequently divided into three stages: early, middle, and late. The ages from 10 to 14 years referred to here as early adolescence – are marked by dramatic physical, cognitive, and social changes; however, researchers view it as among the most neglected periods of life. Across these 5 years, a young person physically develops, progressing from a prepubescent youngster with childlike features to someone with an adult appearance. So too, this period is marked by social and cognitive shifts that set the stage for lifelong capacities and aspirations. WHO (2004) adds on that social relationships often expand beyond the family unit to include more peer group influences and young people begin to acquire behaviors that have a profound impact on later life. In many societies, these years encompass a major educational shift from primary to secondary school or, conversely, to early school leaving, employment in the formal or informal sectors, and perhaps early marriage. There is a set of premises that guide our work. First, while human development occurs from birth to death, there are key transition points when development is progressing at such a fast pace that development itself becomes a central component of health. Second, although less visible than pubertal maturation, this age period is marked by equally profound brain development that fundamentally alters how young people think and engage the world (2–5). Third, this work rests on the assumption that healthy development has as one component empowerment rather than acquiescence and decision-making capacity rather than compliance. Fourth and finally, it rests on the assumption that equity is a component of a healthy society and that the formation of gender norms among early adolescents is important to understand because gender differentiation is a central component of adolescent development that will enhance or subvert equity.

1.6. Significance of the Study

The findings of this study reinforced efforts to design appropriate interventions that was ultimately prevented early marriages among young girls and their impacts on education sector. It is equally important that a better understanding of risks, protective measures as well as social norms informed girls and program designers to mitigate these risks and strengthen protective measures or create them where they do not exist. In so doing, the study provided insight for education practitioners as it provided a more relevant framework in risk analysis for managing risks associated with the practice. It is also possible that, it prompted the responsible authorities to come up with appropriate strategies on how to manage these challenges faced by pupils especially girls. The study is in

line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to achieve equitable access to quality primary education. Moreover, the findings of this study are deemed useful for policy makers and other stakeholders in the Zambia education sector to evolve constructive measures for ensuring better conduct practices among the youths as well as mechanisms to improve the delivery of education in the country. Therefore, the findings of this study formed the basis for individual and institutional interventions and most importantly set the benchmark for a legal and social framework for the protection of children's rights. They were used to guide the creation and evaluation of future strategies to be adopted by the government and other stakeholders, particularly in joining the campaign to end child marriages in Zambia. They also provided ground for other research to be conducted country wide. Most of these marriages are arranged without t prior knowledge or consent of the bride. In most cases it is the girls who are subjected to child marriages.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study Design

The study adopted a mixed methods approach which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Exploratory and descriptive designs were as well considered appropriate as they also allowed for more flexible strategies of data collection in order to answer the research questions. The study incorporated both qualitative and quantitative aspects of research. It was aimed at collecting information from respondents on the effects of early marriages on a girl child's education in Solwezi district of North-western province, Zambia.

2.2. Research Site

The research was conducted in Solwezi district of North-western province in Zambia at some selected secondary schools from which respondents were also sampled.

2.3. Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The population for the study comprised of one officer from DEBS office, head teachers, teachers and pupils at the selected schools. The target population was 1000. The sample size involved a total of 100 respondents which included one (1) officer from DEBS office, three (3) head teachers, one from each selected school. Fifteen (15) teachers, five from each selected school. Eighty-one (81) pupils, twenty-seven (27) from each selected school. The study employed both purposive and simple random sampling on different participants from the selected secondary schools. Simple random sampling was used on the teachers and pupils, this is because there were too many to participate, hence simple random selection of was preferred. On the other hand, Purposive sampling was used on the officer from DEBS office and head teachers for convenient purposes.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed qualitatively as the semi structured interviews schedules were used as data collection instruments. Thematic approach was used, where data analysis started with categorizing of themes from the semi structured interviews schedules. The data gathered were analyzed according to the themes of the study and the order of the research objectives. Data generated from the questionnaires was analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 26) and Microsoft Excel (version 16) to come up with frequency tables, pie charts and bar graphs.

2.5. Ethical Issues

Permission letter from the District Education Board for Solwezi district was sought in carrying out this study. Interviews were not conducted on one-to-one basis; instead, participants were grouped and identified using their titles. An informed consent was sought before collecting information from the informants and guaranteed them with security of the information they provided. Furthermore, the main objective of gathering such information was made clear to the respondents. The researchers avoided pressuring respondents to take part in the research. Alternatively, permission consents, assents were obtained from

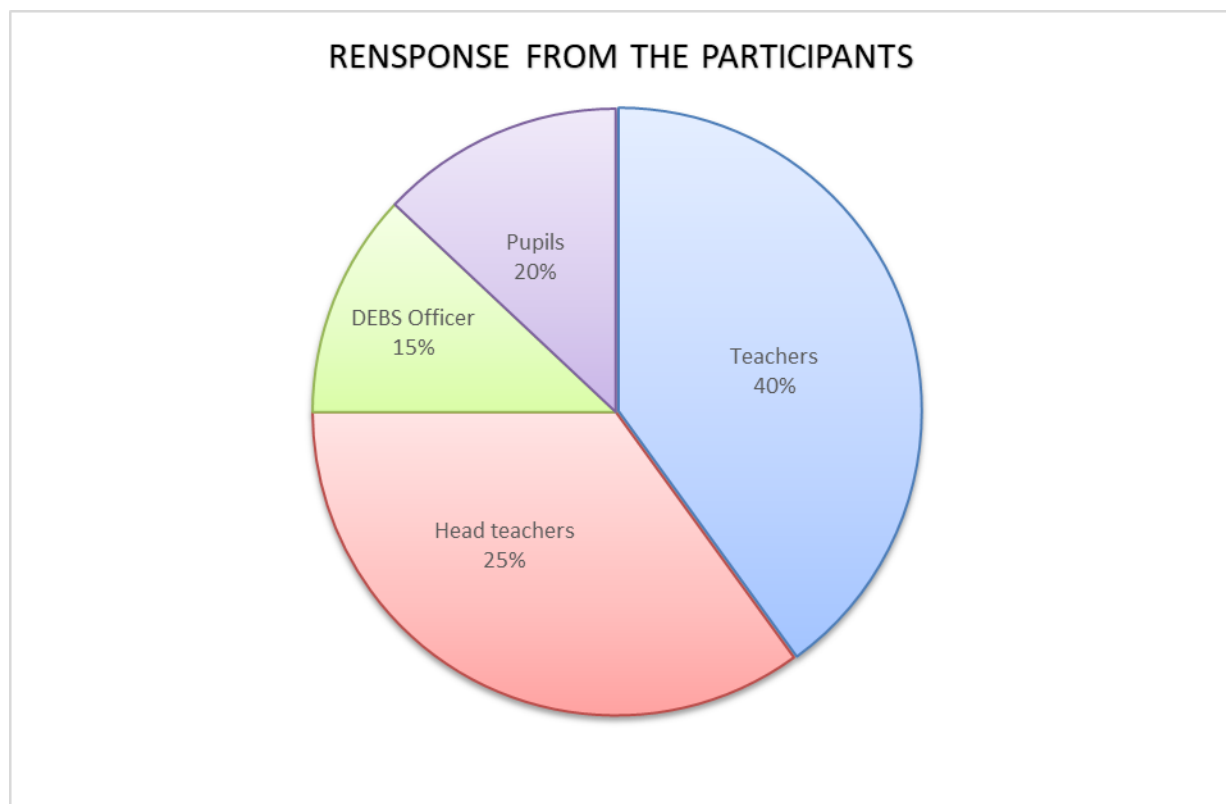
respondents involved in the research and the research topic was strategically selected to ensure that there was no harm whatsoever to the research respondents. In this research, the researchers were fully conscious of the need to abide by the ethical rule of respecting the privacy of individuals taking part in the research. In the same way, all the respondents of the research were to remain unidentified to the public as all their valuable views, opinions and perceptions were only known by the researchers for use only in the research and participant's identities will forever remain hidden.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

3.1. Causes of Early Marriages

Figure 1: Response from the Participants on the Causes of Early Marriages

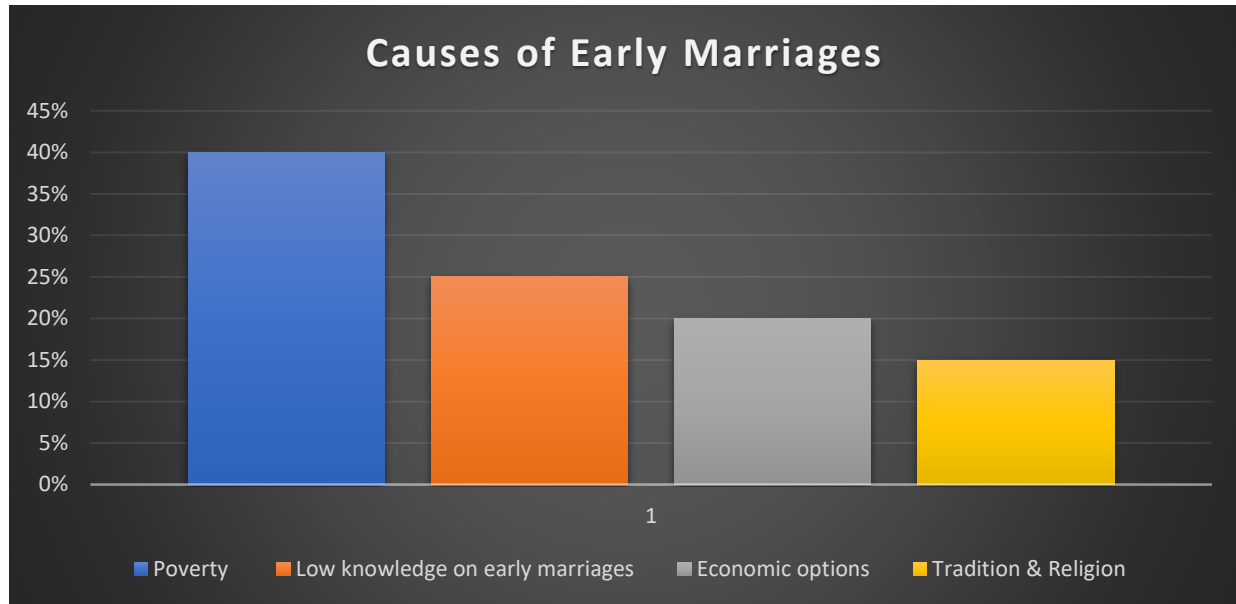


Source: Author, 2023

Table 1: Causes of Early Marriages

Respondents	Causes of Early Marriages	Percentage
Head teachers	Poverty	40%
Teachers	Low knowledge on early marriages	25%
Pupils	Economic options	20%
DEBS officer	Tradition & Religion	15%
Total		100%

Source: Author, 2023

Figure 2: Causes of Early Marriages

Source: Author, 2023

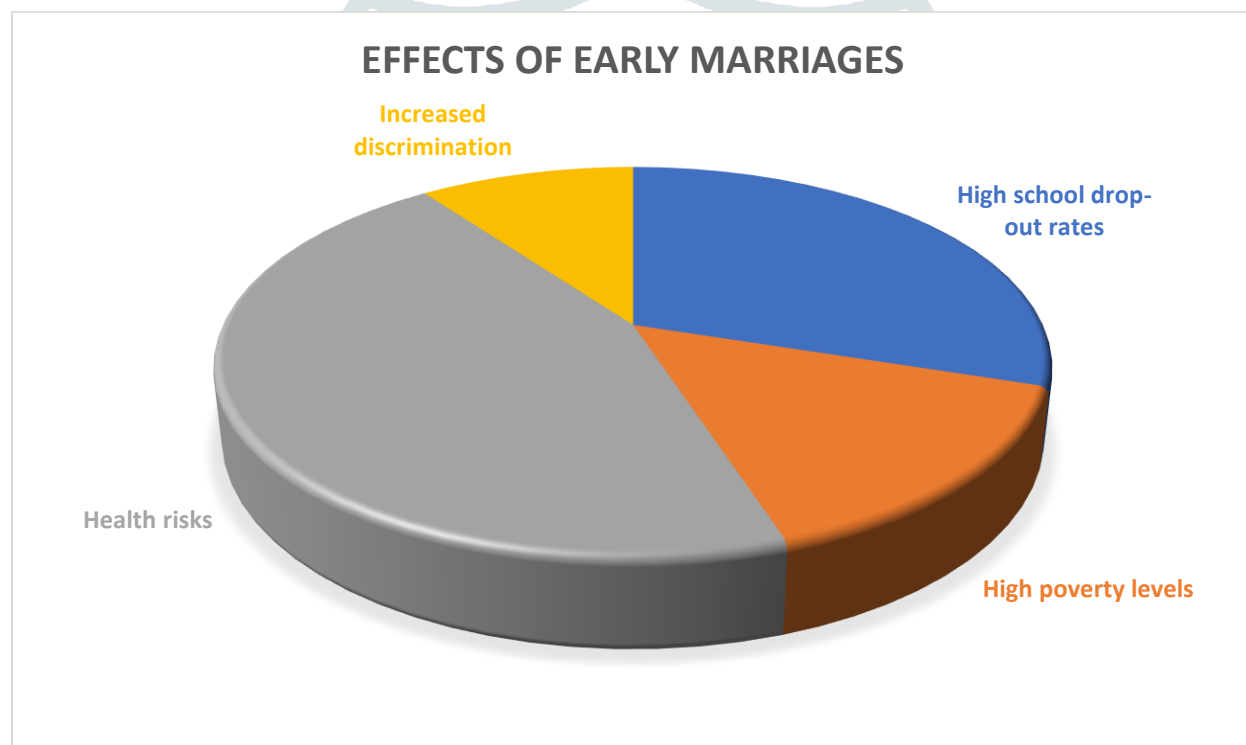
(40%) of the teachers revealed that early marriages in compound is that most of community members in the study area have low knowledge on the impacts of early marriages which was the leading factor for girls' early marriage According to Mwanza (2014), Poverty, gender inequality, cultural customs and traditions, lack of education and economic opportunities, and lack of access to sexual reproductive health (SRH) information and services have been identified as contributing factors to the prevalence of child marriage and teenage pregnancy Early marriage as a tribute to ancestors. According to Anderson (2007) stated that to keep the traditions preserved is one of the primary tasks in many African countries. They contract a marriage due to the customs inherent to their ancestors. (25%) of head teachers revealed that for many poor families, marrying their daughter at an early age essentially is a strategy for economic survival; it means one less person to feed, clothe and educate, the importance of financial transactions at the time of marriage also tends to push families to marry their daughters early. For example, parents get a high bride price for a daughter who is married. (20%) of pupils also revealed that Limited education and economic options is where little or no schooling strongly correlates with being married at a young age (Ahmed, 2013). Conversely, attending school and having higher levels of education protect girls from the possibility of early marriage. (15%) representing the officer from DEBS office revealed that tradition is where parents are under pressure to marry off their daughters as early as possible in an effort to prevent her from becoming sexually active before marriage; a woman who does so brings dishonor to her family and community.

3.2. Effects of Early Marriage Practices on a Girl Child's Education

Table 2: Effects of Early Marriage Practices

Respondents	Effects of Early Marriage Practices	Percentage
Head teachers	High poverty levels	30%
Teachers	High school drop-out rates	15%
Pupils	Health risks	45%
DEBS officer	Increased discrimination	10%
Total		100%

Source: Author, 2023

Figure 3: Effects of Early Marriage Practices

Source: Author, 2023

Research findings indicated that (30%) representing head teachers stated that early marriages perpetuate poverty. Child brides do not receive education and economic opportunities that help lift them and their families from poverty, hence child marriage perpetuates a vicious inter-generational poverty. (15%) representing teachers reported that early marriages also deprive girls of an education. Child brides are likely to drop out of school, curtailing opportunities and realization of their full potential. According to Katapa (2010) mentioned that Girls who are married as children are more likely to experience domestic violence, and have a lower status in society, because too often child brides are denied their right to pursue education, employment or entrepreneurial opportunities. (45%) of pupils reported that early marriages create health risks. Child marriage and teenage pregnancy expose girls to early childbearing and greater risks of life-long fertility with significantly higher maternal and infant morbidity and mortality. (10%) representing the officer from DEBS officer stated that early marriages increase girls' vulnerability. World Bank (2013) adds that child brides are at risk of negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes, including early pregnancy, exposure to HIV and other STIs, and increased

discrimination. It puts girls at risk of violence, increased risk of sexual, physical, and emotional gender-based violence.

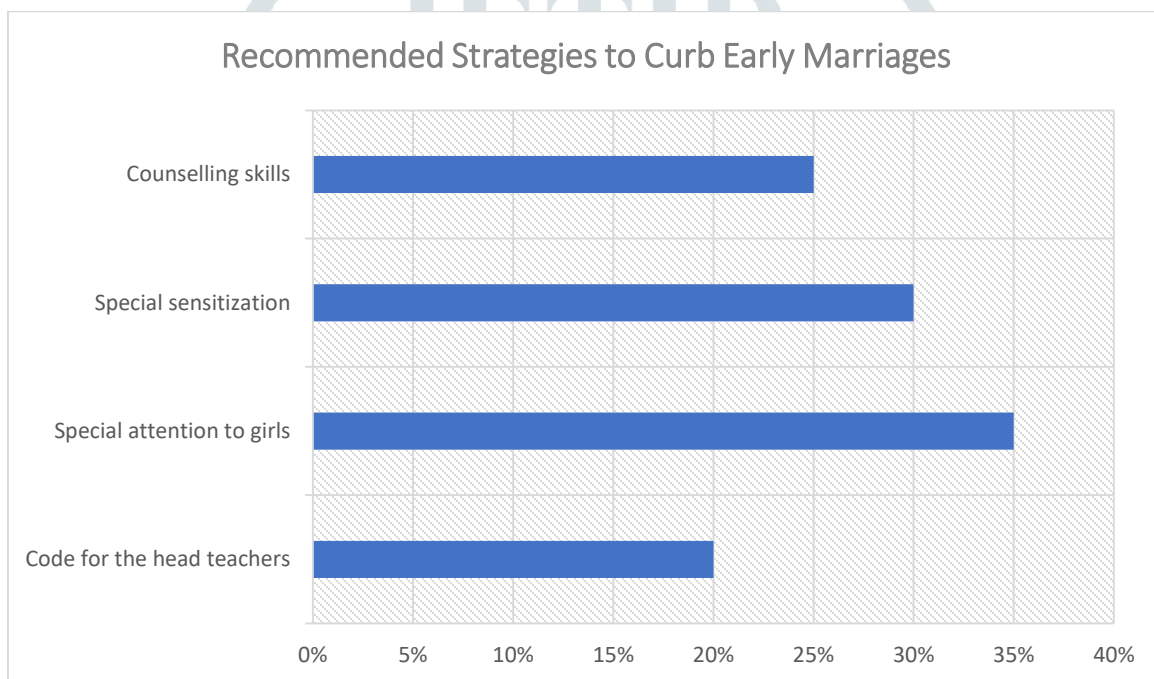
3.3. Recommended Strategies to Curb Early Marriage Practices

Table 3: Recommended Strategies to Curb Early Marriage Practices

Respondents	Strategies to Curb Early Marriage Practices	Percentage
Head teachers	Code for the head teachers	20%
Teachers	Special attention to girls	35%
Pupils	Special sensitization	30%
DEBS officer	Counselling skills	25%
Total		100%

Source: Author, 2023

Figure 4: Strategies to Curb Early Marriage Practices



Source: Author, 2023

(20%) of head teachers reported that, head teachers should be protected by the code in order to deal with early marriages and further stated that, the government should deal with early marriages cases appropriately. (35%) teachers stated that, teachers should pay special attention and identify forms of early marriages and support girls. Upon identification of the cases of early marriages, teachers should report such cases to the police or any other authority. (25%) representing the DEBS officer stated that, the community should be sensitized on the effects of early marriages on a girl child education and further stated that, the Ministry of Education and Training should ensure that teachers are equipped with counselling skills. This can be done by introducing short courses on counselling or ensure that such courses are compulsory at teachers' training institutions. According to Anderson (2007) education plays a critical role in keeping girls safe from child marriage. In fact, the longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to be married before age 18 and have children during her teenage years. According to Abigail (2008), every girl has the right to decide her own future, but not every girl knows this that's why empowering girls is so crucial to ending child marriage. (20%) of pupils stated that, girls should be sensitized on how to protect themselves from early marriages and they further stated that, the school should create a good

atmosphere where a girl child can report their cases at home and away and a girl child victim of early marriages should be provided with extra remedial classes to assist them catch up academically.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the practice of early marriages is a real problem in Solwezi district in North-western province of Zambia. Parents have been found to play a key role in the practice, this is due to the fact that most parents lack understanding of the importance of formal education for their children. Hence, the government has the mandate to come up with strong policies against this act. Among other effects, early marriage practices to younger girls have led to their denial of educational rights. There is a high need for raising awareness to community members on the importance of education to girls so as to discourage early marriage prevalence. In view of the above, it is important that different stakeholders should work together in making sure that this practice is ended.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are actions that should be taken on the basis of the findings of this study:

- The Ministry of Education should make sex education topic compulsory in the school curriculum for proper orientation of the girl-child against early marriages.
- The law-enforcers in the study area, and the nation at large, should work on the by laws that prohibit early marriages.
- The Ministry of Education and Training should ensure that all teachers are equipped with counselling skills.
- Teachers should pay special attention and identify forms of early marriages and support the victims academically.
- Parents, school administrators and teachers should work hand-in-hand in handling the victims of early marriages in order to help them improve academically.

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AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Chanda Chansa Thelma, specializes in civic education and has taught civic education at university level for seven years now. Currently, she is lecturing civic education, political science, religious studies, social sciences research methods and educational research at Rockview University in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Civic Education, Master of Arts in Civic Education, Bachelor of Arts Degree, Diploma in

Education and several Educational Certificates. She is currently the Coordinator for Open Distance Learning at Rockview University.

Lufeyo Chitondo, specializes in Applied Linguistics and has lectured and still in the field of Linguistics and researches and on different academic subject of great significance.

Memory Mumbi, specializes in Information and Communication Technology. She is licensed by the Information and Communication Technology Association of Zambia. She has practiced IT for eight years and has taught ICT courses at university level for seven years. She holds a Master of Business Administration, a Bachelor of Science in Management Information Systems and Diploma in Teaching Methodology and several ICT certifications. She is currently working as ICT Manager at Chreso University in Lusaka, Zambia.

Kamwengo Christian, specializes in Literature, Languages and Drama. He has taught these courses at university level for seven years now. Currently, he is lecturing in Literature and Languages at Rockview University in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia. He holds a Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics, a Bachelor of Arts Degree, a Diploma in Theatre and Drama and several Educational Certificates. He is currently the Dean of Student Affairs at Rockview University.

