

# Factors Leading to Early Marriages in Selected Communities of Lusaka District in Zambia

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## ABSTRACT

Early marriage is a harmful traditional practice that continues to affect millions around the world. Though it has declined over the years, it is still pervasive in developing countries. Hence, the purpose of carrying this study was to investigate into the factors contributing to early marriages in selected communities of Lusaka district in Zambia. The research was carried out at 6 selected schools where teachers are expected to understand learners' Psychological state and the communities at large where different leaders as well as members of the community where giving and bringing out the factors, through their written texts because mostly the words and expressions used are indicative of the state of mind as well as revealing emotional states learners go through when they recount their experiences. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods and a descriptive survey design that sampled 60 participants purposively and conveniently. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews, observations and written text (script) analysis. The data was analyzed by the use of software; Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 26) and Microsoft Excel (version 16). Frequency tables, graphs, figures, and pie charts were also used to analyze the data. The findings indicated that teachers have developed notions that belittle what pupils can do. Interviews revealed that learners especially at junior level, have been perceived and labelled to be potential upcoming wives. Such learners are not even helped to change their state of mind. Furthermore, the study revealed that learners' outward appearance does not reflect or collaret with what they do or write in class. Learners who appear to be very clever orally perform the opposite in written texts. Therefore, the study recommended that teachers should actually play a very critical role using written texts by learners to help identify needy areas that may require shaping their writing skills, developing their critical reasoning and instilling good interpretive skills so that learners can come out as critical, classical and creative writers.

**Keywords:** Community, Developing Countries, Early Marriages, Factors, and Learners.

## INTRODUCTION

While early marriage takes many different forms and has various causes, one issue is paramount. Whether it happens to a girl or a boy, early marriage is a violation of human rights. Early marriage in Zambia lied at the intersection of broad set of problems facing girls. The practice violated girls' human rights, curtails their schooling, harms their health and sharply constrains their future (Chanda, 2023). The right to free and full consent to a marriage is recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and in many subsequent human rights instruments – consent that cannot be 'free and full' when at least one partner is very immature. For both girls and boys, early marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts, cutting off educational opportunity and chances of personal growth. For girls, in addition, it will almost certainly mean premature marriage and childbearing, and is likely to lead to a life-time of domestic and sexual subservience over which they have no control. Yet many societies, primarily in Africa and South Asia, continue to support the idea that girls should marry at or soon after puberty. Their spouses are likely to be a few years older than they are, but may be more than twice their age. Parents and heads of families make marital choices for daughters and sons with little regard for the personal

implications. Rather, they look upon marriage as a family building strategy, an economic arrangement or a way to protect girls from unwelcome sexual advances.

Barrington (2001) states that, trends and patterns in child marriage are likely to include children from poor families or backgrounds, those living in rural areas, those not attending school, pregnant girls and their boyfriends, orphans and stepchildren, difficult or 'hard to manage' children, and children without adequate supervision or support. While both globally and in Zambia, girls appear to be statistically at greater risk than boys of marriage, this study found significant numbers of boy husbands and fathers. The factors that help delay or prevent child marriage for both boys and girls include the education level of parents, access to quality education, strong community leadership, involvement in income-generating activities, opportunities for personal development and access to safe recreational activities, and the presence of positive and negative role models. The United Nations and other International agencies have declared that early marriage violates human rights and child rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that individuals must enter marriage freely with full consent and must be a full age. In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women stated that early marriages are illegal. In 2016, the Zambian government adopted a National Strategy on Ending Early Marriages in Zambia by 2021 by 40%.

Many child marriages are driven by a desire to seize an opportunity to escape bad living conditions, to meet basic needs, to enhance one's own or one's parents' status in the community, to secure an economic benefit or to remain within the peer group. Numerous people have a stake in and an influence on whether a marriage takes place, thus each marriage involves a negotiation between a series of competing and, at times, conflicting agendas. Decision-making involves weighing the actual and perceived benefits against the known risks of early marriage and other health-related problems, voluntary or forced withdrawal from formal education, truncated personal development, becoming a single child mother, placing an increased burden on parents and families in the event of divorce, inadequate parental care and supervision and increased rates of domestic violence (Darwin, 2014). Often boys, girls and their families see the status quo as so intolerable that marriage is understood to be the best among the limited options available.

Lee & Nathan, (2011) argues that poverty is one of the most significant factors driving child marriage in nearly all of its forms in Zambia. Parents and guardians see child marriage as a potential opportunity to benefit financially from the bride price for their daughter and also as an opportunity to ease the strain on household resources. In larger families, for example, the marriage of an older boy or girl can free up resources to support the education of younger children. Economic hardship forces parents and guardians to make difficult choices as they try to manage their living situation and encourages short-term strategic thinking rather than consideration of investment in longer-term gains. For their part, children see marriage as an opportunity to escape challenging economic and material circumstances and as a means of responding to their own basic needs. This viewpoint is particularly prominent among girls. Rural children: In Zambia, as elsewhere, rates of child marriage are higher in rural than urban areas, as are teenage fertility rates. In 2015 following the 2013-14 Zambian Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS), population council and UNFPA conducted a survey to establish areas where early marriages are most prevalent. Findings reaffirm that early marriages are high in Zambia, affecting more girls than boys. 16.5% of 15-18-year-old females reported being currently married as compared with only 1% of males of the same age group. Girls in some rural areas are more than twice as likely to marry as their counterparts living in large towns and cities. They also tend to marry, on average, about two years earlier than girls their same age living in urban areas. This study found that children in rural areas have limited access to a range of programs, information and services and, in many cases, few opportunities for leisure and recreation, skill development and employment.

Daniel, (2009) asserted that, both boys and girls face these risks, People who influence decisions related to child marriage perceived benefits associated with the marriage of a child Parents. Increased social status as a result of having raised a child that somebody wants to marry and because of likelihood of becoming grandparents. Economic benefit associated with the receipt of bride price. Assistance with labor and domestic tasks associated with gaining a daughter in-law or a son in-law. Ibid (2002) alluded to the fact that,

early marriage results in a number of health-related complications: The health risks of child marriage for girls are widely documented. They include maternal mortality, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, cervical cancer and other problems. Childbirth places significant risks on girl mothers; girls are more likely than older mothers to die in child birth because of hemorrhaging and obstructed labor. Girls are also vulnerable to developing fistula, a condition that can cause feelings of humiliation and embarrassment because it leads to a leakage of urine. As a result, girls can become stigmatized and may be rejected by their husbands. That those girls who marry tend to be among the poorest girls in the poorest communities means that few can access decent, affordable antenatal and postnatal care. Most are financially dependent on their husbands (who also tend to be poor) and have limited say in how household finances are allocated. Girls in this study commonly reported these problems, as did adults and some boys.

Throughout the world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life. Sadly, as this Digest makes clear, the practice of early marriage gives no such cause for celebration (Chanda, 2023). 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. Green et al, (2003) postulated that, early marriage not only brings to an end educational opportunity but hampers personal development. Boys are often unable to handle the financial, social and emotional responsibilities that come with marriage and family life, resulting in tensions within the marriage or indeed abandonment of the family. The majority appear to have only limited formal education, thereby constraining their opportunities for paid employment and for important information related to their own and their children's health and well-being. Their inability to support themselves and their children means they often must depend on their parents, grandparents or extended family for support. There is stigma associated with being a young single mother; there is apparently a perception among the broader community that girls in these circumstances are unable to provide adequate care, support, guidance and supervision for their children. International Centre for Reach on Women (ICRW), (2004) explains that, early marriage results in an ongoing cycle of children growing up without adequate parental care. Many child marriages do not last, there is a fear that the cycle of poverty, lack of education and employment and teenage marriage will continue into future generations. Many young married parents may be forced to work away or have little time for child-rearing, leading to a lack of adequate supervision and attention. In such scenarios, older and extended family members, especially grandparents, are often required to take on child-rearing responsibilities.

In accordance with International Centre for Reach on Women (ICRW), (2004), there are a number of local-level groups working to end child marriage. These groups are often the mechanisms through which national actors carry out their practical work: They are the front line for preventing or responding to child marriage, and some of them are the only point of reference in areas where civil society organization or government staffs are not physically present. On the other hand, each district council has a Department of Social Welfare with responsibility for implementing national policy and programs relating to different aspects of child welfare, including child marriage. Under the decentralization process, these councils will take on more responsibility for implementing and coordinating development programs (Ibid, 2004). Representing the substructure of the traditional authorities, chiefs form the most widespread and accessible mechanism for addressing family and social issues in Zambia. The role of chiefs as champions in tackling child marriage is well documented, and their influence has been substantiated by this research. The role of the ndunas (headmen/women) may be particularly important because they are ever present in communities and thus the most accessible 'authority' for the majority of people living in rural areas. It is unlikely that any legal or policy reform will have any effect on communities without the involvement of this group (Moore, 2011).

On the other hand, the police are widespread throughout the country, and many stations now have a Victim Support Unit or an officer who has been trained on how to handle domestic and gender-based violence. Officers report that cases of child marriage often initially come to their attention as cases of domestic violence. Experiences such as these have led the police to become increasingly active in awareness-raising around child marriage. Though cognizant of the laws, officers assert that resource constraints, combined

with the preference of communities to use traditional mechanisms, hinder their ability to bring cases of child marriage to trial (Noland, 2003). Provision of economic Opportunities for Young Women Child marriage is inextricably linked to poverty and families' economic status strongly indicates whether their daughters will be married early. Child brides have less access to schooling and paid work. Cut off from educational and economic opportunities, girls who marry young are more likely to be poor and remain poor. Eliminating child marriage could contribute to broad efforts to reduce long term poverty. In the short term, targeted incentives for postponing marriage into adulthood and providing economic opportunities for unmarried girls after they finish school can help delay marriage. These livelihood opportunities include skills training, micro-credit or savings clubs, and jobs and job placement services. Policy-makers and program planners should also consider ways to make it easier for families to afford education fees and send girls to school. Expanding opportunities for girls and young women can help change social norms that view marriage as their only option, particularly in cultures where bride price and dowry are common (Brown, 2008).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Early marriage or child brides do not imply that children are involved, and the term is vague because what one society considers early might be late for another. Most marriages are arranged by parents, and girls rarely meet their future husband before the wedding. The girls know that after the wedding, they will move to their husband's household become responsibility of their in-laws, and might not see their own family or friends for some time. Early marriage is a challenge which affects both high and low income countries of which Zambia is not an exception. It is a problem which affects almost everybody ranging from teachers, general public, policy makers and many others. The problem of high rate of early marriage if left unattended to, will result in girls leading a very terrible lifestyle. Ultimately, this in turn will positively affect learners' lives and their adult life. Bartel (2001) states that child marriages created problems to both sexes although girls were more affected since they were most vulnerable to early marriages and were the majority victims. Child marriage limited the child's education, affected the general health, and placed the affected in disadvantaged position. For instance, children engaged in an early marriage were more likely to drop out of school, had little or no education, were unemployed or low paid, lived in poor housing conditions and had a lot of children (Chanda, 2023). Despite the efforts being made by the government and various stakeholders in reducing early marriages in the most communities in the country, however there has been an increase in the girls being married early in most communities of Lusaka district in Zambia.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors leading to early marriages in selected communities of Lusaka district in Zambia.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of the study were to:

- Investigate into the causes of early marriages in selected communities of Lusaka district in Zambia.
- Analyze the effects of early marriages on the academic performance of girls who were married off.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by primary socialization theory and the individual difference theory. The primary socialization theory also sees media as one of the primary sources of sexual education for youth in that it says that the primary socialization agents that play a significant role in consumer socialization include parents, peers, schools and Media. These agents influence the psychological, emotional, and understandings of young people as they become consumers in the marketplace. Their influence extends to specific consumer skills such as product selection, brand comparison, price comparison, attitudes toward products

and brands. Research suggests, however, that the relative influence of these socialization agents (parents, peers, schools, and mass media) can change, particularly as the young person ages and matures (Blanc, 1998). It has been evidenced by Boshe, (2009) that while any of these groups (school, family and peers) are capable of transmitting both prosocial and deviant norms, family and school are seen as being primarily prosocial and peer groups carrying the main risk of transmitting deviant norms. Peer groups, according to the above authors, form the last primary socialization group, and have the greatest impact on those alienated from the first two groups.

The individual difference theory has been used mainly in social communication to highlight the influential role of individual's characteristics and qualities (also referred to as individual context) on perception of information or any other stimulus and on the behavior of individuals (Ibid, 2009). The psychological context represents the sum of one's experiences- one's upbringing, education, previous interactions. It is the product of one's collective encounters with the world. It includes psychological qualities (individual needs, values, beliefs, attitudes, and personality), and personal characteristics (age, sex, race, ethnic background and culture). Human beings vary greatly in their personal psychological organization. These variations in part begin with differential biological endowment, but are due in greater measure to differential learning. From different learning environments, people acquire a set of attitudes, values and beliefs that constitute their personal psychological make-up and set each somewhat a part from his/her fellows. Bruce (2004) in his experimental study of human perception highlighted that "the individual's values, needs, beliefs and attitudes played an influential role in determining how he selected stimuli from the environment and the way he attributed meaning to those stimuli within his acquired frames of reference once they came to his attention". What constitutes one's personal psychological context is anything that "you bring to a communication situation that affects the way you interpret, analyze, encode, or decode a message. However, the individual difference theory focuses more on the psychological patterns and seems therefore to not give much credit to the sociological and cultural patterns. In fact, research has revealed that, beyond the psychological context, people with some common social, economic, demographic and cultural characteristics are likely to perceive and respond to a stimulus in a more or less equal way (Ibid, 2004).

### **Significance of the Study**

It is hoped that the findings of the study would help bring out possible solutions that may be of help in solving the problem of early marriages in selected communities of district and the country at large. Therefore, the information obtained may be made available to stakeholders so that appropriate actions may be taken. It is further anticipated that this research study would open the minds of various stakeholders who include non-specialist teachers, specialist teachers, school administrators, non-governmental organizations, social workers, parents and other educationalist on how they can be involved in curbing the challenges which arise from teaching learners whose written texts are revelatory yet untapped by schools. This study may also play a role of influencing stakeholders especially policy makers to formulate policies that would benefit teachers and learners and add to the knowledge about language, cognition and affection among learners which in due course would culminate in a crusade that will promote a discrimination and stigma free education system which will foster inclusiveness and positive discrimination of persons with visual impairment in a just society free from labeling.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Design**

In accordance with Cres well (2009), research designs are plans and procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection. Tromp (2006) postulates that a research design can be thought of as the structure of research. It holds all the elements in a research project together. This study adopted a mixed method approach where quantitative and qualitative data was

corrected. The use of two methodologies was found to enhance research findings by providing a well-rounded understanding of the phenomenon under study. The mixed methods approach allowed the study to not only ensure the validity of the findings but also collect rich information from different perspectives. This mixed methods approach was used because it enabled the study to collect both quantified and personal verbatim which was of good help in furthering understanding of responses from the intended respondents.

### Research Site

This study was conducted in Lusaka district, the capital city of Zambia from the selected for the study were Schools A, B, C, D, and E.

### Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The population for the study comprised selected officials at District Education Board Secretary, School Head Teachers, Teachers, Chiefs, Community members and Pupils, giving a total of one thousand five hundred fifty (1550). The sample size involved a total of 150 respondents which included Two (2) officials from DEBS office, four (4) head teachers, one (1) from each selected school, two (2) chiefs, forty-two (42) community members and one hundred (100) pupils, 25 coming from each selected school. The study used both purposive and simple random sampling on different participants.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to the examining of what has been collected in a survey or experiment and making deductions and inferences. Data analysis also involves scrutinizing the acquired information and making inferences. For the purpose of analysis in this research, the collected responses from the questionnaires and interviews as well as focus group discussions were arranged thematically and coded accordingly using a coding scheme. The coding scheme helped to create codes and scales from the responses, which were then summarized and analyzed using a relevant statistical software package. Preferably the researcher made use of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS v 16) as well as through Microsoft excels.

### Ethical Issues

Permission from the District Education Board for Lusaka district was sought in carrying out this study. Informed consent was sought from the respondents before collecting information from them 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 study avoided pressuring respondents to take part in the research. In this research, the study was 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 researcher for use only in the research, and participant's identities will forever remain hidden.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

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

### Causes of Early Marriages in Selected Communities of Lusaka District

#### Age Diversity and Pupil Performance

Table 1: Extent to Which Age Diversity Affects Pupils' Academic Performance

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Great extent	23	52%

Moderate extent	27	48%
Low extent	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

The study sought to determine the extent to which age diversity affects pupil's academic performance. From the findings 52% of the respondents agreed to a great extent that age diversity does affect school performance. Respondents over the age of 50 expressed that they are losing morale because of the emerging trends in technology which affected the pupil performance who engaged in early marriages and hence dropped out of school and putting the employees below the ages of 40 at an advantage. Employees between the ages 25 – 35 turned out to be vibrant, energetic and advanced in technology. Low morale in the employees over 50 will lead to low productivity therefore affecting performance. The respondents below the age of 40 expressed that knowledge sharing on experiences attained by the teachers over 40 was such an ideal for the school performance. However, those in Management positions also had their own view, they felt having an age diversified comes with its own advantages and disadvantages which will affect the whole organization. The 8% of the respondents indicated that age diversity affects performance moderately. This means that they agree to an extent that age diversity affects performance. There was no record of any disagreements to this research question. This implies that age diversity affects pupil performance largely (Glass, 2007). According to these findings, the effects are both positive and negative. Age diversity can significantly influence the occurrence of early marriages, shaping societal norms and individual life choices. In communities characterized by a wide range of age groups, varying perspectives and expectations regarding marriage often emerge. Older generations may adhere to traditional values, emphasizing the importance of early unions for stability or cultural reasons. On the contrary, younger individuals may be exposed to more progressive ideals, promoting personal growth, education, and career development before entering into matrimony. The interplay of these diverse viewpoints can create tension and conflicting societal norms, leading to either the perpetuation or challenge of early marriage practices. Additionally, age diversity can impact access to resources and opportunities, influencing the decision-making process for young couples. Economic, educational, and social disparities between generations can contribute to the prevalence or mitigation of early marriages, as younger individuals may be compelled to marry early due to limited options or conversely, empowered to delay marriage in pursuit of broader life goals. Consequently, understanding and addressing age diversity becomes crucial in developing strategies to promote informed decision-making, gender equality, and overall well-being within diverse communities.

### **Ethnic Diversity and Pupils' Academic Performance due to Early marriages**

In this section, the study sought to determine whether ethnic diversity due to early marriages had an influence on pupil performance. Ethnic diversity can significantly impact the prevalence and dynamics of early marriages within a society. The cultural mosaic created by diverse ethnic groups often brings forth a range of traditions, norms, and values that shape individuals' perspectives on marriage. In some cultures, early marriages may be deeply rooted in tradition, with customs dictating that individuals should marry at a young age. Hjort (2014) say that the interplay of these cultural norms with ethnic diversity can lead to variations in the prevalence and acceptance of early marriages across different communities. Moreover, ethnic diversity can influence the socio-economic factors associated with early marriages. Certain ethnic groups may experience higher levels of poverty, limited access to education, and restricted economic opportunities, which can contribute to a higher incidence of early marriages within those communities. Discriminatory practices or gender norms prevalent in certain ethnic groups may also play a role in perpetuating early marriages, as they can limit the choices and agency of individuals, particularly young girls. Conversely, ethnic diversity can also be a catalyst for change. Exposure to different cultures within a diverse society may lead to increased awareness and questioning of traditional practices related to early marriages. Education and awareness programs aimed at promoting gender equality and human rights can

find fertile ground in ethnically diverse communities, challenging harmful practices and fostering a more inclusive approach to marriage. In essence, the impact of ethnic diversity on early marriages is complex and multifaceted, influenced by a myriad of cultural, socio-economic, and educational factors. Understanding and addressing this issue requires a nuanced approach that respects the diversity of cultures while advocating for fundamental human rights and equality, especially for vulnerable populations affected by early marriages. The part below will look at the descriptive of ethnicity and pupil performance.

Table 2: Showing How Ethnic Diversity Affect Pupils’ Academic Performance. Level of Agreement to the Statements Below.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
My beliefs influence the way I work	0	0	1	14	10	1.70
My cultural practices and beliefs enable me to cop well with others	0	0	15	2	8	1.77
The company respects my beliefs	0	0	7	17	1	1.75
I prefer working with people with similar beliefs as mine (e.g similar tribe, society, history or culture)	0	0	0	11	14	1.72
My cultural beliefs greatly influence my commitment to work	0	0	1	16	8	1.74

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

The study sought to establish the level at which respondents agreed or disagreed with the above statements relating to ethnicity and performance. Because ethnicity refers to the category of people who identify with each other based on similarities such as common ancestry, beliefs, language, history, society, culture or nation, the above questions helped the researcher to get meaningful data. Responding to the first statement of weather one’s beliefs influenced the way they work, 10 respondents strongly agreed, 14 stated agree and 1 was neutral giving a mean of 1.70. This means that people from different social and cultural groups felt that their beliefs influenced the way they work. For example, a respondent who happened to be a Muslim strongly believed that it is mandatory for him to work very hard but when it is time for him adhere to his religious beliefs, he religion came first other than work. The second statement had a mean of 1.77 which means that the majority felt that their cultural practices and beliefs enabled them to cop well with others because they respect each other’s beliefs and cultural practices, which then gives positive results for the statement that followed. It can be drawn however that despite people respecting each other’s beliefs and differences, a majority of respondents prefers working in groups with similar beliefs, tribe, society, history, etc. They felt there is more understanding and peace among the groups with similarities. (The statement that had a mean of 1.72. The last statement had a mean of 1.74, which shows that a majority felt that their cultural beliefs influenced their commitment to work. From the above findings it can be concluded that ethnic diversity affects pupil performance, more especially those involved with early marriages.

### Gender Diversity and Pupils’ Academic Performance

In this section, the study sought to determine whether gender diversity had an influence on COWI Zambia performance. Gender diversity can significantly impact the prevalence of early marriages, shaping the dynamics of societies and influencing individual life choices. Early marriages, characterized by unions occurring before the age of 18, are often intertwined with prevailing gender norms and roles. In societies marked by gender inequality, where traditional expectations and stereotypes persist, girls are particularly vulnerable to early marriages. Discriminatory practices, limited educational opportunities, and restricted access to resources can contribute to a scenario where girls may be seen as economic burdens on their families, prompting parents to opt for early marriages as a means of ensuring their daughters’ financial security (Fatima et al, 2015). Conversely, the lack of gender diversity in decision-making processes at



various levels of society can perpetuate these harmful practices. When women are not adequately represented in political, economic, and social spheres, policies and initiatives addressing early marriages may lack the nuanced understanding needed to tackle the root causes effectively. Additionally, restrictive gender norms may limit boys’ choices as well, pressuring them to conform to traditional expectations of masculinity and assuming familial responsibilities prematurely. However, embracing gender diversity can be a catalyst for change. Empowering women and challenging traditional gender roles can lead to increased educational opportunities for girls, improved access to healthcare, and enhanced economic prospects. When diverse perspectives inform policies, there is a greater likelihood of implementing measures that address the multifaceted aspects of early marriages. Encouraging gender diversity in leadership positions and dismantling stereotypes helps challenge the societal norms that perpetuate early marriages, fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment (Hofstede, 1980). In essence, gender diversity plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes, dismantling harmful norms, and driving positive change to mitigate the impact of early marriages. By fostering inclusivity and recognizing the inherent value of diverse perspectives, societies can work towards creating environments where individuals, regardless of gender, can make informed choices and pursue opportunities that align with their aspirations and potential. The part below looked at the descriptive of gender diversity and organizational performance.

Table 3: Showing How Gender Diversity Affect Pupils’ Academic performance. Level of Agreement to the Statements Below

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Total Freq
Gender diversity affects performance	0	0	1	14	10	25
Gender diversity does not affect performance	15	2	8	0	0	25

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

The study sought to establish the level at which respondents agreed or disagreed with the above statements relating to gender and performance. 10 people out of 25 strongly agreed while 14 stated Agree and 1 was neutral to the first statement. They felt that gender diversity affects performance in various ways such as males being dominant in decision making positions made females feel less important and that reduced the morale to work hard. Other respondents felt that if performance has more females than males, it is bound to have its overall performance affected. With the second statement, 15 stated strongly disagree, 2 stated disagree and 8 stated neutrals. This illustrates that they all disagreed to the statement that gender diversity does not affect performance. From the findings above, it is significant to conclude that gender diversity affects pupil performance.

### Educational Background Diversity and Early Marriages

Table 4: Showing How Educational Background Diversity Affects Early Marriages

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Freq
Educational background diversity affects early marriage	0	0	1	14	10	25
Educational background does not affect early marriage	15	2	8	0	0	25

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

From the table above all the respondents felt that educational background affects early marriage. Some respondents gave reasons such as, because of their accomplishment in desired education, they are well skilled and knowledgeable in their field of expertise. From the school management perspective, it was found just like any other teacher commented that, it is common to reject pupils whose training, experience, or education is judged inadequate. Well trained and skilled learners with diversity in education put a school

and community at a competitive advantage and high organizational productivity is guaranteed. From the table above, it can be concluded that the majority agreed that educational background affects early marriage. Educational background diversity plays a crucial role in influencing the occurrence of early marriages within societies. The level of education attained by individuals significantly shapes their perspectives, decision-making processes, and aspirations. In communities characterized by diverse educational backgrounds, disparities in values, expectations, and societal norms often emerge. These differences can contribute to variations in the age at which individuals choose to enter into marriage. In regions with a wide range of educational levels, disparities in access to information and awareness about the consequences of early marriages become apparent. Individuals with higher levels of education may be more likely to delay marriage, as they tend to prioritize personal and career development. On the other hand, those with limited educational opportunities may face societal pressures, economic hardships, or traditional beliefs that encourage early matrimony. Hoogendoorn & van Praag (2015) points out that Educational diversity also influences the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Individuals from different educational backgrounds may find it challenging to connect on common ground, leading to miscommunications and conflicts within relationships. This can either contribute to delayed marriages as couples navigate these differences or, conversely, push individuals towards early marriages as a means of conforming to societal expectations. Furthermore, educational background diversity can impact economic factors, as individuals with higher education levels generally have better access to employment opportunities and financial resources. This economic stability can act as a deterrent to early marriages, allowing individuals to establish themselves before taking on the responsibilities of married life. Conversely, those with limited educational backgrounds may face economic vulnerabilities, making early marriages a perceived solution to financial challenges.

### **Effects of Early Marriages on the Academic Performance of Pupils**

As outlined in Figure 1 below, the study found out 6 major effects of early marriages on the academic performance of pupils, more specifically girls. Early marriages can have significant effects on pupils' academic performance. While it's important to note that the impact can vary depending on cultural, social, and economic factors, here are some general effects. Officers from DEBS office explained that the disruption of education resulting from early marriage constitutes a grave challenge that hampers the holistic development and potential of individuals, particularly young girls. Early marriage often compels adolescents, especially girls, to prematurely abandon their educational pursuits, truncating their academic and intellectual growth. This phenomenon perpetuates a cycle of limited opportunities and reinforces gender inequalities, as girls are disproportionately affected. The societal pressure and cultural norms that encourage early marriages tend to prioritize traditional gender roles over educational aspirations, perpetuating a cycle of limited opportunities and reinforcing gender inequalities (Kamonjoh, 2015). Consequently, the abrupt termination of education not only deprives individuals of the knowledge and skills needed for personal advancement but also perpetuates socio-economic disparities within communities. Addressing the disruption of education caused by early marriage requires a comprehensive approach that combines legal reforms, community awareness, and targeted educational interventions to empower young individuals, especially girls, to pursue their education and break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage.

Moving on, community members responded that Early marriages pose significant health challenges for individuals, particularly for young brides. One of the primary concerns is the increased risk of maternal and child health complications. Young girls who enter into marriage early are often not physically mature enough to bear children safely, leading to higher rates of maternal mortality and morbidity. These girls may face complications during pregnancy and childbirth, such as obstructed labor and fistulas, which can have long-lasting physical and psychological consequences. Furthermore, early marriages contribute to limited access to education and economic opportunities for young brides. Magoshi, E. & Chang (2009) narrates that the lack of education and economic independence exacerbates health challenges as it hinders their ability to make informed decisions about their health and well-being. Limited knowledge about reproductive health, family planning, and nutrition can result in poor health outcomes for both mothers and their children. Early

marriages also increase the vulnerability of young brides to domestic violence and sexual abuse. The power dynamics in such relationships often leave these girls with little control over their own bodies and reproductive choices, further compromising their physical and mental health. The stress and emotional toll of early marriages can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. In addition, the cycle of poverty is perpetuated as early marriages often lead to larger family sizes and increased economic strain on households. This can result in inadequate access to healthcare, nutritious food, and sanitation, contributing to a higher prevalence of infectious diseases and malnutrition among young brides and their children. Addressing the health challenges associated with early marriages requires a multifaceted approach that includes promoting education, empowering girls and women, and implementing policies that discourage child marriage. By addressing the root causes and providing support systems, we can work towards breaking the cycle of early marriages and improving the health outcomes of young individuals, fostering a healthier and more equitable society.

Another set of respondents (head teachers) pointed out that Increased absenteeism can be a significant consequence of early marriages, as young individuals who enter into matrimony at an early age often face challenges in balancing familial responsibilities with their education or employment commitments. Early marriages can interrupt the regular attendance of individuals in schools or workplaces, leading to a higher rate of absenteeism. Young married individuals may struggle to cope with the demands of their new roles as spouses and potentially parents, making it difficult for them to prioritize their educational or professional pursuits. The emotional and financial burdens associated with early marriages may force individuals to miss school or work more frequently, impacting their academic performance or career advancement (Max et al, 2015). This highlights the need for comprehensive societal efforts to address the root causes of early marriages and provide support systems to mitigate the adverse effects on education and employment. The study also found that limited access to resources can significantly contribute to the prevalence of early marriages in various societies. When communities face economic challenges, individuals, particularly girls, may find themselves in vulnerable positions with restricted opportunities for education and personal development. In such circumstances, families may view early marriages as a strategy to cope with economic hardships, seeing it as a way to alleviate financial burdens and secure basic needs. Girls may be married off at a young age, often without their consent, as families perceive marriage as a means of transferring the responsibility of care to another household. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty and reinforces traditional gender roles (Gupta, 2013). Additionally, inadequate access to resources like education and healthcare limits the ability of young individuals to make informed decisions about their lives and futures, perpetuating the cycle of early marriages and its associated consequences. Addressing the root causes of limited resources is crucial for breaking this cycle and promoting a more equitable and sustainable future.

Pupils also clarified that early marriages can significantly limit the time available for studies, posing a formidable challenge to the educational pursuits of individuals involved. When individuals marry at a young age, they often find themselves shouldering responsibilities such as managing a household, caring for children, and fulfilling societal expectations. These demands can leave little room for academic endeavors, hindering the pursuit of higher education or career aspirations. Limited time for studies can lead to a restricted skill set and knowledge base, potentially impacting long-term personal and professional growth. Additionally, the lack of educational opportunities may contribute to economic dependence and reduced empowerment for those affected by early marriages. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that considers the socio-cultural factors contributing to early marriages and promotes policies supporting education and personal development for all individuals, regardless of their marital status. Furthermore, chiefs noted that early marriages can contribute significantly to social isolation, as individuals entering matrimony at a young age often find themselves distanced from their peers and broader social circles. Dezo & Ross (2012) explains that the decision to marry early may limit educational opportunities, hinder personal development, and restrict access to social networks outside the immediate family. Social isolation can result from the challenges of balancing marital responsibilities with the desire for social interaction. Young couples may struggle to engage in activities typically associated with their age group,

leading to a sense of detachment and alienation. Moreover, early marriages may exacerbate gender disparities, particularly if individuals, especially young brides, experience restricted autonomy and limited opportunities for social engagement (Ebsham et al, 2011). Overall, the impact of early marriages on social isolation underscores the importance of promoting comprehensive education, empowering individuals to make informed choices, and fostering supportive environments that enable personal growth beyond the confines of early matrimony.

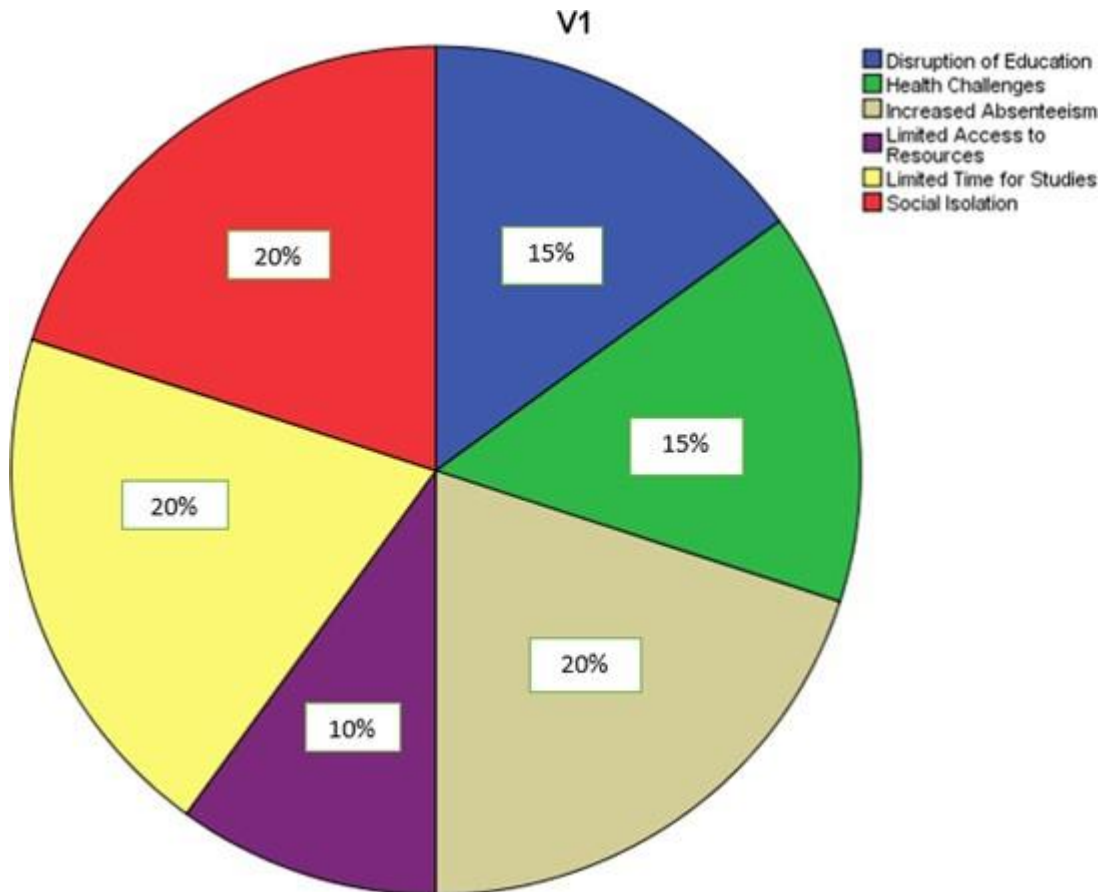


Figure 1: Showing Effects of Early Marriages on the Academic Performance of Pupils

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be said that the effects of early marriages on communities and schools are profound and multifaceted, encompassing social, economic, and educational dimensions. The negative repercussions of such unions underscore the importance of addressing this issue at various levels of society. On a social level, early marriages can perpetuate cycles of poverty and reinforce gender inequalities. Young brides may face increased vulnerability to domestic violence and may struggle with the responsibilities of parenthood at an age when they are still developing emotionally and psychologically. This, in turn, can contribute to strained family dynamics and hinder the overall well-being of the community. Economically, communities may bear the brunt of early marriages as they face the challenge of supporting young families with limited resources. This can lead to a higher prevalence of poverty and hinder the community's economic development. Additionally, the lack of education and skills among young parents may limit their employment opportunities, perpetuating a cycle of financial instability. In the realm of education, early marriages can disrupt the academic trajectories of young individuals, particularly girls. The responsibilities of marriage and parenthood often force young brides to abandon their education

prematurely, depriving them of the skills and knowledge needed for personal and professional growth. The ripple effect is felt in schools, where dropout rates may increase, and the potential of a well-educated and skilled workforce diminishes. To mitigate these adverse effects, concerted efforts are needed at the community, institutional, and policy levels. Community-based initiatives should focus on raising awareness about the consequences of early marriages and fostering a supportive environment that encourages education and empowerment for both genders. Schools should implement comprehensive sex education programs that address the risks associated with early marriages and emphasize the importance of completing one's education before embarking on familial responsibilities. Policy interventions should target legal frameworks that may inadvertently support early marriages. Governments should enact and enforce laws that set a minimum age for marriage, ensuring that individuals have the opportunity to reach maturity before making such life-altering decisions. Additionally, economic policies should prioritize investments in education and vocational training to empower young individuals and break the cycle of poverty associated with early marriages. In essence, tackling the effects of early marriages requires a holistic and collaborative approach. By addressing the issue comprehensively, communities and schools can contribute to the creation of a more equitable, educated, and prosperous society, breaking the chains of intergenerational cycles of early marriages and their detrimental consequences.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- There is a need for the Ministry of Education to enhance the implementation of comprehensive sex education programs in schools to educate students about the consequences of early marriages and the importance of delaying marriage until adulthood.
- There is a need for the government to advocate for the enforcement of existing laws and the introduction of new legislation to protect individuals from early marriages.
- There is a need for the chiefs to establish community-based support systems that provide mentorship and guidance to young individuals, helping them make informed decisions about their future.
- The government should ensure that all communities have access to reproductive health services and information, including family planning, to empower individuals to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health.
- Community members should create programs that address the specific challenges faced by girls in accessing and completing their education, such as gender-based discrimination and cultural barriers.
- Head teachers should perceive age diversity as a source of a competitive advantage within the school. They should embrace age diversity for the potential impact that it has for creativity and innovativeness in the school.

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### Author's Short Biography



**Chanda Chansa Thelma** specializes in Social Sciences, Political Science and Education. She has lectured and still lecturing at the University level for seven years now.