

Factors that Contributed to the Rise of Child Marriages during Covid-19 Lockdown in Zimbabwe: A Case of Kwekwe District

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated factors which contributed to the rise of child marriage during Covid-19 lockdown in the district of Kwekwe. This study utilised Maslow's human needs theory to highlight how the need to satisfy basic survival needs shape the behaviour of individuals. From the literature review, factors like poverty, school closures, teenage pregnancy and child rights capacity-building programs failure to operate were among the drivers of child marriage. The researcher used a qualitative approach and case study research design. The researcher targeted the population in Kwekwe district, Zimbabwe. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to sample participants. The size of the sample was 30 participants for the questionnaire and 3 for the interview. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. The findings indicated that, poverty increased child marriages because guardians were not working due to lockdown restrictions. Lockdown school closures affected girls as they lost hope as they could not afford digital lessons. Closure of schools forced them to get married. The findings indicated that teenage pregnancies escalated due to more free time which increased child marriage during the lockdown. Findings show that, child rights and capacity building programs that protected and prevented child marriages, were limited, which left a high number of girls vulnerable. Based on these findings, the researcher recommends the need for the empowerment of young girls especially those who are victims of child marriage through creation of projects that will assist them to go back to school and reduce rate of poverty and all forms of abuse. There should be a further study to develop more concrete findings on the extent of the child marriage problem and the societal and legal solutions to end them.

Key words: Child marriage, lockdown, factors, covid-19.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 affected the lives of children and families across the globe and adversely affected programmes to end child marriage. Throughout history, child marriages were the custom in most countries. With the average life expectation during such times being only 40 to 45 years of age, child marriages was the faster way to reproduce (Jamieson, 2004). Girls were usually married off as soon as they reached puberty or sometimes even prior to (Jamieson, 2004). He further noted that the practice of child marriages began to be questioned when countries started developing, women started receiving education, voting and other rights and entered the workforce, their economic conditions improved, and there were massive improvements in average life expectancy due to advanced medical practices. Therefore, globally there was a huge progress in reducing the chances of child marriage in various countries. The importance of ending child marriage has been recognized by the international community as well through its inclusion in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5; achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Target 5.3 seeks to end child, early and forced marriage by 2030. Child marriage also hinders the realization of many other SDGs, especially those related to education and health.

World Health Organization on March 11 2020, declared the outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease COVID-19 a global pandemic (Jee, 2020). To reduce the spreading and death toll excessive and restrictive measures

were imposed which includes; school closures, prohibiting mass gatherings, social distancing and in some cases complete lockdown of people's movement. In line with WHO directives the Zimbabwean government also took measures to contain the spread of the virus. Measures such as lockdowns were devastating for people whose livelihoods were based around informal economic activities. The effects of such measures on the girl child are the subject of this study.

Adolescence is a critical age for girls and boys throughout the world. Globally, 39 million girls aged 14–15 in developing countries do not reach secondary education due to several reasons that include early marriage (UNESCO, 2004, as cited in Kanjanda and Chiparange, 2016). What takes place during a child's teenage years shapes future life circumstances. It is important to mold and shape the lives of adolescents' girls and boys to achieve great future leaders and improve socio-economic development. The threat of child marriage is far greater when communities are affected by economic shocks and have limited access to basic services such as health, education and child protection, all of which were being negatively impacted by the pandemic. COVID 19 resulted in factories and businesses in urban centres closing. Surprisingly, this resulted in the surge of child marriages in urban areas which is usually lower when compared to rural areas.

Statement of the problem

The world made a commitment to end the harmful practices of child marriage and the pandemic was making the global target harder to reach. Previous studies show that there was a huge progress on reducing cases of child marriages. In Kwekwe Town, Zimbabwe, there was rapid increase in child marriage as a result of the epidemic. There was also an increase in school dropouts especially among girls. Therefore, the study seeks to establish the factors which contributed to the increase of child marriages during the lockdown.

Aim of the study

To examine factors that contributed to the rise of child marriages during COVID 19 pandemic lockdown in Zimbabwe using a case study of Kwekwe.

Objectives of the study

- a. To examine how poverty increased child marriages during lockdown.
- b. To explore how closure of schools during COVID 19 lockdown contributed to an increase in child marriages.
- c. To examine how teenage pregnancies increased child marriage during the lockdown.
- d. To analyze how violation of child rights led to an increase of child marriages.
- e. To analyze how disruption of capacity building programs led to an increase of child marriages.

Research questions

- a. How did poverty contribute to an increase of child marriages during the lockdown?
- b. How did closure of schools during COVID 19 lockdown pandemic contribute to an increase child marriages?
- c. How did teenage pregnancies contribute to the rise of child marriages during the lockdown?
- d. How did violation of children's rights lead to an increase of child marriages during the lockdown?
- e. How did disruption of capacity building programs lead to the increase of child marriages during the lockdown?

Conceptual framework

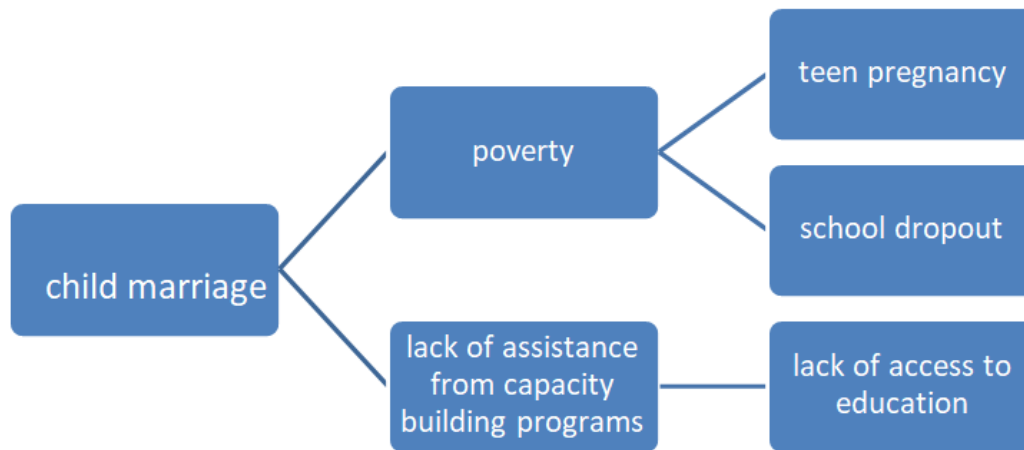


Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing the hypothesized drivers of child marriage

The conceptual framework shown above shows the factors of child marriage. The drivers emanate from poverty and lack of assistance from capacity building programs. In addition, teenage pregnancy, school dropout and lack of access to education also drive child marriage.

Poverty is an economic factor which affects a girl child. Child marriage is driven by poverty (Nour, 2006). Poverty encourages child marriage as a coping strategy for insecurity or financial instability where girls tend to get married to rich families to escape a hard life. The COVID-19 pandemic affected household finances through loss of employment/income due to lockdowns (Yukich & Cappa, 2021). Many girls dropped out of school due to poverty and financial crisis which forced them to get married at an early age.

Studies before had shown that, lack of opportunity for young girls in education and livelihood leads to child marriage. Yukich and Cappa (2021) indicated that, school closures due to COVID-19 have already resulted in a loss of learning and are likely to increase school dropout. Attending school and having higher levels of education protect girls from possibility of early marriages. Lockdowns affected education which is a weapon in reducing child marriage.

In many societies, parents are pressured to marry off their daughters when they discover that they are pregnant in an effort to prevent dishonor to the family and community. Nour (2006) commented that, parents worry about ensuring their daughters' virginity and chastity. Teen pregnancies escalate in environments where there is disaster, diseases or poverty at most. The lockdown affected daily activities of young girls which might have influenced them premarital sex resulting in marriage.

Institutions play a valuable role in initiating programs and services that are essential to facilitating child rights and protection. Awareness campaigns and education on the importance of a girl child reduces child marriages at the same time creating space for women empowerment and emancipation. The covid-19 pandemic and related mitigation measures have resulted in delays or stoppages in the implementation of such programs (Yukich & Cappa, 2021).

Human needs theory

On earth every human has needs for material sustenance, for instance to eat, and if they don't get satisfied then it seems equally clear that some action will be taken. Child marriages are rampant due to lack of human needs attainment. Young girls escape poverty by getting married and some other families use marriage as a coping mechanism to get their needs through dowry payment. It is universally agreed upon by human needs theorists that, the needs are not only material but also physical and emotional needs. If a person lacks love and belongingness according to Maslow, thus need for affiliation, for friends, supportive family, group identification they tend to change their behavior as well (Maslow in Baridam 2002). Hence, it is noted that at most when a girl child lacks love, belonging and sense of safety they tend to find that out of their family,

despite being under the age of 18, they engage into intimate relationships to attain those needs. Maslow's theory suggests that the most basic level of needs must be met before the individual will strongly desire (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017). According to Baridam (2002), Maslow's theory was on the assumption that, individuals have certain needs that influence their behaviour, unsatisfied needs can influence behaviour. Child marriage interconnects with human needs which are shown through behavioral change of a girl child. Young girls get married due to environment instability which emanates from poverty, lack of education, social norms, teenage pregnancy, lack of community and government support to mention a few. These social and economic problems forces adolescent girls to choose marriage instead. Covid-19 lockdown was characterized with the above crisis which affected human security and teenagers were vulnerable which increased the chances of child marriages.

Basic needs proposed by Maslow include: physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization. This is well portrayed on the pyramid below.

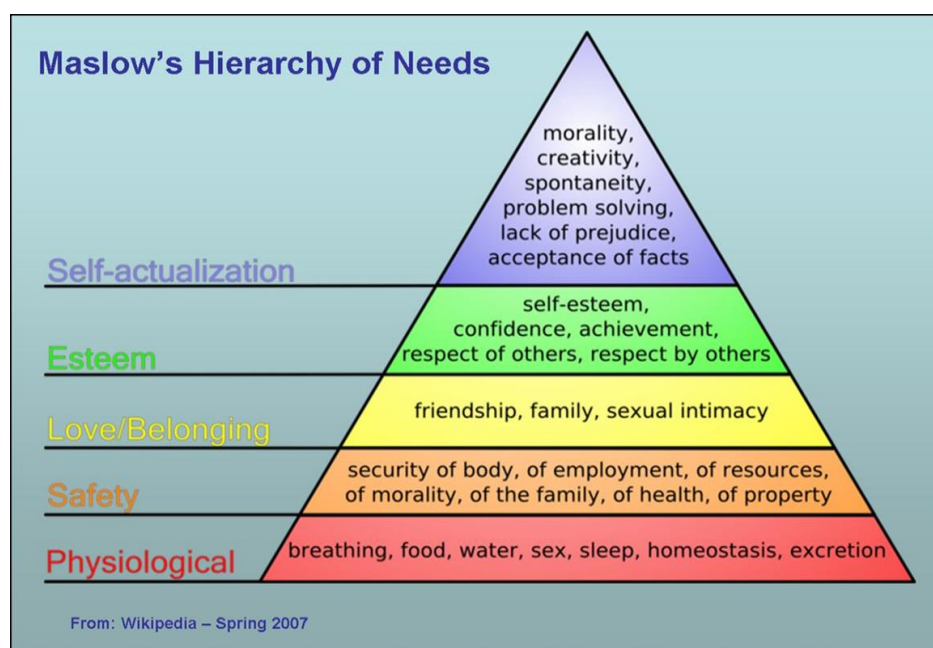


Fig 2: Maslow's pyramid of human needs

The needs above can be grouped into social and economic drivers of child marriages and a lot of studies fail to cover the research on needs and wants which influences girls into marriage. Sources of child marriages gives a broader aspect of factors, effects and implications failing to articulate the needs as Maslow's pyramid shows how food, water, love and education are essential to human daily life. The theory gives an understanding to the question why there was an increase in child marriages as it is shown that, if needs are not met, girls change their behaviour and take their own actions to satisfy themselves. Young girls' needs were not met during the lockdown and their decisions, actions and situations they faced, forced them to be 'Child Brides'. Maslow further stresses that, these needs being unfulfilled are at the root of many mental disturbances. Human beings cannot afford to survive without core human needs. Inability to obtain basic human needs for human survival are not only humiliating but it also negatively affect mental and physical needs of human beings (Dormekpor, 2015). Gleitman and Gross (2010) highlighted Maslow's argument that motivated behaviour that is connected to the achievement of lacking basic needs is engaged because it satisfy those needs. The behaviour aimed at satisfying deficiency needs can be viewed as means towards an end. Schirch (2013) noted that the drive to satisfy core human needs shapes human behaviour. Therefore, children engage into negative habits and lifestyle which turn them into child brides. Lockdown affected lives of many families which impacted on children at most.

Research gap at present, there is a serious lack of data on all aspects of early marriages during COVID 19. There are no clear statistics on the number of girls who engaged in child marriages during the pandemic but assumptions from various institutions and communities imply that there was a noticeable increase in child marriage rate. There are as yet very few studies that have examined the practice from a human security and

human needs perspective, in terms of trends or its impact children, families, or the wider society. These gaps need to be filled urgently, since data must inform policies and programmers and provide a basis for effective advocacy.

Factors contributing to the increase of child marriages

There are various factors influencing child marriages which vary from place to place. According to UNFPA (2006), child marriage and poverty are interconnected; where poverty exist child marriage is likely to occur. Sometimes the girl is likely to be considered an economic burden, where families are often eased to find a spouse for the girl. For instance, in Zimbabwe cases like that are found among some religious denominations where girls are married off to older men because of financial reasons. This normally takes place when the child is very young and indecisive (UNFPA, 2006). The World Health Organisation also argues that, poverty is the main factor that contributes to child marriage. Other factors are being referred to as; peer pressure emanating from the environment children are exposed to, closure of schools during COVID 19 as well as poor governance being silence to individual rights and security which is human security considerations. However, according to the World Bank (2012), the underlying continuation of the trend despite restrictions is due to social standards and what is expected behaviour from girls. The above factors will be illustrated below.

Poverty

Poverty and economic factors encourage child marriage as a coping strategy for financial instability, insecurity or as a livelihood strategy for girls. Poverty definition internationally used is a person surviving on less than \$1.25 per day (World Bank, 2010). A typical family in Africa consist of a large number of children due to lack of safety net available for poor families. Instead, in African families, parents when growing old depend on their children for support. Child marriage rates have been observed to increase in response to extrinsic economic shocks in African regions where bride wealth is commonly practiced, with parents presumably marrying daughters early in order to access capital (Corno and Voena 2016). Global health actors expect a similar pattern may arise in response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic (Cousins 2020). It can be profitable for the family when girls enter marriage very young in order to get rid of the cost of the girl and possibly receive an amount of money exchange. (UNFPA, 2006).

Korankye (2014) argue that, the most extreme form of poverty involve shortage of basic needs to sustain human life such as sufficient and healthy food, shelter, clothing, safe clean water poor access to health services. It is of much pity to find that, women are key actors when striving for development. Women are allotted with more capital, education is usually prioritized which further contributes to development (Witcher, 2009). COVID-19 and the associated policy responses have devastated the livelihoods of many communities. Travel restrictions and market closures have disrupted economies and the informal and low income work predominantly conducted by women and girls (CARE, 2020; World Bank, 2020). As a result, girls and their households are reporting diminished income, loss of work, and heightened food insecurity (Archarya et al., 2020; Amin et al., 2020; Population Council, 2020). As AGYW seek to secure income and meet critical needs, they may engage in labor that increases their risk of exploitation Adebajoko and Walter (2014: 365) adds that, the concept of what may be part of basic needs has been broadened and is no longer limited to water, food, clothing and shelter, but also encompass education, health care services, political participation, credit, as well as security and dignity. Since women and girls play a huge role in providing the household in Africa, there was a decrease in study time, and an increase in time spent on household activities such as caring for others and chores during the lockdown among both boys and girls; but the magnitudes of these changes were significantly larger for girls than for boys. According to Ikejiaku (2009), poverty is viewed as a multidimensional problem that is not limited to economics but it goes further to include political, social as well as cultural issues. Thus, poverty affects all spheres of life. Poverty increased globally due to shut down or lockdown regulation imposed by World Health Organization (WHO) for health security reasons. This affected lives of people as social distance regulations restricted majority of people to work or earn money for survival. In times of distress a lot of girls get married to escape poverty and this is evident in many sources of child marriages in times of Ebola outbreak. Excessive poverty results in the toll of marriages. Poverty as a contributing factor to child marriages during lockdown was not explored in Kwekwe district. This study is an attempt to find how poverty has affected the girl child in terms of marriages.

Lack of assistance from child rights and capacity building programs

Lack of child rights and capacity building programs involvement increases child marriage due to lack of awareness and campaigns as well as financial assistance. Government and non-governmental organisations failed to assist marginalized and poor children during the lockdown. Some of the organisations couldn't provide service to the grass root and many girls got married as a way to reduce their suffering. These organisations failed to operate effectively as they were not in the category of essential services. As mentioned earlier in this study there was a huge progress in protecting a girl child from child marriage but lockdown affected the progress. If the government and organisations worked together there would be a change in child marriages. There is need to find out how lack of assistance from non-governmental organisations and government affected child marriages during lockdown.

Closure of schools during covid-19

Future was bleak for many children as they would spend months at home failing to access online lessons and generally trying to obtain the means to survive since the lockdown restricted non-essential workers to operate. In Zimbabwe, many children failed to access online lessons due to economic hardships and the technology level is quite low or rather backward. Therefore, many girls became victims of child marriages as that was the only option for survival. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO (2004, as cited in Kanjanda and Chiparange, 2016), globally, 39 million girls aged 14–15 in developing countries do not reach secondary education due to several reasons that include early marriage. This would mean that if a child gets into marriage before she completes her education she will have to depend on the husband or the community as UNICEF, (2000) postulates that failure of a girl child to further with education because of marriage increases the girl-child's chances of remaining a second class individual and dependent in the society. Girls' educational attainment is a vital investment in their future earning power (World Bank, 2018). As of late June 2020, school closures due to COVID-19 were affecting almost 900 million learners (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). While education sectors and governments have issued strategies for remote learning, many students did not have the digital resources to benefit from these strategies. The question on how school closures during lockdown affected girls leading to child marriages was answered in the study.

Teenage pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy refers to an underage girl, who usually between ages 13 to 18 years old becomes pregnant. Most young girls nowadays engage in early sexual debut for various reasons such as not living with both parents, financial or material benefits, or mental distress. During the lockdown many girls were victims of teen pregnancy due to lack of parental monitoring, alcohol use and exposure to sexual risk behaviour which forced them to get married early due to social and cultural norms expectations. Lockdown opened an opportunity for teenagers to spend a lot of time doing nothing at home and others spending time together influencing each other in doing bad things. Teenage pregnancies therefore cause early marriages. There is an influence of peer group attachments on child marriages motivation. Children engage in early sexual activities and drug abuse and this tend to force them into early marriages probably due to family issues or situational force. There is behavioral change in individuals as they tend to behave exactly according to what their peer groups whom they associate with behaves. During COVID 19 pandemic lockdown, children spend more time together. Therefore, deviant behaviours led them into experimenting sexual activities or drug abuse leading to child marriages. Teenage pregnancy during the lockdown in the district of Kwekwe was analysed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a qualitative approach. Kothari (2004) posits that the major advantage of qualitative research is its strong ability to provide in depth descriptions of people's experiences. . On this case, the use of qualitative research was an advantage and of much importance as it emphasizes the use of words rather than numbers as compared to the quantitative research style. The researcher used data which was collected through participant observation, interviews and a questionnaire.

The study was carried out in Kwekwe urban, Torwood and Rutendo suburbs to get a broader sense in the increase of child marriage during COVID 19. Kwekwe Town is in the Midlands Province Zimbabwe which is located approximately 220km from the metropolitan cities of Harare and Buluwayo (Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe, 2022).

A case study research design was used. The case study is intended to answer in most cases the “how” and “what” questions which are so crucial in the study. Therefore, this study used a case study of Kwekwe District.

The target population were residents of two suburbs in the City of Kwekwe of all age groups, victims of child marriage as well as key informants drawn from officials of social welfare department. The questionnaire was answered by a sample of 35 participants who were purposively selected. Thirty 30(86%) participants responded to the questionnaire. Three participants, who were victims of child marriage, were interviewed. The three interviewed participants were selected using snowball sampling.

Three victims of child marriage and two key informant were interviewed. This was more suitable as it provided the opportunity to use visual signs such as gestures which can help in clarification. Interviewees spoke freely about their experiences without being limited to what is written down. Also, the key informants were given an opportunity to explain in detail the factors that contributed to child marriages during the lockdown. Questionnaires were self-administered. The researcher chose the questionnaire as a research instrument after assessing their advantages the extent to which they guarantee validity and reliability of the findings. The researcher gathered data that was presented in tables, bar graphs and pie charts. The responses were converted into percentages in order to establish the highest frequency. The data from interviews was presented in the form of quotations taking exactly what was said by the participants. Thematic data analysis is highly inductive as the themes that emerge from the data are not in any way imposed by the researcher (Braun and Clark 2006). The researcher formulated themes from the data collected relating to the research questions which guided the researcher during data collection process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background of participants

The participants' age ranged from 16 years to 65 years. The majority of the respondents 18(60%) were aged between 16 and 25. The next age group between 26 and 45 were 6(20%). The age group between 46 and 65 had 6(20) participants. .

The majority of participants 25(83.3%) were females. Only 5(16.7) were males. There is gender imbalance because most men refused to participate in this study for various reasons. For instance, others declined due to the fact that it's a study about a girl child so they weren't comfortable to participate. Most participants 18(60%) were single, while married participants were 10(33.4%). Only 2 (6.6%) were widowed. Majority were single individuals below 18 years which is a credit to collect data from teenagers' perspective since the study was on child marriage and their age group was affected most during lockdown. However, there was a need for even distribution of information between single and married because, the married group experienced marriage and knows the implications of child marriage.

Most respondents 18(60%) were secondary level graduates followed by those who attained education up to tertiary level 12(40%). The fact that respondents had varied educational backgrounds was important as this provided data from different respondents in terms of education.

Poverty and lockdown

The first objective was to examine the link between poverty and child marriages during lockdown. Okalow (2022) refers to the definition of World Vision on poverty that, as lacking enough resources to provide the necessities of life that includes food, clean water, shelter and clothing but it can extend to include lack of access to health care, education and even transportation. There is a link between poverty and child marriage whereby the United Nations (2020) estimated that, by end of 2022 there will be almost 42 to 66 million already

into extreme poverty as a result of the crisis and this would add to 386 million children already in extreme poverty as recorded in 2019 therefore heightening the cases of child marriages. Poverty increased due to shutdown of businesses.

Table 1 below shows the response to statements which were answered **yes/no** with regards to poverty as the factor which contributed to an increase of child marriages during the lockdown. Three sub-themes emerged from the table namely: lockdown and poverty(1), hunger and child (2&4) marriage, child marriage as a coping mechanism(3)

Table 1 Poverty and child marriages. (No.30)

Statements	No		Yes	
	No.	%	No.	%
1. Lockdown increased poverty which triggered hunger.	5	17	25	83
2. Hunger crisis forced young girls to get married.	5	17	25	83
3. Child marriage was used as a coping mechanism by families to meet household needs during covid-19.	2	7	28	93
4. A girl who experience hunger is likely to get married than a girl who had not experience hunger.	1	3	29	97

Lockdown and poverty

Most of the respondents 25(83 %) concurred with the fact that lockdown increased poverty. This was supported by key informants in an interview who argued that:

Lockdown led to increased poverty because many people were no longer working as most companies were closed. (Key informant A interview)

An industrial worker expressed similar views:

The company where I worked was not regarded as one of the essential ones so was closed during the lockdown. Unfortunately, we were not paid and this led to more poverty. (Key informant B interview).

The results above show that lockdown, as a result of Covid 19, led to increased poverty.

Poverty and hunger

Most of the respondents 25(83%) agreed that poverty may lead to hunger. This was also supported by most of the respondents 29(97%) who agreed that a girl who experience hunger is likely to get married than a girl who had not experienced hunger. These results were also echoed in interviews as shown below:

Victim 1 child marriage explained that:

Both my parents are in South Africa and due to lockdown, they were not working so they couldn't afford to send food or money. I live with my two siblings. We used to spend nights on empty stomachs or just had porridge. My boyfriend, who lives alone, helped me out because he comes from a family that is financially stable, so we decided to live together. Lockdown crippled the source of food. The lockdown worsened the situation which led me into a marriage which was against my wish.(Victim 1 interview)

Victim 2 of child marriage had similar sentiments on how lockdown affected their lives:

My dad and mom both are vendors and due to lockdown measures, everyone was at home and it was a hard time for us. I ended up getting married in order to make ends meet.

Child marriage as coping mechanism

The majority of participants 28(93%) agreed that child marriage was used as a copying mechanism by families to meet households needs. In an interview a key informant lamented how child marriage is used by some to cope with poverty:

There are many cases of child marriage in this town as families try to cope with financial problems. The girl child drops from school and next she gets married even when she is well below eighteen years. The situation was worsened by Covid 19 pandemic. (Key informant B interview).

Similar sentiments were expressed by victim of child marriages who explained why she got married:

My parents failed to pay for my secondary education so after grade 7 I just stayed at home. After a year or two doing nothing at home I got married to the first man who proposed. Lobola was helpful for the family as it provided food and fees for my siblings. (Child marriage victim 2 interview).

The results above indicate that child marriage was used as a coping mechanism in an environment characterized by lockdown and poverty.

These results indicate that, poverty was exacerbated by lockdown during the pandemic which forced young girls to get married to families that are privileged as an escape route from hunger. Okalawo (2022) commented that, child poverty can trigger a cycle of poverty that lasts generations, increase the incidence of early marriage and raise psychological issues of stress and shame. This shows that, poverty is often the cause of child marriage. Lockdown affected the daily lives of people because many work in informal sectors for a living so they didn't go to work which affected their food source and source of income leaving young girls at risks of child marriages as their only solution.

WHO (World Health Organization) (2020) and government's social distancing requirements, travel restrictions and business closures associated with COVID-19 led to a drop in economic activity and an increase in household poverty. The pandemic had harmful effects on the most susceptible household economies and raised the risk of child marriage (Ramaswamy & Seshadri, 2020). This indicates that the resulting economic insecurity limited the ability of parents to provide for their children. UNICEF estimates that an increase in poverty due to COVID-19 would impair children's physical and mental growth and lead to an increase in child marriage (UNICEF, 2020). Poverty during the lockdown forced young girls to get married.

The results of this study reflects well with a UNFPA (2017) report that indicated a connection between poverty and child marriage. Simon et al (2011: 142) asserted that poverty is a comprehensive socio-economic virus which constitutes one of the greatest afflictions of mankind. Lockdown as previously mentioned had huge impact on the economy and poverty rate surged. The surge in poverty was by far the most common explanation provided which forced young girls into marriage. Childhood poverty is closely related to marriage in adolescence (Ramaswamy & Seshadri, 2020). Where poverty exist, child marriage is likely to also be present. Hence, lockdown strained the economy causing poverty which resulted in vulnerability of young girls to child marriages.

Lockdown school closures

The second objective was to explore how closure of schools during COVID 19 lockdown contributed to an increase in child marriages. School closures were imposed in 188 countries around the world, affecting learning of more than 1,5 billion children and youth (UNFPA,2020). Chineka and Kurevakwesu (2021) pointed that children with parents and caregivers who could not meet the costs associated with e-learning were more likely to drop out of school. School closures led to more child marriages as girls had no activities to engage in.

Table 2 shows the results that were obtained on lockdown school closures as a contributing factor to the increase of child marriages.

Table 2: Lockdown and school closures (No.30)

Statements	Agree (frequency)	% (percentage)	Disagree (frequency)	% (percentage)
9. Lockdown school closures increased the rate of child marriage cases.	30	100	0	0
10. Due to extension of school closures girls lost hope and got married.	18	60	12	40
11. Girls tend to get married if they don't have anything to do especially when not attending school	15	50	15	50
12. Girls who could not afford digital learning were vulnerable to child marriage.	28	93.3	2	6.7

The study revealed that all the respondents 30(100%) agreed that lockdown school closures increased child marriage cases. The majority of respondents 18(60%) agreed that extension of school closures led to loss of hope leading to child marriages. Half of the respondents 15(50%) did not agree that girls tend to get married if they don't have anything to do especially when not attending school. Most respondents 28(93.3%) agreed that girls could not afford digital learning were vulnerable to child marriage.

These results on the questionnaire concurred results from interviews. Victim 2 of child marriage explained:

I lost hope that schools will be opened. The fact that we were expected to write ZIMSEC examinations without conducting physical class lessons bothered me. I couldn't afford online learning due to financial problems and no gadgets as well. My parents couldn't afford money for extra-lessons. (Victim 2 interview, 2022)

Victim 1 also added:

I used to spend a lot of time at my friend's house and ended up being in a relationship with her brother. My friend's brother became my boyfriend and I got pregnant then we got married. Spending time at home was boring. (Victim 1 interview, 2022)

Victim 3 said:

Schools were re-opened for a short period of time only for us form 4's to write our exam and I felt I will be wasting my time because we did not learn during lockdown. I chose getting married first then my husband promised to get me enrolled after covid-19. (Victim 3 interview, 2022)

The results above suggest that school closures were an important factor in increasing child marriages. Going to school seems to be a protective factor against child marriage since it keeps young people occupied. Thus, school closures such as those triggered by COVID-19 lockdown pushed girls towards marriage. School was no longer an option and they lost hope to education due to long 'stay at home' regulation. The results concur with Affoum and Recavarren (2020) who argued that, Covid-19 related school closures have interrupted the education of approximately 1.6 billion children worldwide. They further asserted that, evidence from the Ebola outbreak shows that the probability of returning to school greatly diminishes the longer girls are kept out and this leads to child marriages. Nearly 300 pupils in Kwekwe District dropped out of school during the Covid-19 induced lockdown after getting married and other reasons (Magoronga, 2021). Schools were only opened in September after having been closed in March owing to the threat caused by Covid-19 lockdown. Underage girls, who got married constituted the largest chunk 117 out of 124 from secondary schools and seven, including a 12 year old were from primary schools (Magoronga, 2021). Therefore, during the lockdown assistance for girls usually came from their boyfriends. As social animals, we humans have a powerful urge to belong and to feel attached to others in close relationships (Myers, 1999). The assertion probed by Myers can be also be associated with the Maslow's theory of human needs that, humans to feel safe and free from psychological distress there is need for social inclusion.

Teen pregnancies and lockdown

The third objective was to examine the connection between teen pregnancies and child marriage during the lockdown. Teenage pregnancy also known as adolescent pregnancy is defined by the World Health Organisation as pregnancy in a female under the age of 20. There was a connection between teenage pregnancy and child marriages during the lockdown. Zimbabwe has seen a significant rise in teenage pregnancies since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic with the strict 6-month lockdown that followed (Redaction Africanews, 2022).

Table 3 shows the responses to teenage pregnancies as the factor contributing to the increase of child marriage.

Table 3: Teenage pregnancies and child marriages (No.30)

Statement	Agree (frequency)	% (percentage)	Disagree (frequency)	% (percentage)
13.Teenage pregnancies contributed to the rise of child marriages during lockdown	24	80	6	20
14. Lockdown caused teenagers to spend a lot of time together taking drugs which resulted in unprotected sex	22	73	8	27
15.Girls were influenced by their peers who got married during the pandemic to engage into early marriages	12	40	18	60
16. Some of the girls were pressured by their families to get married resulting from teenage pregnancy	18	60	12	40

The majority of the respondents 24(80%) agreed that teenage pregnancies contributed to the rise of child marriages during lockdown. Most of respondents 22(73%) agreed that most of the teenagers spent time together taking drugs which resulted in unprotected sex. Eighteen (60%) disagreed that girls were influenced by their peers who got married during the pandemic to engage into early marriages. This was probably because during lockdown friendships were limited so there was less influence. The majority of respondents 18(60%) agreed that some of the girls were pressured by their families to get married as a result of teenage pregnancy.

The results obtained from the questionnaire concurs with the information from the interview where parents marry off their daughters when they get impregnated.

This was evidently shown during an interview when Victim 3 stated that:

My parents chased me away because they did not want that disgrace in the family and community of a girl child who gets impregnated before marriage (Victim 3 interview).

Victim 1 blamed pregnancy for marriage:

If I did not get pregnant, I wouldn't be married (Victim 1 interview).

During an interview with a key informant, she lamented problems faced:

Young girls were now exposed to drugs, drinking beer and getting involved in unprotected sexual relationships which ended in teenage pregnancy and it is a pity that most of them got married (Key informant interview).

Victim 3 explained:

I had affairs with artisanal gold miners in Kwekwe. The artisanal miners flashed their money for young girls. I fell pregnant and my parents chased me away. The man who was forty five years old and responsible for the pregnancy accepted (Victim 3 interview)

These results indicate that, pregnancy increased risks of child marriage. In our culture once a girl falls pregnant marriage must follow. Families try to avoid shame in the community by forcing young girls who get pregnant,

marry their partners despite the age gap between the girl and the man. Marriage is viewed as a communal endeavor rather than just a personal one, encompassing not only the couple but also their families, extended relatives, and the broader community. On the other hand, some parents recommend that their children get married simply because they come home late at night. Christianity religion and African culture attaches great importance to premarital virginity (Imtoul & Hussein, 2009). Patriarchal cultures tend to monitor the sexuality of women in order to govern the descent and transition of women (Amy, 2008). Hence, young girls were forced to be child brides due to teenage pregnancies which were rife during the lockdown.

Reduced access to child rights and capacity building programs

The last objective was analyse effects of lockdown on child rights and capacity building programs as a factor to the increase of child marriage. According to United Nations capacity building program is a process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organisations and communities need to survive, adapt and thrive in a fast changing world. UN is committed to transform SDG 17 which includes targets for capacity-building. Lockdown affected the operation of institutions that protected a girl child.

Table 4.6 reveals that reduced access to child rights and capacity building programs contributed to the increase of child marriages.

Table 4 Child rights and capacity building programmes (No. 30)

Statements	Yes (frequency)	% (percentage)	No (frequency)	% (percentage)
17. Lockdown reduced access to programmes that protected girls from child marriage e.g Plan international, Social Welfare	20	67	10	33
18. Capacity building programs operation was limited during lockdown	29	97	1	3
19. Programmes that raise awareness and campaigns on child marriages help in reducing the cases	22	73	8	27
20. If organisations that advocate for girls rights were allowed to operate during lockdown, child marriages were unlikely to increase.	28	93	2	7

As shown on Table 4 above there is evidence that capacity building programs operation was limited during lockdown. Most of the participants 29(97%) believed that lockdown reduced access to programmes that protected girls from child marriages. Similarly 29(97%) said that capacity building programmes' operations were limited during the lockdown. Respondents 22(73%) asserted that cases of child may be reduced due awareness and campaigns. Most of the respondents 28(93%) believed that had organisations, which advocated for girls rights, been allowed to work, child marriages were not likely to increase.

These results are similar to the responds given by victims of child marriages that child rights capacity building was depended on by young girls and the interruption on their services resulted in surge of child marriages.

In response to the question that was asked if they got help from social services and if they think it was enough. Victim 1 expressed in grief;

I lost hope because I relied on the services from Shamwari yemwanasikana and due to lockdown they were not allowed to work. They were assisting me with school fees payment and other girl needs like sanitary wears (Victim 1 interview)

One of the victims stated that:

I did not have anyone to tell how my step father was abusing me sexually and my mom is scared of my step father because she often get abused physically when he hits her so I decided to live with my boyfriend... reporting to the police nearby they would publicize my case in the street (Victim 2 interview).

A key informant commented that,

As an organization that focuses on child rights protection and promotion we could not deliver our services because lockdown inflicted massive challenges like working remotely and restrictively in the offices where numbers were obliged to be limited. Our job requires a lot of physical interactions with children. Access to funding was limited due to less field work research on problems affecting children during the pandemic so they were left vulnerable. We were regarded as non-essential services providers so we had limitations in our operations (Key informant 2 interview).

These results indicate that, delayed programs to prevent child marriage increased child marriages in Kwekwe district. The impact of COVID-19 on the health sector has been significant with many resources being redirected to focus on the response to the pandemic and forgot other challenges. Combined with lockdown measures, this has resulted in a severe lack of access and availability of young girls or youths friendly SRH and Gender Based Violence services. Therefore, without these services, increases in teenage pregnancies and child marriages were inevitable. Young girls used marriage as a coping mechanism to escape abuse and violence from their relatives and parents. If the Organisations were allowed to offer services and protection like how they operated before the coronavirus pandemic, there was a respective chance of girls reporting their cases and seek for assistance but rather lockdown shunned all that opportunity which left girls vulnerable.

In Africa, adolescent girls are at increased risk of various forms of gender-based violence, including domestic abuse and sexual violence. The economic repercussions of the crisis have also led to a rise in transactional sex and an increase in child marriages. Organisations failure to operate giving services and programmes that promote and protect children rights increased the rate of child marriages. These organizations assist in giving awareness and education to 'a girl child' and adults as well. Also, they provide young girls activities that benefit their finances and other needs for instance, sanitary wears. Young girls were vulnerable during the lockdown which was more of a silencer to expression of rights which increased child marriages.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first objective was to analyse the effects of poverty on the increase of child marriages during the lockdown. The research findings revealed that some young girls involved in child marriages came from less privileged families experiencing poor living conditions associated with deprivation during the lockdown. The results indicated that in Kwekwe and Zimbabwe as a nation, lockdown raised unemployment which affected parents' ability to provide for their children so that they won't be victims of child marriages or to engage in other deviant acts. Sekatane and Makhalima (2014: 239) also revealed that child poverty is usually derived from the poverty experienced by the family because children are not isolated from the family. Therefore, poverty plays a critical role in pushing young girls to engage in child marriages. According to Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnerships to End Child Marriage (2020), *unless we end child marriage, we won't achieve 8 of the 17 sustainable development goals*. These goals include poverty, food security, health, education, gender, equality, economic growth, peace and justice. Therefore, child marriage is linked to higher household poverty so does higher household poverty is linked to child marriage. Poverty perpetuates a cycle of endless child marriages if not dealt with in action which lockdown created more poverty vulnerability societies. Food insecurity can be the cause to child marriage which is the SDG 2: Zero hunger, that global system is trying to end. According to SDG 1: No poverty, when girls have opportunities and develop skills they can support their families and break cycle of poverty. This relates to the human needs theoretical framework of this study which implies that human beings change behaviour if they lack some of basic needs like water, food, employment, health etc. They become vicious or take actions which affect their lives like child marriage. It's a mandate according to Maslow's theory that, one should have access to physiological needs which are a priority like food, water, shelter to mention a few. Girls that got married during the lockdown according to research findings were in need of physiological needs.

The second objective was to analyse the closure of schools as the drive to increase in child marriage during the lockdown. The study findings in chapter 4 reflected that, these teenagers complained that spending more time at home due to school closures affected them and had no access to emotional and mental help during the pandemic's difficult period. It is clear that, the relationship they had with their boyfriends increased their

confidence in getting married. Additionally, the availability of people (organisations or civil societies) that these adolescents can turn to in times of stress and turmoil to talk through their problems if they feel that they cannot speak openly to their parents might also lead to a reduction in child marriages. SDG 4: Quality education is to give better knowledge and skills for girls to determine their future and girls if they are out of school they are likely to get married. This is on Maslow's 4th hierarchy of needs that education builds self-esteem, confidence and being respected.

Third objective was to analyse teenage pregnancies and increase of child marriages during the lockdown. Therefore, the study findings vividly shown that, rampant increase of child marriages were emanating from teen pregnancies which were being caused by having too much free time, stress, food scarcity, pressure for money, pressure for transactional sex and violence. This finding to the society in Kwekwe and the rest of Zimbabwe imply that parents are lacking effective interaction with their children and the society is failing to address and to educate the issues of teenage pregnancy.

The last objective was to analyse child rights and capacity building programs failure to operate during covid-19 as a contributing factor to the increase of child marriages. The findings showed that adolescent girls were particularly affected by the interruptions to essential services, and by the loss of protective environments and social support networks as schools and youth programs close. The lockdown at most affected among poor and marginalized populations. SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions reflects end of child marriages by implementing strong legal, social and political frameworks to ensure access to education, health and protect girls' rights even during times of crisis. One can conclude that, strategies that were intended to slow the spread of COVID-19 collaterally caused unemployment, education disruption, food insecurity, and reductions in health services and supplies among already vulnerable populations. Therefore, these consequences intersect with gender and age in distinct ways as it was indicated by increase in child marriages.

Therefore, the findings of this study identified socioeconomic factors such as lack of education and poverty, isolation and stress which caused teen pregnancy as well as limited access to programmes and services that protected them before the pandemic. The human needs theory proved to be relevant to this study because the above factors according to Maslow's theory are the core human needs. He proposed that, humans tend to explore the sources of happiness and healthy personality if they are free-willed individuals, and not as captive by unconscious drives. Child marriages were increasing due to the fact that children lacked basic human needs like physiological, safety, love/ belonging, esteem and self-actualization. Emotional and financial needs satisfaction was most of the reasons that persuaded participants into marriage. They believed that marriage could give them the feeling of being loved and state of financial stability.

Recommendations

a) The study showed that the increase of child marriages during the lockdown was due to restrictive operations on child rights and capacity building programs. The researcher recommends that, there is need to develop saleable models to increase the capacity of programmes, backed up by firm commitment and long-term support, including financing. There is need for the empowerment of young girls especially those who are victims of child marriage through the creation of projects. This would benefit economic growth and sustainability where young women become part of economic development and there would be progress on achievement of SDGs 2030.

b) The study revealed that lockdown school closures increased child marriages. Based on this result, schools should put in place flexible learning approaches and appropriate opportunities in future admissions processes to encourage girls, especially pregnant girls and young mothers, to return to school. It is of much benefit to partner with the education sector and programmes to educate students and teachers on how to address child marriages. To ensure that young children have access to institutions for help as well as reporting mechanisms in schools.

c) The results indicate that poverty increases child marriages especially during times of crisis like lockdowns. Social welfare and Social Protection should strengthen child protection and mental health systems at the community level through health, social welfare services, and support to police, education and health services.

Governments should place additional measures to monitor compliance with compulsory education and ensure government education officials monitor strictly returning students and find the causes to drop outs.

This study is intended merely as a starting-point, drawing attention on factors which contributed to child marriage among young girls in Kwekwe district during lockdown. On the basis of the findings of this survey and its limitations (e.g. time and money), it is recommended that there should be a further anthropological study to develop more concrete findings on the extent of the child marriage problem and the societal and legal solutions to end them.

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