

The Role of Social Support in the Psychological Wellbeing of Girls in Child Marriages: A Study of Silale Ward, Baringo County, Kenya.

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Abstract

Adolescence is a time for school, friends and figuring out who one is. For girls in child marriages that window is often closed early. In Silale Ward, Tiaty Sub-County, Baringo County 27% of girls aged between 13 and 17 years are married already. This cuts them off from their peers. Increases risk for isolation, stress and poor mental health. This study examined whether social support makes a difference in their lives. Guided by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping and Cohen and Wills' (1985) Social Support Theory the study surveyed 106 girls aged 13–17 years in child marriages who were enrolled in schools or NGO programs. Ryff's (1989) Psychological Wellbeing Scale and a Social Coping Scale were used. Results showed a positive relationship. Social support accounted for 40% of the variance in wellbeing $F(1, 96) = 64.12, p < .001$. For every one-unit increase in support wellbeing increased by 0.518 units. Girls who belonged to groups and had trusted women to talk to reported higher outcomes. The findings suggested that while ending child marriage is a long-term goal strengthening connections meanwhile can protect girls' mental health. The study recommended creation of girl spaces, mentorship by local women and community dialogue to reduce stigma and improve the girls psychological wellbeing.

Keywords: *Adolescents, child marriage, coping, psychological well-beings, Kenya.*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Child marriage is defined as any formal marriage or informal union where one or both parties are under 18 years of age (UNICEF, 2023). Although the practice is illegal in countries it persists across continents and is closely tied to poverty, gender inequality, humanitarian crises and cultural norms. Globally child marriage remains one of the persistent violations of children's rights. UNICEF (2023) estimates that 640 million women and girls alive today were married in childhood. Despite progress over the decade projections show that without accelerated action an additional 110 million girls will be married before 2030 (UNICEF, 2023). The COVID-19 climate shocks and economic downturns have reversed gains in several regions with school closures and household poverty pushing more girls into early marriage (UNFPA, 2023). South Asia accounts for the share globally with 45% of all child brides while rates remain highest in parts of West and Central Africa (UNICEF, 2023).

Regionally the burden is not evenly distributed. Sub-Saharan Africa has the prevalence rates in the world. 34% Of young women aged between 20 and 24 years were married before 18 and 10% before age 15 (UNICEF, 2023). In West Africa countries like Niger and Chad report rates above 70% (UNICEF, 2023). In Eastern and Southern Africa, the average is lower at 29%. Population growth means the absolute number of girls at risk is rising (UNFPA, 2023). Humanitarian settings has worsened the problem. In refugee and displacement contexts across the Horn of Africa and the Sahel families often view marriage as a way to provide economic security or "protection" for girls (Girls Not Brides, 2023). In East Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia all report prevalence with rural and pastoralist communities bearing the greatest burden (UNICEF, 2020). Drivers are similar across the region:

secondary school access, bride price traditions and the perception that marriage transitions a girl into adulthood and reduces family economic strain (Burgess et al., 2022).

Nationally in Kenya the Demographic and Health Survey (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS] 2022) reports that 23% of women aged 20–24 were married before 18. However national averages hide disparities. Prevalence is 3 times higher in ASAL counties compared to areas (UNICEF, 2020). Among the Pokot, Samburu and Maasai communities' rates exceed 50% (UNICEF, 2020). These figures reflect both practices and limited access to schools, health services and legal protection. In Baringo County Tiaty Sub-County has some of the highest rates in the country. A 2021 SMART survey found that 27% of girls aged between 13 and 17 years in Silale Ward were already married (UNICEF & World Vision 2021). In this context early marriage is often linked to livestock-based bride price, insecurity and the belief that marriage protects girls from sexual violence outside the home (Ayub et al., 2021). The consequence is a disruption to education and social development at a critical stage of adolescence.

This layering of trends regional patterns and local realities shows that child marriage is not a single story. While international frameworks like the Convention on the Rights of the Child and SDG Target 5.3 call for its elimination by 2030 (United Nations, 2015) progress depends on understanding how the practice is experienced in communities. In Silale that experience is shaped by isolation, loss of peer networks and limited psychosocial support. The drivers are complex: poverty, bride price, cultural norms and concerns about girls' sexuality (Burgess et al. 2022). The consequences are immediate. Girls drop out of school face pregnancy and often experience domestic conflict (Wainaina et al. 2021). They also lose access to peer networks at a time when those relationships are critical for development.

Psychological wellbeing is multidimensional. Ryff (1989) described it as having six parts which includes; autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance. For adolescents friends and community are central to all six (De-Juanas et al., 2020). Child marriage disrupts this by isolating girls and limiting their decision-making. So how do girls cope? One key pathway is through people. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argued that coping depends on the resources a person can access when facing stress. Social support is one of the powerful resources (Cohen & Wills 1985). It includes support, advice and simply belonging to a group (Thoits, 2011). Recent studies in low- and middle-income countries show this matter for child brides. In Niger and Ethiopia social isolation worsened health outcomes for married girls (John et al., 2019). In Ghana girls who had an "auntie" reported less depression (Sarfo et al. 2020). A systematic review of 23 studies confirmed that social connection buffers the health effects of child marriage (Kidman & Palermo 2023). We know little about this in pastoralist Kenya. Tiaty is an area services are scarce and cultural norms restrict girls' movement (Ayub et al. 2021). This study fills that gap by asking: does social support influence psychological wellbeing for girls in child marriages in Silale Ward?

Statement of the Problem

Kenya has laws against child marriage, including the Children's Act (2001) and Marriage Act (2014). Despite this the practice of child marriages continues to rise in Silale ward. Girls in marriage face stress, stigma and limited mental health services. While some NGOs run programs many girls remain in homes with no social contact or support. Most research has focused on prevalence and health effects of girls in child marriages. Few studies have tested how social support specifically relates to wellbeing in this context. Without that evidence programs risk being generic and not addressing the problem. This study sought to address that gap.

Objective of the Study

To determine the association between social support and psychological wellbeing of girls in child marriages in Silale Ward, Tiaty Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya.

Hypothesis

H01: There is no statistically significant association between social support and psychological wellbeing of girls in child marriages in Silale Ward, Tiaty Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Support and Adolescent Wellbeing

Adolescence is already a difficult stage in life but for girls who marry early the pressure becomes even heavier. One thing that consistently helps young people get through stress is having people around them who care and are willing to help. Cohen and Wills (1985) called this the "stress-buffering" effect. Basically, support from others can make hard situations feel more manageable. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) adds that it is not the stress itself that matters but how a person copes with it. For girls in child marriage coping often depends on who they can talk to and or walk with. Globally research shows that connection matters. De-Juanas et al. (2020) Reviewed studies across Europe. Found that when adolescents had strong peer relationships, they handled family problems much better. WHO (2022) also lists "connectedness" as one of the five things that protect adolescent mental health worldwide. The challenge is that most of this work assumes girls are in school and can meet freely which is not the case, for many married girls.

Internationally in low-income countries we see both the problem and some solutions. In South Asia Reza et al. (2020) Found that married girls who joined peer groups felt less depressed than those who stayed isolated at home. In West Africa Burgess et al. (2022) Reported that group programs helped married adolescents feel more confident and less distressed. Closer to our context John et al. (2019) Worked with girls in Niger and Ethiopia and found that those in peer groups had better mental health.. There exists a challenge: if the community sees these groups as "foreign" or against tradition girls stop attending. Thus, the culture decides whether support works or not. In East Africa the story is similar. Wainaina et al. (2021) Did a study in Nairobi slums. The findings showed that group meetings helped pregnant teenagers feel less alone. Kosimbei et al. (2023) Working in Kenya found that for married girls talking to friends and female relatives helped more than going to a counselor mainly because it felt safer and more familiar. Ndung'u et al. (2021) In ASAL areas noted that women's groups and church fellowships often become the only place girls can share. These spaces rarely talk openly about child marriage because it is still a sensitive and illegal topic.

Locally in communities like Tiaty things are even more complicated. Ayub et al. (2021) Point out three barriers: long distances to any kind of service, low literacy and very strict gender expectations. In Pokot culture a married girl is expected to be quiet, obedient and not question elders. If she seeks help outside the home people may call it disrespect. That is why formal services are rarely used. Instead, girls rely on support such as an older woman in the manyatta a co-wife or a few trusted friends. The problem is that because child marriage is so normal here there are few safe places where a girl can say "I am struggling" without being judged. Therefore, across international, regional and local literature one thing is clear: social support protects wellbeing. Most studies look at school-going unmarried girls. Few focus on married girls and even fewer look at pastoralist areas where mobility, culture and insecurity shape daily life. That is the gap this study tries to fill. In Silale Ward support may not come from clinics or NGOs. From relationships that already exist. Understanding how that works can help us design help that actually fits this area.

Context of Pastoralist Communities

Life in areas is not the same as in towns. UNICEF (2023) reports that pastoralist girls globally are among the likely to finish school and the most likely to marry early often because of poverty and the need to move with livestock. In Ethiopia and Somalia John et al. (2019) Found that families sometimes marry off daughters during drought as a way to reduce costs and build alliances. In Northern Kenya Ndung'u et al. (2021) Explain that among Pokot Turkana and Samburu bride price is still a reason for early marriage. A daughter's marriage can mean cows for the family so the pressure is real. In Tiaty specifically insecurity and cattle raids make things worse. NGOs find it hard to run programs consistently and health facilities are apart. At the time culture values unity and respect for elders. While this can hold communities together it can also silence girls who are hurt. That is why support that works with culture like mentorship from respected women is more likely to be accepted than outside programs that feel imposed.

Framework

This study is guided by two ideas. First Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model which says that stress is not about the event but about how we deal with it. Child marriage is a stressor. Whether a girl breaks down or keeps going depends on the coping tools she has. Second Cohen and Wills' (1985) theory that says that people with social support handle stress better. Applied to Silale this means girls who have someone to talk to share with or lean on are more likely to protect their wellbeing in difficult marriages. Together these two frameworks help this study ask: What is hurting these girls and what relationships are helping them cope?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design.

Population and Sampling

The target population was 1,025 girls aged 13–17 years who are in child marriage in Tiaty Sub-County. However, due to the sensitive and illegal nature of child marriage, a complete sampling frame was unavailable. Therefore, the accessible population was 530 girls in child marriage who are enrolled in schools or rehabilitation programs, including secondary schools and initiatives by Girls Not Brides initiatives, county offices and other organizations focused on helping girls in child marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2022).

Snowball sampling method was used to select 106 girls in child marriage from Silale Ward. This approach was necessary to access a hidden and stigmatized population. Of these, 98 provided data, giving a response rate of 92.5%. The limitation of this sampling method was potential selection bias, as it may exclude the most isolated girls not linked to any program.

Instruments

In this study, two instruments were used to collect data. The first was an 18-item version of Ryff's Scales of Psychological Wellbeing. This version has a Cronbach's alpha score above 0.7. Is frequently applied in psychological research (Costea-Bărluțiu et al. 2018). In this study $\alpha = .82$. The second instrument was a 14-item Social Coping Scale adapted from Folkman and Lazarus (1988). It measured peer support, family support, group participation and help-seeking. ($\alpha = .82$). The second was a 14-item Social Support Scale adapted from Folkman and Lazarus (1988) measuring peer support, family support, group participation, and help-seeking ($\alpha = .81$). Both instruments used a 5-point Likert scale. It had a Cronbach's alpha of .81 in this sample.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from Egerton University Ethics Review Committee. Permission was sought from the County Director of Education and local chiefs. Given that participants were minors, written assent was obtained from the girls and consent from their parents and guardians. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at anytime. Confidentiality was maintained, and a referral pathway to a local health facility was made available for participants reporting distress. Research assistants fluent in Pokot and Kiswahili administered the questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Support Practices Among Married Girls

The study found moderate engagement in social support, $M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.91$. Belonging to a girls' group had the highest mean, $M = 3.12$, suggesting that peer groups were the most accessible source of support. This is consistent with John et al. (2019). Talking to a mother, aunt, or older woman was also common, $M = 2.89$. Attending

community meetings was lowest, $M = 1.98$. This may be due to cultural norms that discouraged young wives from speaking in public forums. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Social Coping Practices Among Married Girls (n = 98)*

Social Coping Practices	Percentage					Descriptives	
	SD%	D%	U%	A%	SA%	M	SD.
I talk to a friend about my problems	28.6	32.7	15.3	14.3	9.2	2.34	1.28
I talk to my mother, aunt, or older woman	22.4	24.5	12.2	23.5	17.3	2.89	1.41
I belong to a girls' group	19.4	18.4	14.3	26.5	21.4	3.12	1.35
I visit relatives when I feel stressed	25.5	27.6	16.3	18.4	12.2	2.67	1.30
I ask teachers or NGO staff for help	27.6	30.6	18.4	15.3	8.2	2.45	1.22
Composite Scores						2.58	0.91

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, U = Undecided, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Regarding social coping practices the study found that on average most girls had moderate engagement in social support as shown by a cumulative mean of 2.58 and standard deviation of 0.91. Belonging to a girls' group had the mean of 3.12 indicating that peer groups were the most accessible source of support. This agrees with John et al. (2019) Who found that peer groups helped married girls in Ethiopia and Niger cope with isolation and withdrawal.

Talking to a mother, aunt or older woman also scored relatively high $M = 2.89$. In interviews girls described women as "the only people who listen without shouting" (Participant 7). This reflects the role of kin in buffering stress (Cohen & Wills 1985). Attending community meetings had the mean of 1.98. Most girls strongly disagreed 42.9%. Disagreed 31.6% that they participated. A chief explained, "Our culture does not allow young wives to speak in barazas. People will say she is disrespectful" (Key Informant 2). This is consistent with Esia-Donkoh et al. (2017) Who noted cultural barriers limit girls' public participation in rural Ghana. Asking teachers or NGO staff for help was also low $M = 2.45$. This was due to schools and NGOs found in Silale Ward and long distances covered to reach these institutions likely contributed to this. Wainaina et al. (2021) Similarly reported that pregnant adolescents in Nairobi slums had limited access to support.

Psychological Wellbeing of Girls in Child Marriages

Girls reported low positive relations, $M = 1.68$. This suggests struggles to maintain connections with others. This aligns with Kosimbei et al. (2023) and Amangbey et al. (2019), who noted withdrawal due to stigma among married women.

Table 2: *Positive Relations of Girls in Child Marriages (n = 98)*

Positive Relations	Percentage					Descriptives	
	SD%	D%	U%	A%	SA%	M	SD
I am able to maintain meaningful connections with those around me.	45.9	39.8	10.2	3.1	1.0	1.73	0.84
Others would say that I am generous with my time to support others.	37.8	53.1	6.1	1.0	2.0	1.77	0.78
Composite Scores						1.68	0.78

On positive relations as a wellbeing coping strategy results showed most girls disagreed with all items. The composite mean was 1.68. This suggests girls, in Silale Ward struggled to keep ties, were not ready to spend time with others and lacked warm connections. This finding is consistent with existing literature on child marriage and social isolation. Kosimbei et al. (2023) Found that keeping close ties helped adolescents deal with stressful situations and the absence of such ties increased vulnerability to depression and anxiety. Amangbey et al. (2019) Also noted that girls in child marriage withdrew from others out of fear of being judged and stigmatized by peers and community members. Similarly, Iris Group (2021) reported that most girls in child marriage felt lonely because peers in their age group did not want to associate with them leading to a loss of peer networks that're critical during adolescence.

The loss of relationships is further supported by Burgess et al. (2022) Who observed that married girls in West Africa experienced exclusion from both school friends and extended family which contributed to low self-esteem and poor mental health. John et al. (2019) In a study of child brides in Niger and Ethiopia found that isolation from age peers was one of the strongest associators of psychological distress. In the context Wainaina et al. (2021) Reported that adolescent girls in settlements who entered early marriage described feeling "cut off" from their friends and community support systems which worsened their coping capacity. Ndung'u et al. (2021) Also documented that cultural norms in communities often restrict married girls from participating in peer gatherings further deepening their isolation.

From a perspective Cohen and Wills (1985) explain that positive social relations act as a buffer against stress. When these relationships are missing as seen in this study girls have emotional resources to manage the challenges of early marriage motherhood and poverty. Therefore the low scores on relations in Silale Ward reflect both a psychological and a structural problem child marriage interrupts normal adolescent social development and limits access to supportive networks. Table 3 presents the frequencies percentages mean and standard deviations for self-acceptance among girls in child marriage in Silale Ward Tiaty Sub County.

Table 3: *Self-Acceptance of Girls in Child Marriages (n = 98)*

Self-Acceptance	Percentage					Descriptives	
	SD%	D%	U%	A%	SA%	M	SD.
I generally have positive feelings toward my own character.	7.1	4.1	10.2	41.8	36.7	3.97	1.135
When I reflect on my life experiences, I feel content with the direction my life has taken.	31.6	59.2	4.1	2.0	3.1	1.86	.837
My accomplishments in life often give me a sense of motivation.	66.3	23.5	3.1	4.1	3.1	1.54	.965
Composite Scores						2.46	0.98

Overall, the scores were low with a mean of 2.46. Many girls said they were not happy with who they had become and did not feel proud of what they had achieved far. This points to struggles with self-worth which is common when girls are forced into adult roles before they are ready. This pattern matches what other researchers have found. Girls who marry often feel like they lost control of their own life story. Dina (2020) found that in Ethiopia many young wives described themselves as "failures" because marriage ended their schooling and dreams. In Ghana Amangbey et al. (2019) reported that community judgment made girls internalize shame which made it hard for them to value themselves. Reza et al. (2020) also explain that when people cannot accept themselves they are more likely to experience sadness and anxiety.

Studies from countries tell the same story. John et al. (2019) in Niger and Ethiopia showed that early marriage interrupts teenage growth so girls don't get the chance to build a strong sense of who they are. Burgess et al. (2022) added that stigma from peers and relatives makes this worse because girls start to believe the negative things said about them. The situation in Kenya looks similar. Kosimbei et al. (2023) noted that married girls in areas often compare themselves to classmates who are still in school and that comparison lowers how they see themselves. Wainaina et al. (2021) working with adolescents in Nairobi slums found feelings of regret and embarrassment among girls who married early. In ASAL counties like Baringo Ndung'u et al. (2021) observed that cultural pressure to act like a "wife and mother" clashed with what the girls themselves wanted leaving them confused about their identity.

Ryff (1989) describes self-acceptance as being at peace with who you're and with your past. When that is missing people tend to feel regret and disappointment. That is what was noted with girls in Silale. Many girls were carrying adult responsibilities. They have not had the space to grow into them on their own terms. What this means for support programs is clear helping these girls will require more than food or school fees. They also need spaces where they can rebuild confidence. Mentorship skills training and chances to achieve goals can help them start seeing themselves differently and with more kindness.

Table 4: *Autonomy of Girls in Child Marriages (n = 98)*

Autonomy	Percentage					Descriptives	
	SD%	D%	U%	A%	SA%	M	SD.
I find myself going along with people who have strong beliefs.	30.6	14.3	7.1	17.3	30.6	3.03	1.67
I trust my own judgement, even when it does not match what others think.	48.0	16.3	11.2	15.3	9.2	2.21	1.42
I evaluate myself based on my own values rather than others' opinions.	4.1	3.1	3.1	42.9	46.9	4.26	.98
Composite Scores						3.17	1.35

On girls in child marriage in Silale Ward reported moderate use of autonomy as a coping strategy with a composite mean score of 3.17. However the responses were mixed. Some girls said they were often swayed by people with opinions while others indicated that they judged themselves based on their own beliefs rather than on what others expected. A third group expressed confidence in standing by their own views when these differed from those of people around them. This mixed pattern reflects the tension many child brides face that means being expected to be adults while still operating in settings where decisions are made by husbands in-laws and elders.

Recent studies support this finding. Kosimbei et al. (2023) in Kenya found that married adolescents developed some level of self-reliance out of necessity but still struggled to make decisions without approval from older family members. Wainaina et al. (2021) working with girls in Nairobi settlements reported that early marriage forced girls to "grow up fast" and take responsibility yet their choices were still heavily controlled by spouses. Ndung'u et al. (2021) in ASAL counties including Baringo noted that cultural norms often limit girls' freedom to express opinions even when they wanted to.

Internationally John et al. (2019) in Niger and Ethiopia observed that child marriage can push girls to become more independent in tasks like managing a household but it does not automatically translate into psychological autonomy

or decision-making power. Burgess et al. (2022) in West Africa similarly found that while some girls showed resilience and self-direction still deferred to authority figures due to fear of conflict or stigma. Dina (2020) in Southern Ethiopia reported that girls who married early learned to rely on themselves. This was often a survival strategy rather than a choice.

From a perspective Ryff (1989) defines autonomy as the ability to resist social pressure evaluate oneself by personal standards and regulate behavior from within. A score of 3.17 in this study suggests that some girls in Silale are beginning to develop this capacity but many are still navigating pressures. The mixed responses may therefore reflect both resilience and constraint: girls are trying to assert themselves in circumstances but do not always have the space to do so freely. This implies that programs aiming to support girls in child marriage should not assume autonomy. Instead, interventions could focus on building decision-making skills spaces for girls to voice opinions and engaging families and spouses to support girls' right to self-determination.

On average girls in child marriage indicated they used autonomy as a coping strategy as shown by a composite mean score of 3.17. Still the results reflected different views. Some proportion of girls were neutral on whether they were influenced by people with opinions while another group said they evaluated themselves based on what they believed was important and not on other people's values. Another view was expressed by those who lacked confidence in their opinions even when their views differed from others. Shahan (2021) reported that girls were able to make and uphold their decisions. A study by Gesora (2018) found that girls in child marriage were more self-reliant. Research by Kumar et al. (2018) Also showed that most girls in child marriage could assess themselves through their situation without being influenced by others. The personal growth indicators for girls in child marriage in Tiati are shown in Table 5 using percentages means and standard deviations.

Table 5: *Personal Growth of Girls in Child Marriages (n = 98)*

Personal Growth	Percentage					Descriptives	
	SD%	D%	U%	A%	SA%	M	SD
I see life as an ongoing process of learning and personal development.	38.8	42.9	11.2	3.1	4.1	1.91	1.00
I value experiences that push me to see myself and the world differently.	50.0	23.5	16.3	6.1	4.1	1.91	1.13
I continue to work toward making important improvements in my life.	2.0	4.1	16.3	31.6	45.9	4.15	0.98
Composite Scores						2.66	1.04

In general, most girls in child marriage in Silale Ward did not see growth as a way of coping with a composite mean score of 2.66. This suggests that many did not view life as a process of learning, change and growth. They also did not feel the need to seek out experiences that could challenge how they understood themselves or the world around them. The standard deviation of 1.04 shows that experiences varied with some girls expressing more openness to growth than others. This low score makes sense given their context. When girls are married early their daily lives often become centered on household duties and meeting the expectations of a husband and in-laws. This leaves no room to explore, learn or try new things that promote personal development.

Recent studies support this finding. Wainaina et al. (2021) in Nairobi slums found that married adolescents felt "stuck" because marriage cut short their education and social life making it hard to see life as a journey of growth. Kosimbei et al. (2023) in Kenya reported that married girls had limited exposure to new ideas and opportunities which reduced their motivation to grow personally. Ndung'u et al. (2021) in ASAL counties including Baringo

noted that cultural expectations kept girls focused on roles with little encouragement to pursue self-improvement or new skills.

International findings are similar to this. John et al. (2019) in Niger and Ethiopia observed that early marriage interrupted adolescent exploration, so girls missed chances to discover their abilities and interests. Dina (2020) in Southern Ethiopia found that most young wives did not see themselves as growing" because their roles were fixed early. Burgess et al. (2022) in West Africa explained that stigma and isolation often make girls withdraw which limits exposure to experiences that could broaden their thinking. However, some studies show that when support is available girls can still experience growth. Hajihasani and Sim (2019) found that girls who received counseling and peer support began to see challenges as opportunities to learn. Similarly Reza et al. (2020) Noted that resilience programs helped some adolescents reframe hardship as part of development.

From Ryff's (1989) perspective personal growth means having a sense that one is continuing to develop and's open to new experiences. The mean of 2.66 in this study suggests that for girls in Silale this sense of ongoing development has been interrupted. Marriage at a young age appears to have closed off pathways for learning and self-discovery that are normally part of adolescence thus affecting their psychological wellbeing. This also has implications for intervention. Programs that provide access to education skills training, mentorship and safe spaces for girls to try things may help restore a sense of growth. Even small opportunities to learn and achieve can help girls start seeing their lives as capable of change and improvement. Table 6 presents findings regarding the level of environmental mastery among girls in child marriage in Silale Ward, Tiaty Sub-County.

Table 6: *Environmental Masterly of Girls in Child Marriages (n = 98)*

Environmental Masterly	percentage					Descriptives	
	SD%	D%	U%	A%	SA%	M	SD
I am usually able to handle my daily duties without feeling overwhelmed	33.7	32.7	26.5	5.1	2.0	2.09	1.00.
I feel I have control over the circumstances in which I live.	42.9	36.7	10.2	9.2	1.0	1.89	1.00
I am capable of managing the demands of everyday life.	52.0	30.6	11.2	6.1	0.0	1.71	0.90
Composite Scores						1.90	0.96

Overall, the results showed that most girls in child marriage in Silale Ward, Tiaty Sub-County struggled with mastery. This was reflected in a composite mean score of 1.90. In terms many girls felt weighed down by daily pressures and reported having little control over their circumstances. Managing routine tasks also appeared to be a challenge for them. This finding is consistent with studies in Kenya and the region. Kosimbei et al. (2023) in Kenya found that married adolescents often felt overwhelmed by household demands and lacked the resources to manage them effectively. Wainaina et al. (2021) working in Nairobi settlements reported that early marriage placed girls in adult roles without adequate preparation leaving them feeling out of control of their environment. Ndung'u et al. (2021) in ASAL counties including Baringo observed that cultural expectations and limited support systems made it difficult for married girls to manage life on their own terms.

International studies report patterns. John et al. (2019) in Niger and Ethiopia noted that child brides frequently struggled to make decisions or manage their surroundings because power in the home rested with husbands and elders. Burgess et al. (2022) in West Africa found that many girls felt they had say over their living conditions and often relied on others to solve problems for them. Dina (2020) in Southern Ethiopia reported that young wives

described their lives as "being managed by others" than managing things themselves. In contrast Gobindgarh (2022) found that some girls in child marriage were able to handle day-to-day responsibilities when they had support from family or community programs. This suggests that environmental mastery is not fixed, but can improve with access to skills, resources and support.

However, from Ryff's (1989) framework environmental mastery involves the ability to manage environments take advantage of opportunities and create contexts suited to one's needs. A mean of 1.90 in this study indicates that most girls in Silale have not yet developed this capacity. The pressures of marriage, limited education and restricted mobility appear to limit their ability to shape their environment. This implies that interventions should focus on building life skills providing access to income-generating activities and creating support networks. When girls are given tools and some control over decisions they are more likely to feel capable of managing their lives. The findings on purpose in life among girls in child marriage in Silale Ward, Tiaty Sub-County are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: *Purpose in Life of Girls in Child Marriages (n = 98)*

Environmental Masterly	Percentage					Descriptives	
	SD %	D %	U%	A%	SA%	M	SD
I feel that my life has clear direction and meaning.	2.0	4.1	18.4	28.6	46.9	4.14	1.00
I tend to focus on the present rather than planning for the future.	-	3.1	16.3	30.6	50.0	4.28	0.85
At times I feel I have accomplished everything life has to offer.	1.0	3.1	17.3	33.7	44.9	4.18	0.90
Composite Scores						4.20	0.91

Most girls in child marriage in Silale Ward reported that having a purpose in life helped them cope, with a composite mean score of 4.20. This suggests that despite their circumstances many did not feel lost or without direction. A large proportion indicated that they saw meaning in their lives even though some also reported living day by day without thought about the future. This finding shows resilience. In difficult marriages some girls hold on to goals, faith and family responsibilities as sources of meaning.

Recent studies support this. Kosimbei et al. (2023) in Kenya found that married adolescents drew purpose from caring for children and contributing to the household, which gave them a reason to keep going. Wainaina et al. (2021) in Nairobi slums reported that many young wives identified faith and the hope of a future for their children as what kept them focused. Ndung'u et al. (2021) in ASAL counties including Baringo noted that cultural and religious values often provide girls with a clear role and sense of duty, which can create purpose. International evidence is mixed but similar. John et al. (2019) in Niger and Ethiopia found that some child brides developed goals around motherhood and survival which gave their lives direction. Burgess et al. (2022) in West Africa observed that girls who were involved in support groups or income activities reported having goals and plans for the future. In contrast Dina (2020) in Southern Ethiopia found that a number of girls felt their lives were on "pause" and struggled to see long-term meaning beyond survival.

From Ryff's (1989) perspective purpose in life involves having goals, a sense of directedness and beliefs that give life meaning. The high mean of 4.20 in this study suggests that for girls in Silale purpose acts as a coping resource. However, the item on "living one day at a time" also shows that while they have meaning now long-term planning may still be limited. This implies that programs should build on existing sources of purpose. Linking girls to

education vocational training and mentorship can help translate meaning into future goals. When girls can see a path beyond their situation their sense of purpose becomes stronger and more sustainable.

Association between Social Support in Psychological Wellbeing

The purpose of this study was to look at how social support affects the health of girls who are in child marriages in Silale Ward, Tiaty Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya. To do this a simple linear regression was done where social support was the thing that was associated with health. Table 8 shows the results of the model.

Table 8: *Model Summary for the Association of Social Support in Psychological Wellbeing*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.632	.400	.394	0.57421

The results indicated that social support was significantly associated with psychological wellbeing, $R^2 = .400$, $F(1, 96) = 64.12$, $p < .001$. The unstandardized coefficient was $B = 0.518$, $p < .001$. This suggests that for every one-unit increase in social support, psychological wellbeing was associated with a 0.518unit increase. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

These findings support Cohen and Wills' (1985) stress-buffering hypothesis and Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model. They also align with Reza et al. (2020) and Burgess et al. (2022), who found that group programs were associated with better mental health outcomes for married adolescents. To check if the model was important ANOVA results were done and are in Table 9.

Table 9: *The ANOVA Results for Regression of Social Support in Psychological Wellbeing*

Scale	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-ratio	p-value
Regression	21.132	1	21.132	64.120	.000
Residual	31.640	96	0.330		
Total	52.772	97			

The results showed that the model fit the data better than a model with no associators, $F(1\ 96) = 64.120$, $p < .05$. The model was therefore important in showing the health of girls in child marriages.

Table 10 shows the model coefficients for how social support affects the health for each one-unit change in social support.

Table 10: *Model Coefficients for Social Support in association to Psychological Wellbeing*

Scale	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-value	p-value
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	1.322	0.185		7.140	.000
Social Support	0.518	0.065	.632	8.010	.000

The analysis showed that social support was an associator of mental health $t = 8.010, p < .05$. For every one-unit increase in coping the mental health of girls in child marriages increased by 0.518 units assuming other things stayed the same. When it was standardized a one-unit increase in coping was linked to a 0.632 unit increase in mental health. So the idea that there is no association was rejected at the 5% level of significance. This means that girls who had people to talk, share problems with or get help from tended to have good mental health. Social connections seem to help reduce the stress that comes with marriage.

This result matches with what other studies have found. Cohen and Wills' (1985) theory about stress and support says that having support helps reduce stress by giving emotional, information and practical help. Recent studies in other areas also support this. Kosimbei et al. (2023) did a study in Kenya and found that married teenagers who had supportive friends and family had less stress and more confidence. Wainaina et al. (2021) in Nairobi settlements found that girls in support groups felt less alone and handled marriage stress better. Ndung'u et al. (2021) in areas with climates including Baringo found that social groups through womens meetings and religious events gave girls strength and a feeling of being part of a group.

International studies show the thing. John et al. (2019) in Niger and Ethiopia found that girls with social ties had better mental health and were more likely to ask for help when needed. Burgess et al. (2022) in West Africa saw that girls in community groups or mentorship programs had strength and better mental health than those who were alone. Reza et al. (2020) also found that support was one of the things that helped teens deal with bad experiences.

The quality of the social support is very important. Dina (2020) in Southern Ethiopia found that family help helped. If the relationships were judgmental or controlling it worsened stress. This shows that not all social interactions are good and safe non-judgmental places are important. Overall, the results from Silale Ward match the picture where social support is an important factor for girls in early marriages. When girls have people they can trust they are more likely to handle stress, stay healthy and not feel lonely. This has meaning for programs. Efforts should focus on creating safe places, group meetings and mentoring networks where girls can share their experiences and get help. Getting husband's mothers-in-law and community leaders to create conducive home environments can also make social support better.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concludes that social support is significantly associated with psychological wellbeing among girls in child marriages in Silale Ward. Peer groups and support from older women emerged as key protective factors. Given low scores in environmental mastery and positive relations, interventions should focus on building connections and life skills among girls in child marriages.

Recommendations:

1. Establishment of safe girl spaces in Silale ward where married girls can share experiences and learn life skills.
2. Training and supporting local women as mentors to provide guidance and psychosocial support to the girls in marriages.
3. Conducting community dialogue with elders and men to reduce stigma and create acceptance for girls' support groups.

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