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MINISTRY OF GENDER EQUALITY, POVERTY ERADICATION AND SOCIAL WELFARE

NATIONAL FORMATIVE STUDY ON CHILD MARRIAGE

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| LIST OF FIGURES | iv |
| LIST OF TABLES | iv |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | v |
| ACRONYMS | vi |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 1 |
| | |
| 1. CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION | 5 |
| 1.1 Study Context | 5 |
| 1.2 Rationale | 5 |
| 1.3 Purpose of the study | 6 |
| 1.4 Objectives of the study | 6 |
| 1.5 Research Questions | 7 |
| | |
| 2. CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW | 8 |
| 2.1 Child marriage | 8 |
| 2.2 Trends and patterns of child marriage | 8 |
| 2.3 Drivers of Child Marriage | 9 |
| 2.4 Consequences/effects of child marriages | 9 |
| 2.5 Existing legislation | 10 |
| 2.6 Cultural practices | 10 |
| 2.7 Linkages between child marriage, HIV, gender-based violence and teenage pregnancies | 12 |
| 2.7.1 Gender Based Violence | 12 |
| 2.7.2 HIV | 13 |
| 2.7.3 Teenage pregnancy | 13 |
| 2.8 Good practices for child marriage prevention | 14 |
| | |
| 3. CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY | 21 |
| 3.1 Overall Study design | 21 |
| 3.2 Secondary data | 21 |
| 3.2.1 NDHS Data | 21 |
| 3.3 Qualitative data | 22 |
| 3.3.1 Study areas | 22 |
| 3.3.2 Data collection methods | 22 |
| 3.3.3 Sampling and sample sizes | 23 |

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 3.4 | Study team | 23 |
| 3.5 | Ethical considerations | 24 |
| 3.6 | Limitations and Challenges | 24 |
| 4. | CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION | 25 |
| 4.1 | Descriptive Statistics | 25 |
| 4.1.1 | Distribution by region | 25 |
| 4.1.2 | Ever married women sample Rural vs Urban | 25 |
| 4.1.3 | Age Distribution | 26 |
| 4.1.4 | Religion | 26 |
| 4.1.5 | Main Language Spoken at Home | 27 |
| 4.1.6 | Literacy | 27 |
| 4.1.7 | Highest Educational Level | 27 |
| 4.1.8 | Wealth | 28 |
| 4.1.9 | Age at First Sex | 28 |
| 4.2 | Knowledge of and attitudes towards child marriage | 28 |
| 4.2.1 | Meaning of a child | 29 |
| 4.2.2 | Marriage and marriage practices | 31 |
| 4.2.3 | Child marriage | 33 |
| 4.2.4 | Indicators of readiness for marriage | 34 |
| 4.3 | Trends and patterns of child marriage (extent/prevalence, practices and causes) | 35 |
| 4.3.1 | Prevalence of child marriage | 35 |
| 4.3.2 | Distribution of Child marriage by region | 36 |
| 4.3.3 | Age at first cohabitation by Urban or Rural Residence | 37 |
| 4.3.4 | Age at first marriage/cohabitation | 38 |
| 4.4 | Reasons for and drivers of child marriage | 39 |
| 4.4.1 | Poverty | 39 |
| 4.4.2 | Customary and religious beliefs | 40 |
| 4.4.3 | Early sexual debut and teenage pregnancies | 42 |
| 4.4.4 | Alcohol abuse | 43 |
| 4.4.5 | Lack of educational opportunities | 43 |
| | Cultural practices and beliefs that have implications for child marriages | 44 |
| 4.6 | Consequences/effects of child marriages on the child and community | 50 |
| 4.6.1 | Poor educational attainment and unemployment | 50 |
| 4.6.2 | Poor Health Outcomes | 53 |
| 4.6.3 | Gender Based Violence | 54 |
| 4.7 | Linkages between child marriage, HIV, GBV and SRHR | 54 |
| 4.7.1 | Age at first cohabitation by GBV | 54 |
| 4.7.2 | Age at first Cohabitation by HIV Status | 56 |
| 4.7.3 | Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights | 56 |

| | | |
|------------|---|-----------|
| 4.8 | Knowledge and use of existing legislation, programs and interventions against child marriages | 57 |
| 4.8.1 | Knowledge on children's rights | 57 |
| 4.8.2 | General knowledge on laws/policies governing marriage | 58 |
| 4.8.3 | Knowledge on organisations and interventions for child marriage | 58 |
| 4.9 | Cultural/traditional/religious protective factors against child marriage | 60 |
| 4.10 | Gaps in child marriage response | 61 |
| 5. | CHAPTER 5 - SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 64 |
| 5.1 | Summary | 64 |
| 5.1.1 | Knowledge, attitude and practices | 64 |
| 5.1.2 | The extent of child marriage in Namibia | 64 |
| 5.1.3 | Factors driving child marriages | 64 |
| 5.1.4 | The consequences/effects of child carriage on the child and community | 64 |
| 5.1.5 | Knowledge and use of existing legislation, programs and interventions against child marriage | 65 |
| 5.1.6 | Linkages between child marriage, HIV, GBV and SRHR | 65 |
| 5.1.7 | Cultural practices that have implications for child marriages | 65 |
| 5.1.8 | Good practices/protective factors for child marriage prevention | 65 |
| 5.1.9 | Gaps in combatting child marriage | 65 |
| 5.2 | Recommendations | 66 |
| 5.2.1 | Law reform and dissemination | 66 |
| 5.2.2 | Community mobilization | 67 |
| 5.2.3 | Empowerment of married children | 67 |
| 5.2.4 | Enhanced education of children | 68 |
| 5.2.5 | Enhanced Adolescent and Youth Sexual Reproductive Health | 68 |
| 5.2.6 | Addressing harmful cultural practices | 68 |
| 5.2.7 | Economic incentives to address poverty | 69 |
| 5.2.8 | Conduct research on specific child marriage issues | 69 |
| 6. | REFERENCES | 70 |
| 7. | ANNEXURES | 75 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Figure 1: Namibia's regional map</i> | 5 |
| <i>Figure 2: Global & regional averages for child marriage</i> | 8 |
| <i>Figure 3: Inter-linkages between child marriage, GBV, HIV and teenage pregnancy</i> | 12 |
| <i>Figure 4: Most commonly used strategies to combat child marriage</i> | 14 |
| <i>Figure 5: Study design</i> | 21 |
| <i>Figure 6: Distribution of the sample by region</i> | 25 |
| <i>Figure 7: Distribution of the ever-married women sample rural vs urban</i> | 25 |
| <i>Figure 8: Distribution of sample by age group</i> | 26 |
| <i>Figure 9: Distribution of sample by religion</i> | 26 |
| <i>Figure 10: Main languages spoken at home</i> | 27 |
| <i>Figure 11: Literacy levels</i> | 27 |
| <i>Figure 12: Highest level of education</i> | 27 |
| <i>Figure 13: Wealth index</i> | 28 |
| <i>Figure 14: Age at first sex</i> | 28 |
| <i>Figure 15: Prevalence of child marriage</i> | 36 |
| <i>Figure 16: Child marriage prevalence by region (NDHS, 2013)</i> | 36 |
| <i>Figure 17: Child marriage prevalence map in Namibia</i> | 34 |
| <i>Figure 18: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by place of residence</i> | 37 |
| <i>Figure 19: Age at first marriage/cohabitation</i> | 38 |
| <i>Figure 20: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by wealth index</i> | 39 |
| <i>Figure 21: Age at first cohabitation by main language spoken at home</i> | 41 |
| <i>Figure 22: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by religion</i> | 42 |
| <i>Figure 23: Age at sex debut</i> | 42 |
| <i>Figure 24: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by current employment</i> | 50 |
| <i>Figure 25: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by current occupation</i> | 51 |
| <i>Figure 26: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by literacy level</i> | 51 |
| <i>Figure 27: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by highest educational level</i> | 52 |
| <i>Figure 28: Age at cohabitation/marriage by GBV</i> | 54 |
| <i>Figure 29: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by HIV status</i> | 56 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Examples of Cultural practices | 11 |
| Table 2: Best Practices to Combat Child Marriage | 18 |
| Table 3: Qualitative data respondent groups | 23 |
| Table 4: Organisations and interventions perceived to be as working toward reducing child marriage | 59 |

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It is our hope that this report will be used by stakeholders as a resource for planning and implementation of actions to prevent and eliminate child marriages in Namibia.

ACRONYMS

| | |
|----------------|---|
| ACRWC | African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child |
| AIDS | Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome |
| ALHIV | Adolescents living with HIV |
| ARVs | Antiretroviral drugs |
| ART | Antiretroviral therapy |
| BESO-II | Basic Education Strategic Objective II |
| CACOC | Constituency AIDS Coordinating Committee |
| CBS | Central Bureau of Statistics |
| CCPA | Child Care and Protection Act |
| CEDAW | Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women |
| CSO | Civic Society Organisation |
| DRC | Democratic Republic of Congo |
| ELCIN | Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia |
| FAWENA | Forum for African Women Educationalists Namibia |
| FBO | Faith Based Organisation |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| GBV | Gender Based Violence |
| GBV NPA | Gender Based Violence National Plan of Action |
| HIV | Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| HCW | Health Care Worker |
| ICRW | International Center for Research on Women |
| ICPD | International Conference on Population and Development |
| IPV | Intimate Partner Violence |
| KII | Key Informant Interview |
| KW | Kavango West |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| LAC | Legal Assistance Centre |
| MOEAC | Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture |
| MoHSS | Ministry of Health & Social Services |
| MoSS | Ministry of Safety and Security |
| MGECW | Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare |
| NAPPA | Namibia Planned Parenthood Association |
| NANGOF | Namibia Non-Governmental Organisation Forum |
| NDHS | National Demographic and Health Survey |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NIDS | Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey |
| OYO | Ombetja Yehinga Organisation |
| PLHIV | People Living with HIV |
| SADC | Southern African Development Community |
| SADF PF | Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum |
| SAfAIDS | Southern Africa HIV & AIDS Information Dissemination Service |
| SIAPAC | Social Impact Assessment and Policy Analysis Corporation |
| SRHR | Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights |
| SSA | Sub-Saharan Africa |
| STI | Sexually Transmitted Infections |
| TCE | Total Control of the Epidemic |
| TWG | Technical Working Group |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCRC | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| UNAIDS | Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |
| WLC | Women's Leadership Centre |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child marriage is a global problem with more than one in every three girls getting married before the age of 15 years. The state of child marriages in Namibia has not been systematically investigated to inform the development of evidence-based policies, legal reforms, resource mobilization and programming. This report attempts to fill that gap.

A mixed methods design was employed for this study. Primary qualitative data was collected through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) from five purposively selected regions, namely Kavango West, Kunene, Ohangwena, Omusati and Zambezi. Key informants included women who were married as children, their parents, government officials, traditional authorities, CSOs and FBOs. Young girls between 11 and 17 years were also engaged through FGDs. The secondary data source used for quantitative data was the Namibia Demographic Health Survey Data.

The legal age for marriage in Namibia is 18 years and this fact was generally known by respondents. They mostly considered the practice of child marriage as bad due to its negative consequences on the married child. While customary marriage and cohabitation were the two most common forms of union, church and civil marriages were also reported. The main drivers of child marriage were identified as poverty, culture and tradition, early sexual debut and teenage pregnancy, alcohol abuse and lack of educational opportunities. Based on the data collected through qualitative interviews, the earliest age at first marriage/cohabitation is estimated at 11 years.

From the NDHS 2013 data, the prevalence of child marriage among women in Namibia is 18.4%, while that for males was considerably lower, 4.1%. By region, the highest prevalence of child marriage among women was reported in Kavango (39.7%), while Kunene (24%), Zambezi (23.8%), Omaheke (23%) and Otjozondjupa (22.6%) also recorded high levels. The least prevalence was reported in the Oshana region (7%). There are more child marriages in rural areas (22%) than in urban areas (15%). Statistically significant associations were found between child marriage and place of residence, wealth index, home language, church denomination, employment status, occupation, educational level attainment and literacy level. Although qualitative findings indicated some cases of gender-based violence in child marriage, there were no statistically significant relationships between child marriage and GBV or HIV status from the NDHS 2013 data.

Poor educational attainment, poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, deprivation of childhood experiences and abandonment by husbands were some of the reported consequences of child marriage. Customary practices potentially encouraging child marriages were identified as holy fire, celebrating womanhood, arranged marriages and tjiramue in Kunene region, sikenge in Zambezi region and eengoma in Ohangwena region. Most of these practices take place at puberty and are primarily focused on preparing the girl for adulthood and marriage. Graduates of Olufuko, a popular cultural practice in Omusati, reported that it did not contribute to child marriages contrary to views widely held elsewhere. This study, however, found some of these cultural practices to be diminishing as fewer people know or practice them.

Child marriages are seldom reported to authorities. In the Kunene region, cases of child marriage and statutory rape were not being reported as they often happen between close family members. Even when such cases come to light, law enforcement structures tend to be lenient due to their

own traditional grounding. The majority of the respondents had partial knowledge about children's rights and laws governing child marriages. The MGECSW, MoHSS, MoSS and MoEAC were recognized as the main government ministries fighting child marriages alongside civil society. Notable community level protective measures against child marriage include financial penalties for men who marry young girls, the school system (keeping children, particularly girls, in school) and religious teaching. These interventions have clearly been insufficient in mitigating the problem of child marriages.

The most effective interventions were found to be those that are integrated within and across multiple government and private sectors, implemented into existing programming and are positioned to deal with the risk factors for child marriage. In that regard, to accelerate efforts to eradicate this practice, the following actions are recommended based on the findings of the study and the Namibian context.

a. Law reform and dissemination

- Strengthen consistent implementation and improve the operation of available legislation, such as the Combating of Rape Act, the Married Persons Act and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- Enforce enacted legislation such as the Child Care Protection Act (CCPA)
- Refine the legal and policy framework to align conflicting instruments, such as the Namibian constitution, customary law and the statutory law
- Develop and gazette a national policy and strategy on ending child marriage in Namibia
- Orient law enforcement officers, judicial members and traditional leaders to consistently enforce national laws
- Increase awareness of child marriage related laws and services among public, private and civil society structures and communities
- Improve coordination of services between organisations fighting child marriages.

b. Community mobilization

- Conduct periodic, country-wide campaigns aimed at educating communities (parents, men, women, traditional leaders, school-going boys and girls, youths) on child marriage, especially in the regions with high prevalence of child marriages, such as Kavango, Zambezi and Kunene. This can be through social mobilization strategies, like messaging and utilization of community information systems and communication models
- Integration of community mobilization, education and outreach into already existing programs run by line ministries, such as MoHSS, MGECSW, MHAI, MYOSS, MoEAC, as well as civil society organisations
- Engage traditional leaders, political leaders, social figures, churches, faith-based organisations and the media in preventative initiatives
- Establish community level teams to spearhead preventative programs at the community level

c. Empowerment of married, divorced or separated children

- Enhance married girls' formal education, vocational skills and life skills (HIV prevention methods, SRHR,)
- Develop support networks or groups for married children, to inspire and empower them by providing psychological support, mentoring and career guidance
- Improve coordination of efforts by protective services through reporting of identified cases

of child marriage or cohabitation

- Strengthen social protection services, such as economic incentives and legal support against GBV
- Provision of adolescent-friendly health services to deal with grave health issues identified in the study, such as complicated pregnancies, STIs, including HIV, and substance abuse

d. Enhanced education of children

- Promote education and school completion in communities, particularly for the girl children
- Ensuring equal and equitable access to school for both boys and girls through scholarships, subsidies and establishment of schools that offer all grades in hard to reach areas
- Meet the needs of school-going girls, such as providing sanitary wear, to prevent drop outs

e. Enhanced adolescent sexual and reproductive health

- Strengthen the implementation of the Education Sector Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy by providing a consistent provision of information on sexual and reproductive health to both girls and boys; promoting life skills programs; ensuring the school is a safe environment for learners, free from sexual harassment or sexual abuse by learners, teachers or other staff and involving the community at large in preventative measures against pregnancy
- Improve access to quality, adolescent and youth-friendly health services, particularly for sexual and reproductive health

f. Addressing Gender based violence and harmful cultural practices

- Advocate for the abolishment of all harmful and discriminatory customary laws and practices which expose children, especially the girl child, to child marriage and violate their rights
- Promote alternative culturally grounded practices that do not violate rights and put children at risk
- Harmonise traditional laws with the legal and policy framework to align with various national and international human rights instruments
- Educate traditional and religious leaders to uphold the law and protect the rights of children
- Implement awareness raising campaigns aimed at educating communities on harmful cultural and traditional practices, the rights of children and laws to protect them
- Empower girls and women to challenge and reject harmful traditional practices by taking control and making their own choices regarding sexuality
- Address GBV and sexual abuse

g. Economic incentives to address poverty

Through existing programs under the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare's Wealth redistribution and poverty eradication blue-print, as well as the newly launched Sustainable Livelihoods Project for Rural Communities in Namibia:

- Increase food productivity, security and nutrition in areas that are poor and vulnerable to child marriage
- Strengthen establishment of food banks for poor and vulnerable families at risk of marrying girls early
- Strengthen the provision of the social grant to poor and vulnerable persons including the child state grants.

h. Conduct research on specific child marriage issues

- The inclusion of cohabitation as part of a broader description of marriage demands further investigation of cohabitation to determine its prevalence among children; furthermore, a standard definition of cohabitation is needed for effective programing
- System failures in responding to child marriage issues, such as statutory rape and teenage pregnancy, need to be reviewed to give a better understanding of the lack of reporting and lack of duty bearer response
- Traditional initiations such as Olufuko, and practices that are part customary law, need to be studied further to establish their role, if any, in child marriages.
- Conduct extensive research on harmful cultural practices in Namibia.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Context

Namibia's population is estimated at 2.32 million (NIDS, 2016), and with a total land area of 823,290 Km², the country is one of the least densely populated in the world at just 2.8 people per square kilometre. Namibia is made up of 14 regions, as shown in Figure 1 below

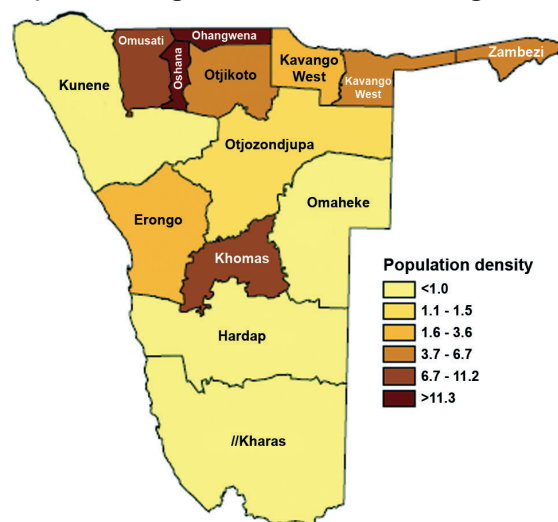


Figure 1: Namibia's regional map

Namibia has a young population with a mean age of 21 years. About 73.2% of the population is below 35 years of age, with almost 36.4% of the total population being less than 15 years of age, and 36.8% being in the 15-34 years age group (NIDS, 2016). Approximately 52% of the population lives in rural areas and females constitute 51.4% of the total population. The majority of people are Christians (80-90%). Although Namibia is ranked as an upper middle-income country, it has one of the most skewed distributions of income per capita. This is due to unbalanced development, which has seen the unemployment rate increasing from 27% in 2012 (NDHS, 2013) to 34% in 2016 (CBS, 2016).

1.2 Rationale

According to the Namibian Child Care and Protection Act No.3 of 2015, 'child' means "a person who has not attained the age of 18 years". Child marriage is a statutory or customary union in which one party is a child or both of the parties are children (SADC Model Law on Eradication of child marriage, 2016, Part 1 [2]). Below the age of eighteen, children are considered not to be physically and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and child bearing. The marriage may take place with or without formal registrations, under civil, religious or customary law (Hervish & Feldman-Jacobs, 2011).

Studies have described child marriage as a global problem with more than 1 in 3, or 250 million, girls getting married before 15 years of age (UNICEF, 2015). In some communities, child marriage is a strategy for economic survival as families marry off their daughters at an early age to reduce their economic burden (UNFPA, 2012).

Child marriage is considered a human rights violation as it deprives the children involved of education, good health and the chance to learn skills and develop their personalities. It also leaves them vulnerable to abuse and maltreatment (Perczynska, Turn & Coyle, 2012).

According to UNICEF (2015), Africa has the second highest rates of child marriage in the world (34%) after South Asia (44%). Sub-Saharan Africa's incidence of child marriage stands at 26%. Deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth are an important contributor to mortality for girls aged 15-19 worldwide (UNICEF, 2015). Children born to mothers under the age of 18 years are more likely to suffer from low birth weight, malnutrition and late physical and cognitive development. In Namibia, there are more women and girls living with HIV compared to their male counterparts, particularly between the ages of 15-24 years.

Girls are disproportionately vulnerable due to prescribed gender and cultural norms, income inequality, gender-based violence (GBV) and their biological make up (Concept Note on Adolescent Girls & Young Women, 2016). About 43% of new HIV infections take place in the 15-24 age group of which 67% of them are among females (NDHS, 2013). Although local incidence is reported to be relatively low, the 2013 Namibia Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) reports the existence of child marriage in Namibia. The Child Care and Protection Act No. 3 of 2015 states that no child under the age of eighteen (18) should be married.

The 2013 Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Namibia reported adolescent girls remain at very high risk of violence, exploitation and persistent harmful traditional and cultural practices. One in three adolescent girls aged 15-19 have ever experienced physical or sexual violence, putting them at risk of unintended pregnancy and HIV infection. The government of Namibia has ratified multiple conventions, including the UN Convention on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (UNCRC), the Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, as well as the Maputo Protocol.

Having ratified the above-mentioned conventions, the Government of Namibia has committed to take all appropriate measures to abolish traditional practices detrimental to the health and welfare of children, such as child marriages. Data gaps need to be filled to inform the development of evidence-based policies, legal reform, resource mobilization and programming.

This study was aimed at filling that gap. It sought to determine the extent of child marriage in Namibia as well as explore underlying drivers, impact of customary practices and the nature of the legal framework in the country.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to describe the state of child marriages in Namibia to inform the development of evidence-based policies, legal reform, resource mobilization and programming.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To assess the extent of child marriage (Knowledge, Attitude and Practices)
2. To assess factors driving child marriages
3. To assess knowledge and use of existing legislation, programs and interventions against child marriage
4. To determine the consequences/effects of child marriage on the child and community
5. To identify the linkages between child marriage, HIV, GBV and SRHR (causal, consequences)
6. To investigate harmful cultural or traditional practices and implications for child marriages
7. Document good practices/protective factors for child marriage prevention

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the common forms of marriage in Namibian communities?
2. What are the underlying drivers of child marriage within Namibian communities?
3. How is child marriage practice affecting the married child and the community?
4. What are the social and cultural beliefs in Namibia and how do they promote or prevent child marriages?
5. To what extent are communities knowledgeable of and influenced by practical interventions and legal and policy framework related to child marriages?
6. What are the perceptions on linkages between child marriage and HIV, GBV, SRHR and alcohol and drug abuse?

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Child marriage

The Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC, Article 1, 1990), defines a ‘child’ as a “person below the age of 18, unless, under the law applicable to the child, age of majority is attained earlier”. According to the Namibian Child Care and Protection Act (CCPA) No. 3 of 2015, ‘child’ means “a person who has not attained the age of 18 years”. As per the Namibian CCPA, “marriage” means a marriage in terms of any law of Namibia and includes a marriage recognised as such in terms of any tradition, custom or religion of Namibia and any marriage in terms of the law of any country, other than Namibia, where such a marriage is recognised as a marriage under the laws of Namibia.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16(2) marriage “shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses”. Child marriage in Namibia, therefore, refers to any marriage, whether legal or customary, that occurs when one or both of the spouses is/are below the age of 18 years (UNFPA, 2012).

2.2 Trends and patterns of child marriage

Child marriage affects girls in far greater numbers than boys (UNICEF, 2014). An estimated 720 million women were married or in a union before the age of 18 as compared to 156 million of men. According to UNICEF (2015), in Africa, child marriages are most likely to be found in rural areas and among the poorest segments of the population. The likelihood of rural girls getting married before the age of 18 years is twice that of their urban counterparts. The same trend is observed when girls from the poorest households are compared to their peers from the richest households. Figure 2 below highlights the global and regional averages for child marriages. Child marriage occurs in many countries, cultures, and religions and its prevalence is highest in South Asia with 44% percent of women aged 20-24 years having been married before their 18th birthday.

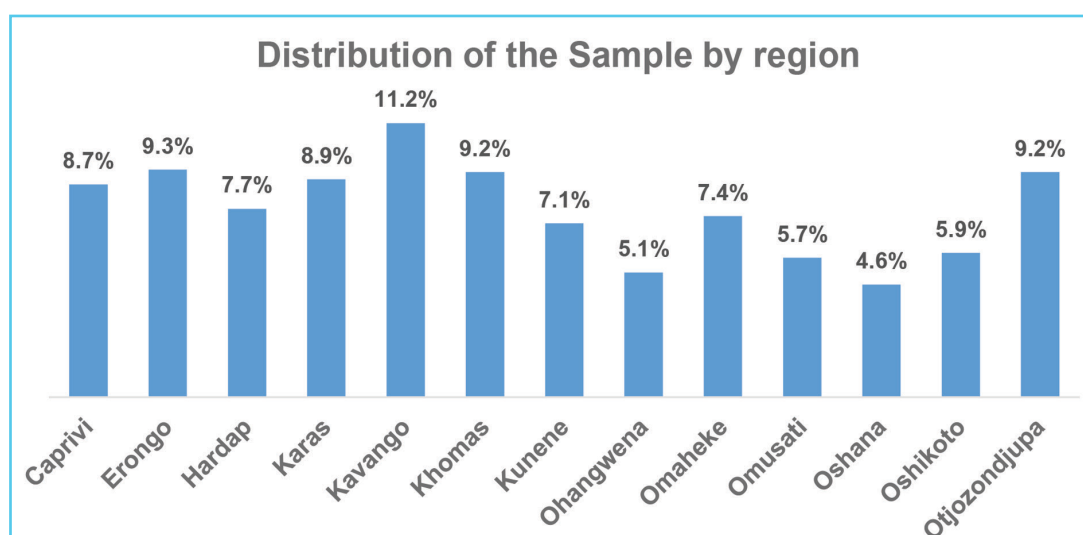


Figure 2: Global & regional averages for child marriage
(Adapted from UNICEF, 2015)

The average child marriage rate in Africa (34%) is higher than the global average (26%). Within Africa, highest prevalence rates are recorded in Western, Eastern and Central Africa, and least in Northern Africa. Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland are among a few Sub Saharan African countries with child marriages rates below 10%. According to UNICEF (2016), 7% of girls in Namibia are married before the age of 18 years.

2.3 Drivers of Child Marriage

Harmful cultural practices, socio-economic factors and gender inequalities are the main drivers of child marriages globally as evidenced by several studies on child marriages. A study by Mann, Quigley and Fischer (2015) asserts that child marriages are driven by a desire to seize an opportunity, to escape bad living conditions, to meet basic needs, to enhance one's own or one's parents' status in the community, to secure an economic benefit or to remain within the peer group. In Asian societies, Chowdhury (2004) reported the bride price tends to decrease with increasing age thus prompting some parents to marry off their daughters at a very young age in order to fetch a higher bride price. Mann et al., (2015) affirms poverty is one of the greatest factors driving child marriage as "parents and guardians see child marriage as an opportunity to escape poverty".

In Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi, poverty was found to be a strong driver of child marriage, as well as traditional practices and lack of education to a certain extent (Pazvakawabwa & Wanjau, 2015). The Women's Refugee Commission (2016) also emphasized that poverty exacerbated by displacement following conflict is a driver of early child marriages as parents hope to secure a daughter's future or meet a basic need.

A survey on child marriage in Tanzania (Ministry of Health, 2017), found that parents may force their children into child marriage because of bad behaviour and the fear that the children would bring shame to the family by getting pregnant outside wedlock. Social norms and religious practices were also found to be significant drivers of child marriage in Zimbabwe (Pazvakawabwa & Wanjau, 2015).

The Womens' Refugee Commission (2016) reported the same findings in Somalia and Syria. Another study in Nepal identified low education levels of the girls and traditions like dowry as playing a significant role in the prevalence of child marriage. No studies have been done in Namibia to explore the drivers of child marriages.

According to UNICEF (2014), culture and tradition also play a role in child marriages; "in many places, child marriage persists because it has happened for generations", more so, "marrying off a girl as a child is seen as a way to ensure her safety, especially in areas where girls are at high risk of physical or sexual assault". In Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe, some traditional practices expose children directly or indirectly to sex and child marriage (Pazvakawabwa & Wanjau, 2015). The Women's Refugee Commission (2016) reported some girls in Syria are being raped, killed and harassed, thus, it's better for the parents to give their daughters to men in marriage to protect them from sexual violence. Gender inequality across Africa is also a major contributor to child marriages due to the disparities on the perceived value of boys versus girls (UNICEF, 2014). The latter are considered to be a burden or a commodity, hence they are married off early.

2.4 Consequences/effects of child marriages

The consequences of child marriage are well documented, and these include health, education and socio-economic effects. Studies have shown that child marriage has numerous severe health risks on the married child. This is mainly because the child is expected to start being sexually active and commence childbearing before her body is fully matured. The heavy physical housework over long periods also causes physical long-term damage (Bahgam & Mukhatari, 2004; Perczynska & Coyle, 2016).

Childbearing at a young age also leads to a greater risk for poor health outcomes among the girl child's offspring. Commonly observed outcomes include that the foetus of the pregnant child may not be carried to term, the baby may be small for its age and poorly developed and children of these mothers also run a high risk of mental retardation (Bahgam & Mukhatari, 2004). Child marriage is also associated with exposure to violence and abuse, as girls who refuse to be sexually active with their spouses due to the pain and discomfort are subjected to marital rape, domestic violence or abandonment by their husbands who go on to take new wives (Lemmon et al., 2014; Perczynska & Coyle, 2016). The Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Seniors and Children (MoHCDGSC) (2017) survey in Tanzania also reported girls in child marriages find it difficult to bond with age mates and they also lack the opportunity to choose their own partners. Lemmon et al., (2014) further argued that child marriage disrupts progress towards educational goals because when children marry young, their education is cut short. Their individual and their families' economic potential becomes limited, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty in which so many poor countries find themselves trapped.

2.5 Existing legislation

Namibia ratified regional and international conventions that express violation of child rights in child marriages and seek to protect and strengthen children's rights. These include the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Article 16, which states that women should have the same right as men to "freely choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent". The convention proceeds to state "betrothal and marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory".

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC), Article 24 also states the right of children to be protected from harmful traditional practices, which include female genital mutilation and child marriage, among other practices. In 1994, the UN International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Program of Action, which was adopted by 107 countries, called on countries to eliminate child marriage and to enforce laws that ensure free and full consent in marriage.

More so, the African charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child and the SADC Model Law on eradicating child marriage and protecting children already in marriage are model laws based on international instruments that prohibit child marriages. The Marriage Act, 1961 (Act No. 25 of 1961) as amended, sets the minimum age at which a child can be married in a civil marriage to 21 years for both girls and boys in accordance with international conventions.

The Child Care and Protection Act, 2015 (Act No. 3 of 2015) (CCPA), section 10 (10) also states that anyone below the age of 21 years, requires the consent of parents/guardian to get married. Section 226 of the CCPA prohibits child marriages in traditional unions, customary and civil marriages, and makes the contravention a criminal offense.

2.6 Cultural practices

Culture reflects people's values, behaviours and way of thinking (SAfAIDS, 2011). Some cultural practices are considered harmful because they perpetuate forced or arranged marriages and the spread of HIV (Women's Leadership Centre, 2010). Most harmful practices have a cultural, social or religious underpinning, and as such, they are socially acceptable (Plan International, 2012).

This makes enforcement of legislation difficult and those who practice them are not brought to book (Plan International, 2012). The practices that were considered harmful in Africa and Namibia from literature review (LAC, 2005; GBV NPA, 2010; WLC, 2010; SAFAIDS, 2012; UNAIDS, 2013; Indongo & Pazvakavambwa, 2015; UNICEF, 2015; NANGOF Trust, 2015) are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Examples of Cultural practices

| CULTURAL PRACTICE | DESCRIPTION |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Polygamy | It's a practice where a man can have several wives. This practice is encouraged and well accepted and is done openly, or in some instances secretly. In Zimbabwe, the Apostolic religious sect openly marries off girls as young as 12 years to older men who are already married to more than one wife. In Namibia, polygamy was reported in Oshana, Kavango West, Otjozondjupa, and Zambezi. |
| Forced/ arranged marriages | Women (especially young women or adolescents), do not choose who to marry, but are forced against their will, to marry most often older men, who are likely to have been married or are married. Though they bear resemblance, some arranged marriages are not necessarily forced but they take away the individual's decision making and free choice on who to marry. There are no forced marriages in Namibia, if children are forced to marry it amounts to statutory rape which is a criminal offence. |
| Widow inheritance | This is a customary practice whereby a widow/widower is compelled to marry a relative of her/his deceased husband or wife. In these cases, and indeed some cultures, women are viewed as objects to be owned and if they refuse to be inherited they may also risk losing their property as they are viewed as part of the estate the husband's family can inherit (LAC, 2017). This practice may involve marrying off a child under the age 18 years which leads to child marriage being considered an acceptable norm. |
| Tjiramue | <p>"Omuramwe" is directly translated as a cousin and culturally these people are permitted or allowed to have an intimate relationship amongst themselves and can also marry. There are two types of cousins and can be differentiated in terms of blood cousins (Brother and sisters children) and the other is the one that can be traced in terms of "eanda" which is derived from a matri-clan. In this regard it means the marriage preferred for a man is one with a woman of his father's matri-clan, which is a cross cousin who stands in the relationship to him of father's sister's daughter (Gibson, 1956).</p> <p>Although the practice was meant to ensure the continuation of the "eanda" and also for economic benefits it has not been void of abuse, since men feel that they can use such opportunities to harass their cousins for sex and relations. It therefore puts young girls at risk of sexual abuse or getting married in polygamous relationships by older men as this practice encourages sexual activity of young women and girls with older men. Further, this practice encourages and contributes to GBV and transmission of STIs. In Namibia, this is more common in Otjiherero communities.</p> |
| Sikenge | As supported by literature (NANGOF Trust, 2015), sikenge is a traditional initiation practice in the Zambezi region. It is practice whereby women who are getting ready for marriage are taught about womanhood. It is conducted for young girls when they start menstruating and the initiation period is one month. At initiation, the girls are taken to a secluded location where they are taught about womanhood, how to take care of their future husbands and how they should behave when they get married. It was also reported that they are also taught how to be responsible citizens. |
| Olufuko | Literature suggests the process includes, pregnancy testing and culminates in interested men making a choice of who they want to marry. It is believed that Olufuko encourages girls to keep their virginity. A local organisation Namrights (2014) described Olufuko as a harmful traditional practice which perpetuates child marriage and infringes on children's rights. |

2.7 Linkages between child marriage, HIV, gender-based violence and teenage pregnancies

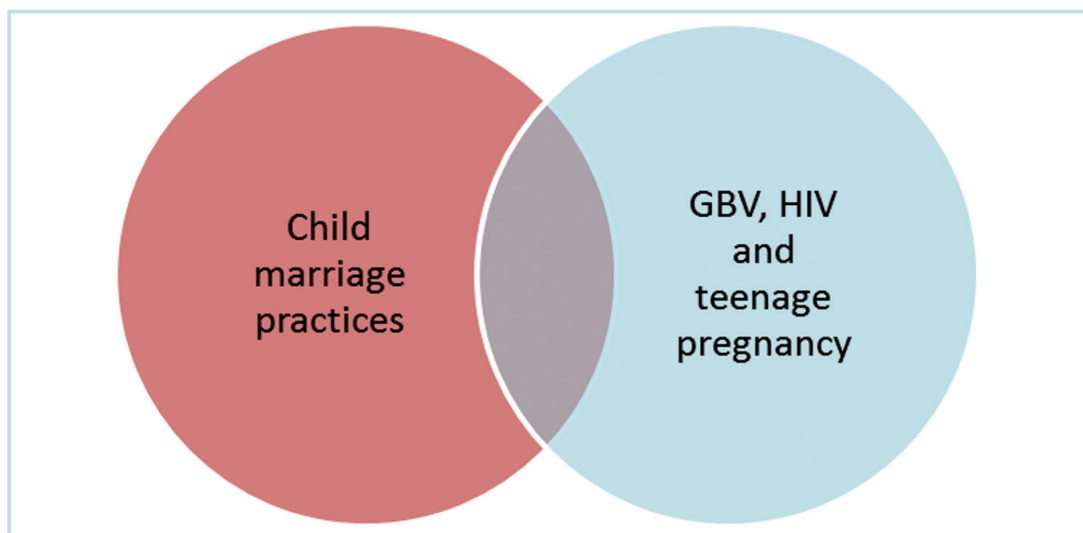


Figure 3: Inter-linkages between child marriage, GBV, HIV and teenage pregnancy

2.7.1 Gender Based Violence

Culture, traditions, limited education, unequal power relations and low status of women are some of the factors causing GBV (NGP, 2010). Gender roles are strongly influenced by culture and most African societies are patriarchal in nature; that is, men have control over women and women should be subservient to them (USAID, 2009; SAfAIDS, 2012; LAC, 2017). As such, women have little or no decision-making power including their sexual and reproductive health.

In Namibia, over 40% of women aged 18-49 years have been subjected to GBV (SIAPAC, 2009). According to the National Gender Policy of Namibia (2010), the most prevalent forms of GBV in Namibia are rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment and forced marriage. These affect women and girls more than men. The policy also highlights forced marriages among girls and young women married off to older men as contributing to GBV.

According to SAfAIDS (2012), GBV can be physical, emotional, sexual or economic (deprivation of access to finance and other resources). It often involves children as they are exposed to sexual abuse, harmful cultural practices and exposure to domestic violence (LAC, 2017, p. 211). Forty-one percent (41%) of rape cases reported in Namibia between 2003 and 2012 were perpetrated against children and 25% of them involved family members, spouses or intimate partners. Studies done in India (ICRW, 2004), Kenya (UNICEF, 2005) and Peru (Flake, 2005) report the following outcomes for girls married before the age of 18:

- > They are most likely to report domestic violence.
- > They are most likely to report being forced to have sex.
- > They lack decision making power.
- > They show signs of sexual abuse.
- > GBV was also found to be a key factor in the prevalence of HIV.

2.7.2 HIV

Marriage before the age of 20 years is associated with elevated HIV infection risk (Clark, 2004). A study in rural Uganda by Kelly et al., (2003) found higher rates of HIV in young married women when compared to their never married counterparts. The main linkages between child marriage and HIV infection are identified as frequent unprotected sex, intergenerational sex, lack of power to make choices or decisions and limited access to information.

Frequent unprotected sex; Anatomical and biological factors in young women contribute to their vulnerability to HIV and AIDS on sexual debut. Clark (2004) highlights the frequency of unprotected sex as one of the HIV risk factors that is common in marriage. Married girls were found to have unprotected sex much more often than unmarried ones.

Intergenerational Sex; Intergenerational sex was found to be common among young married and cohabitating women, which increases exposure to HIV (Population Council, 2004; NDHS, 2006; Clark, Bruce & Dude, 2006). According to SAfAIDS (2011), in forced marriages, women (often adolescents and young women) do not choose who to marry and often end up with older men. These men are likely to be married or previously married, increasing HIV risk. Polygamy was another practice that was found to be associated with large age gaps between husband and wife with increased risk of HIV infection (UNICEF, 2005; Clarke et al., 2006). In Namibia, polygamy is reported in Oshana, Kavango West, Otjozondjupa and Zambezi regions (Indongo & Pazvakavambwa, 2015). The men involved are typically older and condom use is low.

Lack of power to make choices and decisions; According to Clarke et al., (2006) and YCSRR (2015), young women in unions with older men have minimal decision-making power. Most societies are patriarchal in nature and men have control and power in the marriage (USAID, 2009). Women are less likely to be able to negotiate the use of protective methods such as condoms. In Namibia, condom use was found to be low among married or cohabitating people in general (NDHS, 2006).

Limited access to information/support; When compared to their unmarried counterparts, who have access to HIV information in schools, married girls/young women spend less time at school as a result of being married as children (YCSSR, 2015). They also have reduced social contacts due to the patriarchal nature of their societies and are less likely to be exposed to mass media (Clarke et al., 2006). This results in reduced access to reliable information on sexual reproductive health and the opportunity to get information on HIV issues.

2.7.3 Teenage pregnancy

The Namibian Gender Analysis Report (2017) provides a succinct overview of the status of teenage pregnancy in Namibia. According to the 2013 Demographic and Health Survey, as cited in the Gender Analysis Report, 34% of girls had begun childbearing by the age of 19 years and under 4% by the age of 15. By region, the highest rates were reported for Kunene (39%), Omaheke (36%) and Kavango (34%). The fertility rate of girls aged 12-14 years in 2011 was 13 births per 1,000 females compared to 68 births per 1,000 females aged 15-19 years, (2011 Census Fertility Report).

The Gender Analysis Report (2017) reports that “girls and young women aged 15-19 who had entered into a marriage or consensual union had fertility rates five times higher than those who had never married” thus suggesting a strong linkage between teenage pregnancy and marriages.

Furthermore, it was reported that the mean desired number of children was lower than the total fertility rate in 11 of the country's 14 regions suggesting an unmet need for contraception or that women did not have sufficient control over their fertility.

2.8 Good practices for child marriage prevention

Though interventions to curb child marriage have been increasing over the years, most of them have not been evaluated to determine their success in combating the problem (Karei and Erulkar, 2010). According to UNICEF (2015), South Asia has the highest prevalence of child marriages in the world and multiple interventions have been implemented in that setting. It has been found that the most effective interventions are those that are integrated within and across multiple government and private sectors (USAID, 2012). According to Girls Not Brides (2016), child marriage interventions must be integrated into existing programming to accelerate progress towards eradication.

Child marriage programs can be integrated into existing programming in education, health, GBV, youth, human rights, governance, economic growth, energy, environment, conflict resolution, agriculture, food security and nutrition (Girls Not Brides, 2016). In addition, Girls Not Brides, also highlighted programs that are positioned to be most effective in dealing with the risk factors for child marriage, such as poverty, tradition/culture and gender inequalities.

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) (2013) documented evidence found to be effective in ending child marriage. They drew out five strategies, as shown in Figure 4 below. These multi-sectoral strategies are positioned to act on risk factors for child marriage and can be implemented in existing programming.

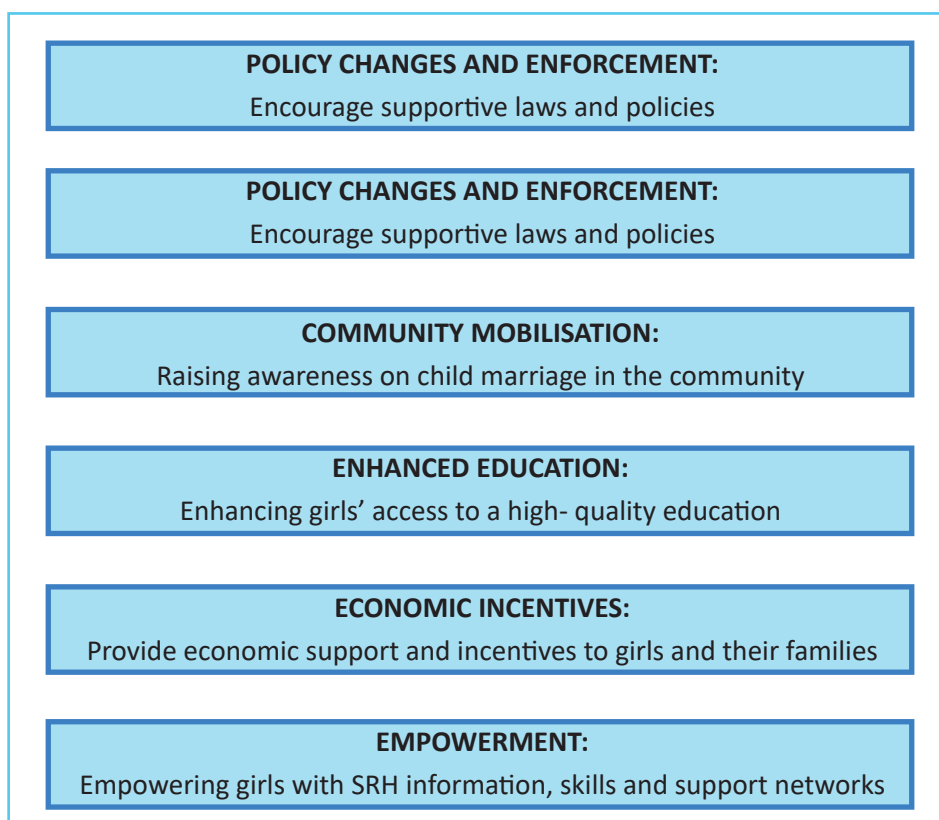


Figure 4: Most commonly used strategies to combat child marriage

1. Policy review and law enforcement

Besides the development and gazetting of national policies, laws and strategies to prevent and eradicate child marriage, this strategy also involves interventions to promote enactment and enforcement of laws and policies that delay marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2016). Laws to discourage and eradicate violation of women's and children's rights, including child marriage, exist globally, and many countries have revised the legal age of marriage to 18 years (Save the Children, 2014; Girls Not Brides, 2016).

However, Plan International (2012) conceded that there are gaps in effective and consistent implementation and enforcement of laws prohibiting child marriage. In some cultures, child marriage practices are acceptable, and legislation is not enacted, implemented or enforced (Plan International, 2012). Law enforcement and judicial officers, community and traditional leaders are critical in implementing and enforcing laws that are passed in countries (USAID, 2012).

In 2015, the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF) adopted the first-ever Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children already in Marriage. In 2016, the Tanzanian government took tough measures to combat child marriage and teenage pregnancy and made it illegal for anyone to marry primary and secondary school girls under any circumstances (Girls Not Brides, 2016). Other SADC member states, such as Zambia and Mozambique, also adopted national strategies and action plans to end child marriage in their countries in 2016.

2. Community mobilization

This involves awareness raising among the community through interventions that enable community mobilization, education and outreach to shift attitudes, norms/cultures which perpetuate child marriages (USAID, 2012). The most common factors driving child marriage are poverty, tradition and gender inequalities in Africa (UNICEF, 2014).

Coupled with the patriarchal nature of African societies, where men have control over women, child marriage lies mostly in the hands of parents, men, community and traditional leaders (USAID, 2012). Working with these groups, i.e. engaging parents, men, community and traditional leaders, is found to be effective, as they can help in shifting attitudes, encourage behaviour change and prevent and eliminate harmful practices that perpetuate child marriage.

According to Pazvakavambwa and Wanjau (2016), Plan Zimbabwe implemented the 18+ Ending Child Marriages project in 2013, whose objectives included: increasing support from community members and leaders to discourage child marriage and ensuring that community members have increased knowledge on the realities of child marriage. In 2013, the Government of Zambia partnering with civil society organizations, also launched a nation-wide campaign to end child marriage, raising awareness in the communities on the consequences of child marriage and encouraging communities to delay marriage for their daughters. This has resulted in most traditional leaders banning child and forced marriages in their communities.

In Ethiopia, a basic education program (BESO-II Community Government Partnership Program) that included promotion of messages against child marriage was implemented by World Learning Ethiopia. It has improved knowledge and attitudes related to child marriages (Karei & Eruikar, 2010).

3. Enhanced education

According to Save the Children (2014), uneducated girls are at a higher risk of child marriage than those with secondary or higher education, who are more likely to marry later. Keeping girls in school is one way that was found to avoid child marriage, as it provides benefits such as protection and information with regards to child marriage (UNFPA, 2012). Other organisations, such as USAID (2012) and Save the Children (2014), also reiterated that families and communities view girls in schools as unready for marriage.

According to Save the Children (2014), ensuring equal access to school for both boys and girls and meeting the needs of school going children to prevent drop outs or never enrolling at all are some of the strategies that were found to be effective in reducing child marriages and should be emphasized. This can be done through free education, scholarships and subsidies (UNFPA, 2014).

Examples documented by Karei and Eruikar (2010) include the Berhane Hewan program (2002-2008), designed and implemented by the Population Council in Ethiopia. The program was targeted at married and unmarried girls aged 10 to 19 years with interventions such as the provision of school supplies to enable girls to remain in school. Another intervention was the BESO-II Community Government Partnership Program implemented in Ethiopia that provided scholarships to encourage poor girls to stay in school.

4. Economic incentives

This involves strategies to address poverty, as it is one of the risk factors causing child marriage. According to Save the Children (2014), providing economic incentives to girls and their families are approaches that improve their socio-economic status and in turn delay child marriage.

Some of the interventions that were found to work include cash transfers or loans (Karei & Eruikar, 2010) and income generating projects (Save the Children, 2014). The Berhane Hewan program (2002-2008), mentioned above, also targeted poor families and provided conditional asset transfers to address economic incentives to offset the economic benefit of marrying girls in the families. The End Child Marriage Program, which was later implemented in other regions of Ethiopia in 2011, built on lessons from the Berhane Hewan experience and also included economically empowering poor households in its interventions.

5. Empowerment

This can be achieved by addressing the unique needs of married girls in programs (USAID, 2012). UNFPA (2012) highlighted strategies that enhance married girls' formal education, vocational skills and life skills (including SRH) as crucial in empowering them to develop livelihoods, confidence, negotiation skills and make decisions that better their lives. According to the same organisation, these programs have shown evidence of changes in attitudes, knowledge and behaviours related to child marriage.

In 1997, the Zambian government put in place a Re-Entry policy that encourages and provides a second chance to married and/or pregnant girls to go back and continue with school until they complete their secondary education. Pazvakavambwa and Wanjau (2016) highlighted that between 2007 and 2010, Zambia experienced a marked improvement in re-entry rates for girls who experienced child marriage and pregnancy (17.6% to 31.7%).

Partnering with Plan International, Malawi has a National Girls Education Strategy that focuses on reducing child marriage and teen pregnancies in Malawi. They established “Mother Groups” comprising of women from school catchment areas who, once they become aware of a girl who has dropped out of school due to marriage or pregnancy, follow up with the family and chiefs to ensure the girl returns to school (Pazvakavambwa & Wanjau, 2016).

2.9 Programs/Interventions to combat child marriage

The table below presents international best practices to combat child marriage that were employed in African countries such as Ethiopia, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, as well as other interventions globally. It summarizes program objectives, targets, interventions, achievements and challenges as found in program evaluations.

Table 2: Best Practices to Combat Child Marriage

| Country of Implementation | Program and main objectives | Target | Interventions | What has been achieved so far | Challenges |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|--|--|
| Ethiopia | Berhane Hewan program (2002-2008) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To reduce the prevalence of early child marriage among adolescent girls - To create safe social spaces for the most vulnerable and isolated girls, including access to education - To support girls who were already married - To increase use of reproductive health services among sexually experienced girls. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Girls aged 10-19 - Married adolescent girls - Parents and community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing school materials to girls - Providing non-formal education (alternative basic education) to married/unmarried girls - Community conversations - Economic incentives to parents who do not marry off their young girls - Mobilization of girls groups with an adult female mentor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Girls aged 10-14 are three times more likely to be in school as a result. - Family planning use increased | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Budget delays - Bureaucratic procedures hindering effective implementation |
| | CARE's Towards Economic and Sexual Reproductive Health Outcomes for Adolescent Girls (TESFA, 2010-2014) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To improve the lives of married girls - Delay marriage for unmarried girls | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ever-married adolescent girls - Unmarried girls - Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educate and rally parents and community members. - Empower girls with SRHR information, skills and a support network. - Provide essential health information and services. - Provide financial and livelihoods training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hundreds of cancelled marriages - Raised average age of marriage in community - Forced marriage nearly abandoned - Changing broader gender relations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Husbands not allowing wives to attend meetings - Program implemented for a short period of time - Unsupportive legal framework - Initial hostility towards implementers |
| | African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN): Girl Power Program (2012-2015) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allocating practical resources to girls - Building capacity of schools as protective environments - Strengthening coordination among stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Girls - Schools - Government officials - Health providers - Women's Association leaders - Development Army members | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training about child marriage and a plan for reporting child marriages. - Providing school supplies such as pens, paper and feminine hygiene products to individual girls - Supporting girls' clubs and helping them to keep girls in school - Raising awareness - Establishing and supporting multi-stakeholder child protection structures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raising age of marriage in community - Improved awareness about the risks of child marriage - Strengthened child protection services - Increased girls' knowledge of services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nearly absent legal enforcement - Parents hiding or lying about child marriage - Community elders' hostility towards program |

| Country of Implementation | Program and main objectives | Target | Interventions | What has been achieved so far | Challenges |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|---|--|
| Ethiopia | The End Child Marriage Program or Finote Hiwot (2011-2016) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and broader community leaders Government officials Adolescent girls, boys Poor households | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness raising Economic incentives to targeted households in pilot areas Strategic engagement at regional and federal levels Strengthening of Harmful Traditional Practices Committees Training on business development and entrepreneurship to beneficiaries School materials disbursement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved awareness of negative effects of child marriage among community members Increased rates of girls' school retention Created an environment where there was willingness in some communities to try to cancel child marriages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor reach of target population Inadequate resources for school material support Financial constraints to meet economic incentives Staff turnover |
| | Combating Violence against Women and Harmful Traditional practices (2009-2011) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women Girls Boys | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raising awareness Girls clubs with provisions of sanitary supplies and SRH training Boys clubs for reporting child marriage and changing gender norms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced child marriages Elimination of genital mutilation or cutting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited budgets Limited coordination or linkages to government structures Time consuming frequent meetings or gatherings |
| Malawi | The World Bank's Zomba Cash Transfer program To keep school girls in school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School girls drop outs(girls) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides school fees and cash transfers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce the rate of child marriage by up to 40%. Reduced school drop-out rates from 20% to 11% Reduced sexual debut | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fuel shortages for field work Villagers distrusting and protecting themselves from strangers (implementers) |
| | Plan International's 18+ program- Campaigns and dialogue; and mother groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Married and unmarried girls Traditional and religious leaders Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness door-to-door campaign Traditional and religious leaders training Reintegrating girls who had dropped out of school due to child marriage or teenage pregnancy Supporting girls with learning materials and personal hygiene supplies. Introduction of an abuse reporting mechanism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved the learning environment for girls Successful in reintegrating girls back into schools Girls and parents made written commitments not to enter into child marriage Traditional leaders have established decrees and by-laws preventing child marriages in areas targeted by Plan International's projects | Not found |

| Country of Implementation | Program and main objectives | Target | Interventions | What has been achieved so far | Challenges |
|--|---|--|--|---|---|
| Zambia | Plan International's 18+ program –Advocacy; Girl Power program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To mobilise girls so that they have the capabilities to determine their own futures - To transform gender norms and practices that drive child marriages through social movement-building | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Girls - Traditional leaders - Community at large | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nation-wide awareness raising - Mobilizing traditional leaders to be agents of change in discarding harmful practices - Training of boys, girls, and young women in sexual reproductive health rights, and child marriage - School clubs for raising awareness amongst children and their parents | Traditional leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - are banning child, early and forced marriages in their communities - are issuing decrees and signing declarations to ban the practice in their chiefdoms - have banned initiation of girls during school days, - have developed an initiation curriculum | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not found |
| Zimbabwe | Plan International's 18+ program- Media and Advocacy campaigns; Engagement of religious and traditional leaders; Building Skills for life project (2011-2013), <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To transform gender norms and practices that drive child marriages through social movement-building - To facilitate community-level dialogue in the context of girls' right to education and addressing child marriage and harmful practices. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Girls - Traditional leaders - Community at large | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multi-pronged media and advocacy campaign - Engaging chiefs and traditional authorities to support attitude and behaviour change - Paying for school fees and providing girls with education materials - Introducing adolescent sexual reproductive health education, girls' empowerment clubs and improving school-based child protection systems. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The majority of girls in this program have re-entered the formal education system and many have performed well academically - Chief's Council committed to address child marriage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not found |
| Asia (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, Laos, Cambodia and Indonesia) | Asia Child Marriage Initiative (ACMI), <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To prevent child marriage - To mitigate the harmful consequences of the practice. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Girls - Schools - Public servants /government officials - Parents, and community at large | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community awareness raising and advocating on child rights and the negative effects of child marriage. - Supporting girls' access to secondary school and empowerment - Life skills education, and peer educator training - Universal birth registration, civil servant training in the application of marriage laws, and policy-based advocacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Girls stayed in school which largely prevented them from marrying early - Girls economically empowered as teachers in pre-primary schools - Increased parents respect for children's rights to education in Bangladesh - In India, married and unmarried girls are helped to continue their education. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not found |
| UK | Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To rescue potential victims of rape or forced marriage. - To tackle the drivers of forced marriage - To improve the quality of support provided to victims. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Victims/potential victims of forced marriage - Professionals dealing with cases | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Media campaigns, - Law reform - Support and outreach to professionals and practitioners handling the cases - Providing school resource materials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The FMU handled cases involving 60 different countries, including Pakistan (47.1 %), Bangladesh (11 %), India (8 %), Afghanistan (2.1 %), Somalia (1.2 %), and Turkey (1.1 %) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not found |

Sources: Jain & Kurz (ICRW), 2007; Karei and Eruikar, 2010; Malhotra, Warner, McGonagle & Lee-Rife 2011; Plan International, 2013; Baird, Chirwa, McIntosh, & Ozler, 2015; IMC Worldwide, 2015; Plan International, 2016; Jones, Tefera, Presler-Marshall et al., 2016

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overall Study design

The research employed a mixed methods design using both qualitative and secondary data analysis. Qualitative methods were used to collect and analyse primary data, whereas both qualitative and the quantitative analysis were used on available secondary data as depicted in Figure 5 below.

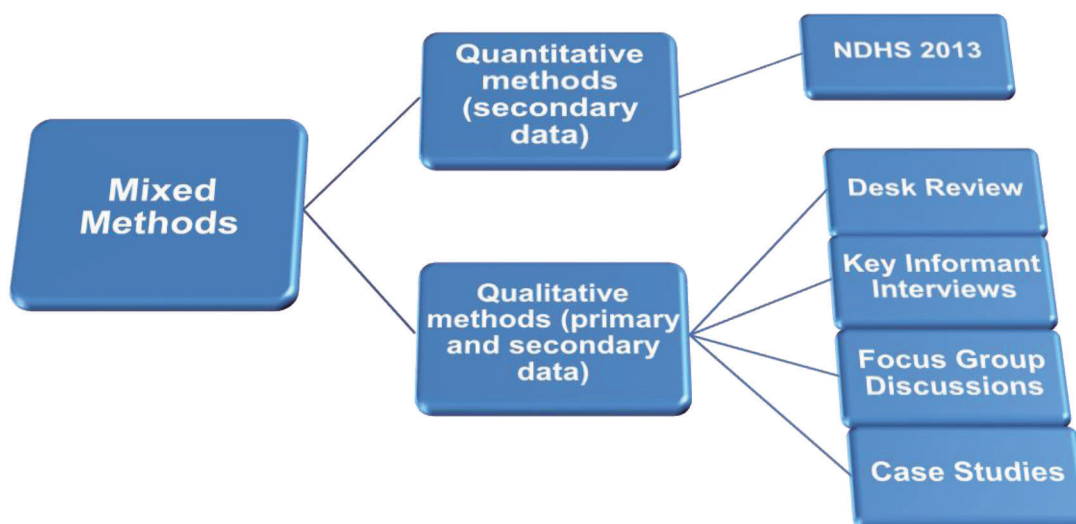


Figure 5: Study design

3.2 Secondary data

Secondary data analysis was done on the Namibian 2013 Demographic and Health Survey. This data source was more detailed on the child marriage aspects compared to census and other data sources.

3.2.1 NDHS Data

The NDHS covered a sample of 10,018 women of child bearing age of which 4,685 (46.8%) of them had ever been in a marital union. According to the 2013 NDHS, the “age at first marriage” was defined as “the age at which the woman began living with her first spouse/partner”. It is important to note this definition does not distinguish between formal marriage and cohabitation/living together and therefore in this report, child marriage also includes early cohabitation. Information on age at first marriage was obtained by asking all women who had ever been in a marital union the month and year when they had started living with their spouse/partner.

Some variables were re-coded to enable analysis and new variables were generated, for example, to define child marriage (Child marriage = Age at first marriage less than 18 years (Coded 1) or otherwise (Coded 0). From the above topics, which were covered in the questionnaire, the study focused on assessing the impact of socio-economic, geographical and demographic characteristics (such as region, place of residence, wealth index, age group, literacy, highest educational level, religion, and main language spoken at home) on child marriage.

The choice of independent variables was guided by literature review and data availability. Descriptive summary statistics in the form of frequency tables, bar charts, histograms and measures of centrality and dispersion were established. Bivariate analysis was based on cross

tabulations, multiple bar charts and Chi-square tests of association to establish whether significant associations existed between child marriage and the potential risk factors/drivers. For all inference, a probability value (p-value) less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

3.3 Qualitative data

3.3.1 Study areas

Five of the 14 Namibia administrative regions were selected for the qualitative component of this national formative study on child marriage. These were the Kunene, Omusati, Kavango West, Ohangwena and Zambezi regions. Selection was done purposively based on the following indicators:

- High HIV prevalence (e.g. Zambezi, Omusati, Kavango)
- High Teenage pregnancies (e.g. Ohangwena, Kavango)
- High primary and secondary school dropout and low school completion rates (Kavango, Ohangwena, Omusati and Zambezi)
- High poverty (Kavango, Zambezi, Kunene and Ohangwena)
- High reported cases of Gender Based Violence (GBV) (Kavango),
- Regions with traditional setups in which child marriage is likely to take place (Kunene, Omusati and Zambezi)
- Regions with high rates of child marriage (Kavango, Zambezi)

3.3.2 Data collection methods

Focus group discussions, in-depth interviews with key informants, document review and secondary data analysis were done.

Document review/desk review was conducted for all the relevant literature, including, but not limited to, policy and legislative documents, national reports and previous studies on child marriages in Africa.

Focus Group Discussions were conducted with men, boys and girls from rural and urban communities. Four subgroups were identified:

- Girls - 10-14 years
- Girls - 15-17 years
- Boys - 15-19 years
- Men - 20-39 years

Key Informant Interviews were carried out with;

- Government and agency officials
- Faith Based Organisations
- Teachers
- Traditional authorities
- Parents of children who have experienced child marriages
- Women under and over 18 years old who experienced child marriages
- Men under and over 18 years who experienced child marriages

These subcategories, although analysed and adopted, were prescribed in the terms of reference (ToR).

3.3.3 Sampling and sample sizes

Purposive sampling was used to select study participants for the KII and FGDs. Table 3 below highlights the sample size and the respondent groups that were proposed, and the actual sizes interviewed for the five regions.

Table 3: Qualitative data respondent groups

| RESPONDENT GROUPS | METHOD | TOTAL ALL 5 REGIONS |
|--|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Officials from MGECW | KII | 6 |
| Law enforcement agencies | KII | 4 |
| Governor's Office | KII | 4 |
| Regional Councillor | KII | 2 |
| Faith Based Organizations | KII | 4 |
| Other NGOs | KII | 5 |
| Teachers | KII | 12 |
| Health Care Workers | KII | 12 |
| Traditional authority | KII | 14 |
| Traditional healers | KII | 1 |
| Parents of Children who experienced child marriage | KII | 10 |
| Girls, women, boys and men who had child marriage | KII | 10 |
| Girl Child 10-14 years | FGD | 10 groups (8 people each) |
| Girl Child 15-18 years | FGD | 8 groups(8 people each) |
| Boys 15-20years | FGD | 6 groups(8 people each) |
| Men 21-39 years | FGD | 5 groups(8 people each) |
| FGD Olufuko graduates (Omusati) | FGD | 1 group(6 people) |
| TOTAL Interviews | FDG & KII | 83 KII and 30 FGD (238 people) |
| QUALITATIVE DATA SAMPLE SIZE | FDG & KII | 331 |

3.4 Study team

The study team consisted of 10 individuals, excluding logistical and support staff. There were 5 senior researchers, 5 research assistants and an additional researcher and statistician for secondary data analysis. Logistical and supporting staff included Regional MGECW social workers, teachers and traditional authorities who coordinated the field work.

- To ensure the team was well prepared, a 2-day capacity building workshop and piloting of tools was conducted prior to data collection. The training covered the following topics:
- Child marriage study and desk review overview
- Introduction to qualitative research
- Qualitative data collection methods and skills
- Data collection methodologies for children
- Possible challenges in qualitative data collection and how to overcome them
- Mock data collection scenarios
- Tool testing/piloting

3.5 Ethical considerations

The field work exercise was governed by high ethical standards to which the entire research team adhered to. All the applicable rules governing research with human subjects, including privacy, confidentiality and informed consent, were followed. The aim of the study was explained to the participants before each interview and they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any stage of the data collection process. For participants under the age of 18, consent was also sought from both the participant and the parent/guardian/partner. Rapport with the children was established before data collection. Ethical clearance was sought from the Namibia MoHSS Ethics Committee.

3.6 Limitations and Challenges

Methodological and Study limitations

- The primary data is entirely qualitative.
- Quantitative data is based on analysis of secondary data (NDHS, 2013).
- Some respondents, especially traditional healers, were not cooperative due to the sensitive nature of the topic and their undocumented status.
- There was poor identification of women married before the age of 18 years.

Logistical and timing challenges

The main challenge with the study was timing. The delays in kick-starting the study saw it being scheduled the last 3 months of the year (1 October to 31 December, 2017). This is the most difficult part of the year where most, if not all, key stakeholders are busy. Besides the festive mood, work and deadline pressures, other challenges related to timing were:

- School examinations and closure leading to challenges in organising school children for focus group discussions.
- Data collection clash with the political congress which saw most regional and local leadership unavailable during the period of the study.
- There was also the Police Commemoration Day during the last week of November and World AIDS Day preparation and commemoration.

Logistical arrangements were at times challenging. This was mainly due to busy schedules of MGECSW Social Workers, who were responsible for this task, and communication difficulties with hard to reach villages. Initial misunderstandings of the project design, delayed feedback from TWG and the delayed disbursement of activity funds led to the postponement of field work and cancellation of some appointments.

CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and analyses results of quantitative (secondary analysis) and qualitative data collected during the study.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

This section describes the demographic characteristics of the sample of women from the NDHS and gives a picture of how the sample was distributed by region, setting, age, age at first sex, religion, home language, literacy, education and wealth status.

4.1.1 Distribution by region

The NDHS sample was taken from all the 13 regions at the time (now 14) and regional contribution by percentage is displayed in figure 6 below. Kavango was the highest contributor at 11.2% while Oshana contributed least to the sample at 4.6%.

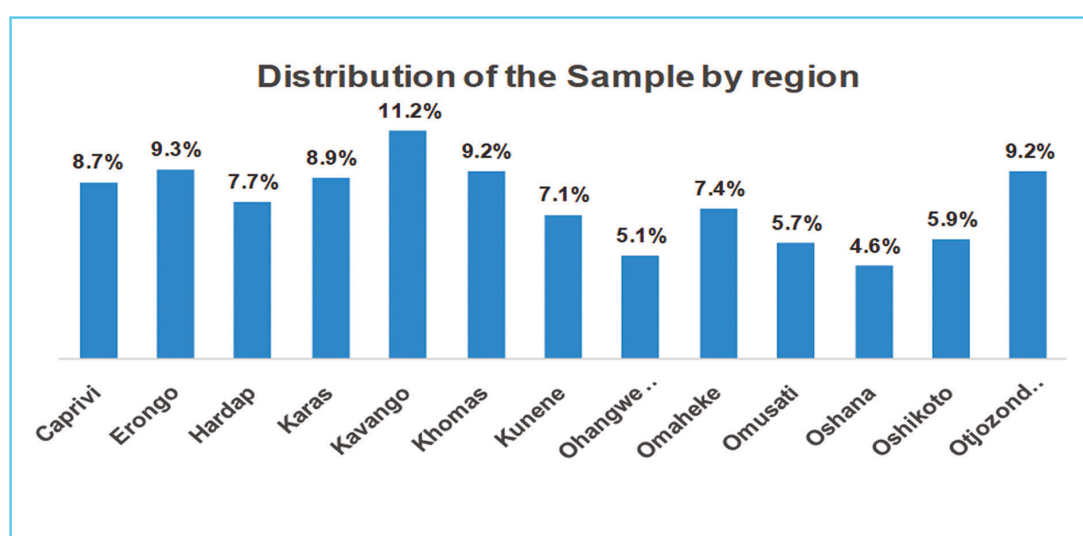


Figure 6: Distribution of the sample by region

4.1.2 Ever married women sample Rural vs Urban

Ever married rural and urban women were almost equally represented at 49% and 51% respectively.

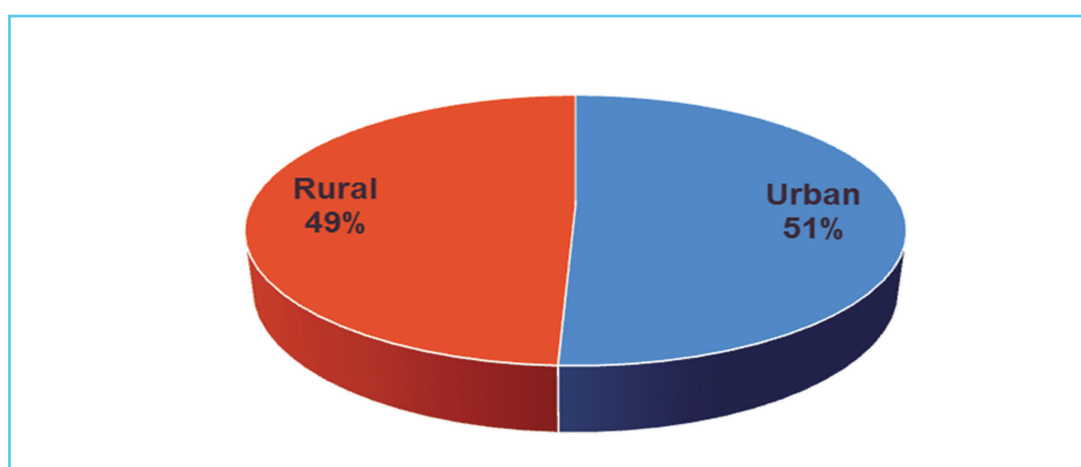


Figure 7: Distribution of the ever-married women sample rural vs urban

4.1.3 Age Distribution

The NDHS sample of 4,685 ever married women only included women from 15 to 49 years of age at the time of the demographic health survey. The most represented age group was the 35-39 age band (16.1%) while the least represented were the adolescent girls (15-19 years) and young women (20-24 years) at 2.6% and 9.5% respectively. This was expected since most adolescent girls are not yet married.

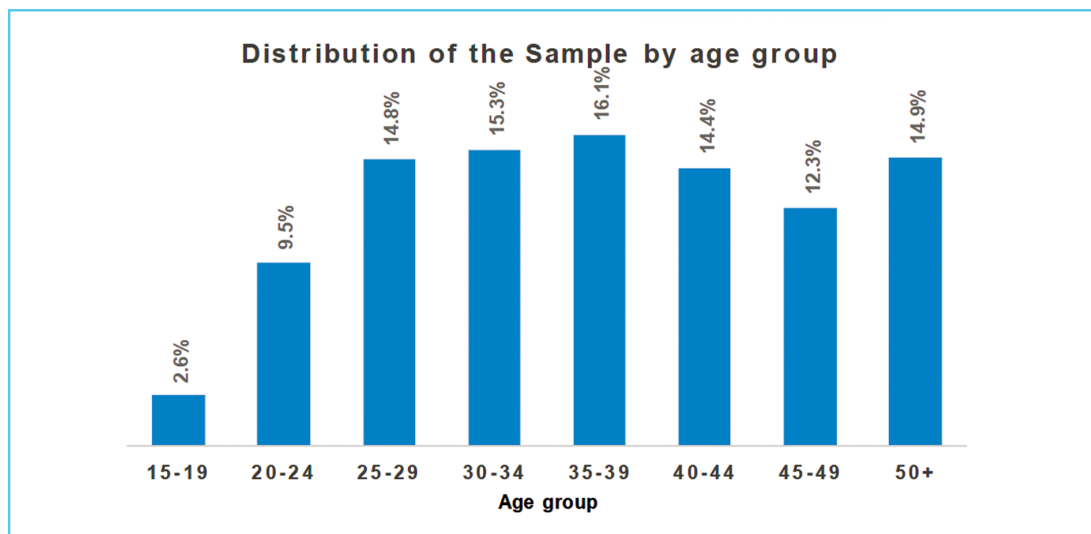


Figure 8: Distribution of sample by age group

4.1.4 Religion

In terms of religious conviction, 88% of the sample identified themselves as Christian. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) church was most represented at 37%. Figure 8 displays the sample distribution by religion and church denomination.

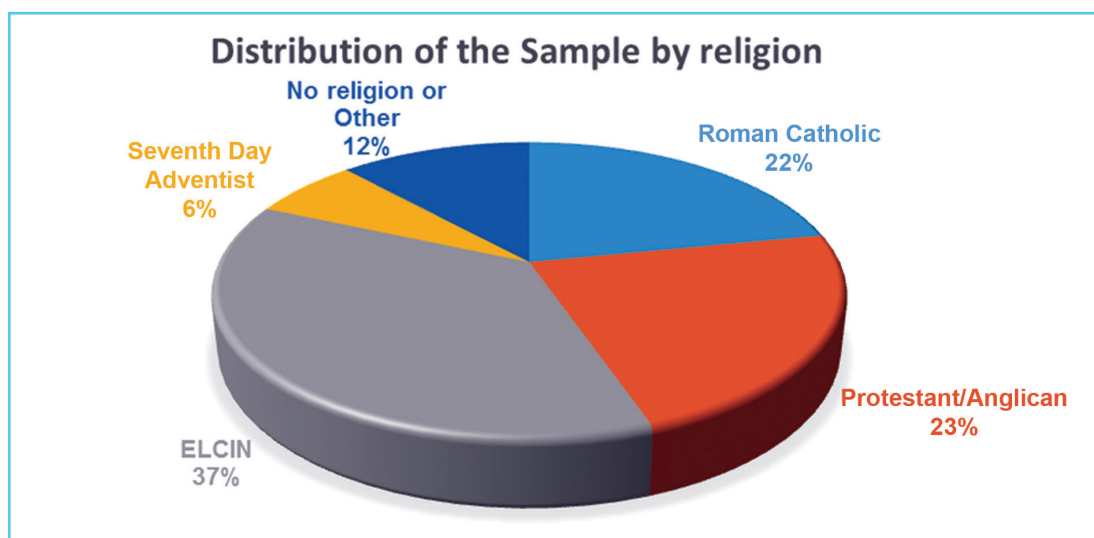


Figure 9: Distribution of sample by religion

4.1.5 Main Language Spoken at Home

Home language is a fair proxy of ethnicity and culture. Approximately 32% of the sampled women indicated Oshiwambo as the main language spoken at home while the San language was least represented at under 2%. Home language distribution between 8 broad categories is shown in figure 10.

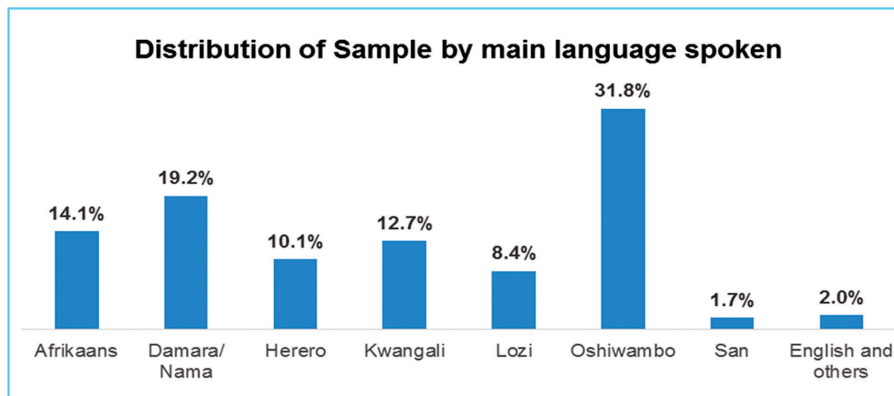


Figure 10: Main languages spoken at home

4.1.6 Literacy

Literacy levels ranged from those who could not read at all (12.5%); those who could read parts of a sentence (7.6%); those who could read the whole sentence (78.5%); and the remainder who were either visually impaired or could not be assessed due to lack of assessment material in their preferred language (1.8%).

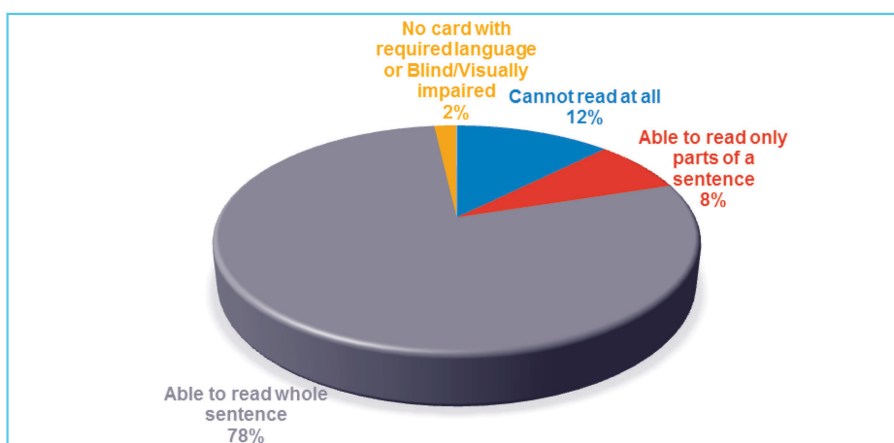


Figure 11: Literacy levels

4.1.7 Highest Educational Level

Most (61%) of the women in the sample had secondary or tertiary education. A significant proportion (11%) had no formal education (Figure 11).

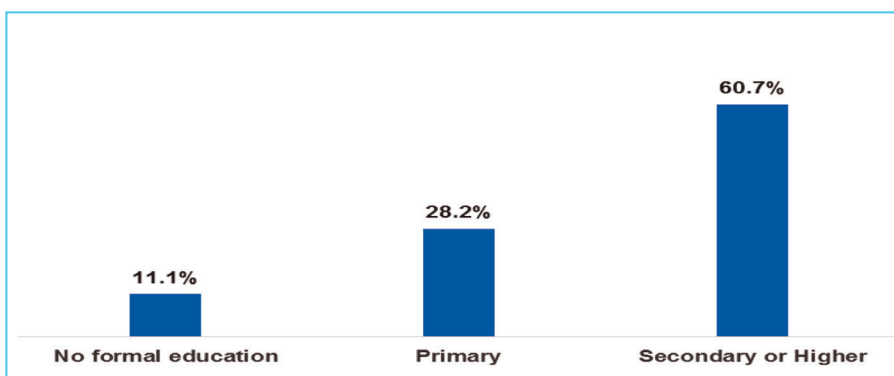


Figure 12: Highest level of education

4.1.8 Wealth

There was a near-uniform distribution across all wealth index categories from poorest to richest, as shown in figure 13 below.

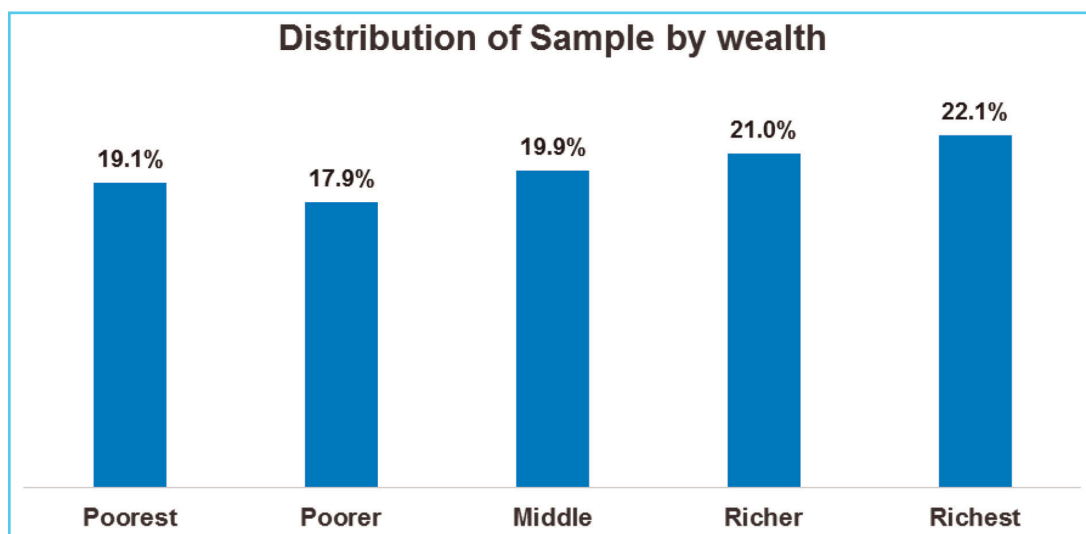


Figure 13: Wealth index

4.1.9 Age at First Sex

The majority of women (58%) had their sexual debut after the age of 18 years, while a sizeable proportion (7%) reported engaging in sex between the ages of 12-14 years and 35% reported first sex between 15 and 17 years of age.

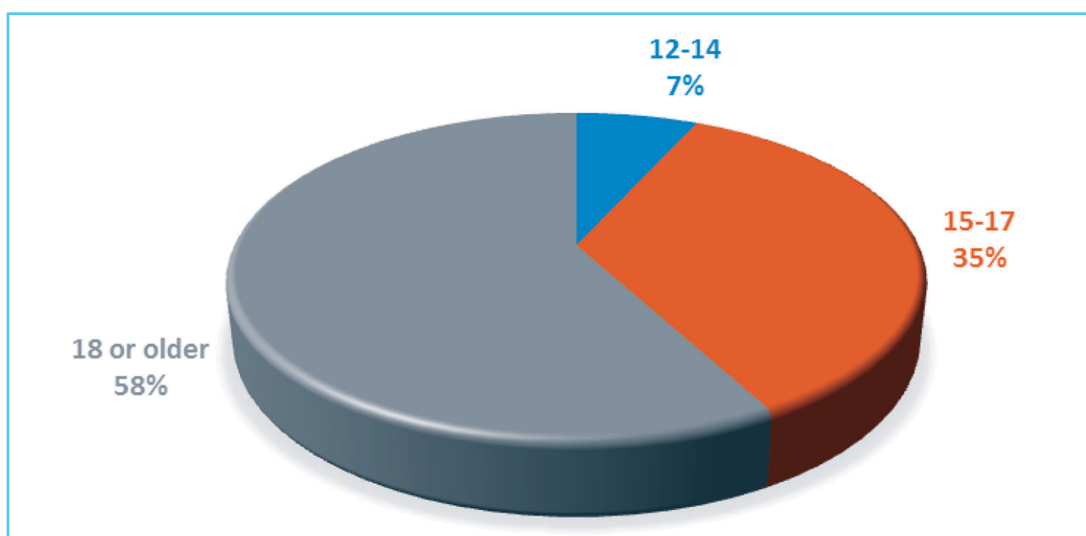


Figure 14: Age at first sex

4.2 Knowledge of and attitudes towards child marriage

This section explores the knowledge and attitudes of the Namibian community on child marriages based on the qualitative information collected through KII and FGD. It presents and discusses findings on participant understanding of what defines a child, marriage and child marriage, legal age of marriage, as well as indicators for marriage readiness. It also examines attitudes towards child marriage.

4.2.1 Meaning of a child

According to the Namibian Child Care and Protection Act No. 3 of 2015, a child is “a person who has not attained the age of 18 years”. Levels of understanding regarding the definition of a child differed between community level respondents and the district and regional officials across all regions. The majority of district level officials and higher-level respondents knew that a child is someone under the age of 18 years, as stipulated by the Namibian Law. They, however, also defined a child in terms of development, decision making and achievements.

“A child is one who can’t make decisions on his/her own” (Law Enforcement, Ohangwena).

“A child under the age of 18 who is not yet responsible and is still under the parents’ care. She/he cannot decide for herself or himself” (District level government official, Zambezi).

“To me, that is a child because that person does not have the right to make informed decisions. Until such a time when a person is able to do things on their own, that person is still a child to me” (Regional level government official, Omusati).

Some of these officials, however, did not know the definition of a child, suggesting that not all officials know or accept the legal definition of a child. This presents potential bottlenecks to the child marriage response efforts as the same officials are part of the protective services for children. “Protective services” in the CCPA 3 (1) of 2015, are defined as services aimed at providing care, protection or both care and protection for a child to safeguard his or her safety, security and well-being or improving such care, protection or both care and protection.

“In my understanding a child is a person who cannot decide on her own, who cannot think on her own because she is a minor...16 downwards” (Law Enforcement, KW).

“Anyone under 14” (Teacher, Zambezi).

On the other hand, information from both FGDs and KIs with communities shows that there is a lack of knowledge on who a child is, in terms of the Namibian Law. Most respondents across all respondent categories did not know the legal definition of a child, i.e. a person under the age of 18. They did not define a child in terms of age demarcations but rather by the stage of development, education, roles, responsibilities and economic dependency. However, when asked the age demarcations of a child, most of them indicated ages below 15 years, with a few going beyond 18 years. This knowledge gap has potential negative implications with regards to upholding children’s rights.

“...from 9 years”, “15 years down”, “from 10 years to 20 years” (Women, KW).

“...a child is from 5 years to 10” (FBO, KW).

“...under 10, under 15, under 21” (Girls FGD 10-14 years, Kunene).

“Under 15” (NGO, Ohangwena).

“16 to 17 years old” (Parent, Ohangwena).

“1 week - 6 years” (FGD Girls 10-14, Ohangwena).

“one year to 14 years”, “5 to 10 years”, “7 to 10 years”, “anyone who is in Grades 1, 2, 3 and 4” (Girls, FGD 10-14 years, Zambezi).

*Someone who “cannot be able to work for himself or have responsibilities for himself”,
“depends on somebody, who cannot be able to work for herself or whatever”,
“cannot be able to pay for himself at school or dependent on someone”,
“Under the rule of someone” (Girls FGD, 15-18 years, Kunene).*

“One that goes to school” (Boys FGD, 16-19, Ohangwena).

A substantial proportion of respondents from both the community and officials also related their answer to the onset of puberty as they linked the attainment of puberty to the end of childhood and view it as a child’s eligibility for marriage and childbearing. This poses a risk for children below the age of 18 years getting married after attaining puberty, as they would not be considered children anymore.

“When it comes to age, I think most of the people here, such as the Rukwangali culture, if a girl has started developing breasts she is said to be a woman and if you are interested in that girl, she is not a child. The boy also the same when he starts (silence), in our culture, we say if the voice developed as a big one is then a man” (Regional government official, KW).

“Say if you are matured, even a woman, they will look at the breasts, they will see that now you are fully matured. You see now. So, same applies with men. With men, they look at the beard” (District level government official, Zambezi).

It was also interesting to find that most respondents still felt people should marry when they are older than the age of 18. When asked on the appropriate age to marry, both community level and officials indicated ages that are beyond 20 years. Some also felt that the women have to be younger than the man, as a general cultural belief.

“The woman should be around 25 years old; the man should be 35 years and older. At that age they can succeed in marriage” (FBO, Kunene).

“25 years for female and 35 years for male”, “from 21 years for a lady and a man maybe 25” (Teachers, Kunene).

“21 and above” (Regional government official, Kunene).

“From 25 years old. By then, one would be matured (to get married)” (Parent, Kunene).

“Let’s say above 25 years” (NGO, KW).

“25 years”, “27 years”, “28 years” (Women, KW).

“21 years, because you have the right to your own life. You have the key and you can be able to make choices of your own life” (Teacher, Omusati).

“At least 30 years, because that person is matured”, “30-40 years, that is when a person has grown up” (Parents, Omusati).

“Legal age can be 18 but right age at marriage might be 21 years” (HCW, Ohangwena).

“From 21 to 30 years” (Girls FGD 10-14 years, Ohangwena).

“21-30 years” (Girls FGD 15-18 years, Zambezi).

The findings presented here are consistent with other studies conducted on child marriage in Africa, notably Zambia (2015) and Tanzania (2008). Similar patterns were reported, where community level people lacked knowledge on what defines the term ‘child’ and based their responses on the stage of development, education, roles, responsibilities and economic dependency. This may have a negative bearing on upholding children’s rights and preventing child marriage.

4.2.2 Marriage and marriage practices

Marriage is defined as an act, ceremony or process by which the legal relationship of husband and wife is constituted/established by civil, religious or other means as recognized by the laws of a country (United Nations, 2001, p 12). The Legal Assistance Centre of Namibia (2016) defines a civil marriage as “a marriage that is solemnized by a marriage officer – which could be a magistrate or a religious leader who has been certified as a marriage officer by the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration”. KIs and respondents from FGDs were asked to define marriage in general and the main types of marriages that were common in their communities. Most considered marriage to be a union and commitment between a man and a woman.

“There is a traditional marriage, first thing I think it is an agreement between two of you, you agree that you are going to stay together and you go to parent and pay lobola” (HCW, Omusati).

“Marriage is when two grown up people given right by their parents to stay together” (Parent, Omusati).

“Marriage is when the person is leaving the parents’ house as per their agreement. That is when we go to a father-in-law’s house to propose a wife. Before we leave her house with her, we slaughter and eat meat. When she comes to our house, we also slaughter and celebrate again” (Traditional Authority, Omusati).

“Real marriage that we know whereby the parents are involved in giving their child’s hand in marriage” (Traditional Authority, Ohangwena).

“Marriage is when a woman and a man stay together and it is known by the parents” (Women, KW).

“...when it is official through the blessing of both families”,

“Marriage is when two people get involved with each other, and they can do everything by themselves and they live together, and they have to follow the steps of being in a marriage”,

“My own description of marriage is when a male and a female, when they get married is like they pay Lobola to the parents and then those two are married, they have children together and they stay together” (Girls FGD 15-18, Zambezi).

The forms of marriage that were identified are: customary marriage, church marriage, civil marriage and cohabitation. However, the most common forms of marriage that are happening in the five study regions are traditional marriage and cohabitation. In all regions, respondents explained that most people are just staying together as husband and wife without payment of lobola or following any traditional rites. This is consistent with NDHS findings where the percentage of married men and women fell from 19.9% in 2006/7 to 17.9% in 2013 (NDHS, 2006/7; NDHS, 2013).

“Like in Zambezi region, you find that most of our people like cohabiting, they like staying together, living together, not necessarily getting married. You find that they believe more of customary laws, hmmm they get married through the Khuta [Traditional Court] but 90% of the marriages here you find that it is just cohabiting” (Regional level government official, Zambezi).

“It is just staying together, it happens in the villages; the traditional ones are also many” (Teacher, Zambezi).

“They are just cohabitating and just staying without any legal or civil marriage or church marriage. Just like that” (Regional level government official, KW).

“The common one that I have seen is cohabitation, where people just meet and they do not go to the traditional authority to make things formal or they do not make it to church or they do not take it to the magistrate; they just meet together, meet families and that is it. They just stay together for a long time, so cohabitation is the one which is commonly practiced here” (HCW, KW).

“Yes! Mostly in grade 6, there are a lot of kids that are involved in cohabitation. Sometimes they come from school and go drop their uniforms at the parents’ house and go to their boyfriends. They come back tomorrow early in the morning to bath and take their bags to come to school” (Teacher, Omusati).

“There is traditional marriage, but 90 percent of the time here there is no marriage. They don’t value those things of marriage, they just stay together” (HCW, Omusati).

“The most common forms of marriage are traditional and cohabitating” (Girls FGD 15-18, Omusati).

“Cohabitation in ‘kambashus’ (informal dwelling)” (Regional level government official, Ohangwena).

Although cohabitation is common and considered as marriage in Namibia (NDHS, 2013), a few respondents indicated that some community members do not consider it as such.

“There are no marriages but what is here is just cohabitation” (Parent, Omusati).

“Sometimes you will find that the elders will not appreciate such kinds of marriages. To them, it is like a taboo. Like, you cannot stay with a girl if you have not paid lobola” (Headman, Omusati).

Customary marriages were found to take different forms in the studied regions. In Kunene, most of the respondents described traditional marriages in which parents choose a man for their young daughters. Ideally, the girl remains with her parents until she “comes of age”, that is, mature enough in the eyes of the parents; but there are instances where the groom demands his bride earlier.

The girl is not involved in choosing her groom. This is despite the fact that Article 14(2) of the Namibian Constitution states that “marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses”. Section 226 of the CCPA also prohibits child marriages in traditional unions, customary and civil marriages, and makes the practice a criminal offense.

“When a person is a baby, her parents choose a man for her already. When she grows up, she already gets married, but she was given the man by her parents” (FGD 15-18 girls, Kunene).

“Among the Himbas (a local tribe), it happens when maybe a child is six and they say this is going to be your wife or husband and then the future wife or husband start giving goods so that when the child is grown, s/he will know that I am going to be married to this man or woman” (Girls FGD 15-18 years, Kunene).

“If you were given to your husband while you are young, the husband has the right to come and say I want my child. He doesn’t care, even though you are 16 years, as long as you belong to him” (Girls FGD 15-18 years, Kunene).

In the Kavango, Ohangwena and Zambezi regions, and most parts of Omusati, traditional marriage involves courtship between a man and a woman, after which the man pays lobola, including cows, to his in-laws. Emphasis is placed on parental blessing and consent.

4.2.3 Child marriage

In Southern Africa, most countries set the minimum age of marriage at 18 years. These include Angola, Botswana, DRC, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Swaziland. In Namibia, the minimum age in terms of the Marriage Act, 1961 (Act No. 25 of 1961) is 21, a person who is below the age of 21 years, needs to obtain consent from parents/guardians before marriage, but not from the government. Article 14(2) of the Namibian Constitution also states, “Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses”.

Child marriage refers to any marriage, whether legal or customary, that occurs when one or both of the spouses are below the age of 18 years (CCPA, 2015, Section 1; UNFPA, 2012). Our qualitative findings suggest limited awareness of these laws. While the CCPA has already addressed these challenges, further effort is underway, for example, the Law Reform and Development Commission Proposal on recognition of customary marriages, stipulates the minimum age of a customary marriage to be 18 years.

All respondents were asked to define child marriage. Those whose definition included an age reference stated ages between 18-21 years as thresholds.

“...sometimes an elderly person will marry somebody who is below 18 years of age. That small boy or small girl who is married to an older person it is referred that to as child marriage” (Teacher, Zambezi).

“When a child, whether a boy or girl, who is getting married under the age of 18” (Regional level government official, Omusati).

“Marriage below 21 for males and 18 for females” (HCW, Kunene).

“Married at age 12-15 years” (Girls FGD 10-14 years, Kunene).

“Child marriage is marriage under the age of 18” (Traditional Authority, KW).

Other respondents especially children and community level respondents answered in terms of development.

“It’s when a young person gets married” (Girls FGD, 10-14 years, KW).

“A young lady married by a big man” (Boys FGD 16-19 years, Kunene).

“When a child is married” (Boys FGD 16-19 years, Ohangwena).

“When someone is not ready to become a wife or a husband (is married), so it becomes child marriage” (NGO, KW).

“When someone gets married and is still underage, then they call it child marriage. That person is not maturely developed, be it immune system, physically, in their social life; so that person is still a child” (HCW, KW).

“When a child is with an adult person getting married or they stay together” (Teacher, Omusati).

“A person gets married to her husband, but it happens while she is small” (Parent, Omusati).

“A young person who is married” (Parent, Ohangwena).

The general outlook from the responses shows that both community and higher-level officials do not know what child marriage is when it comes to the age demarcations of marriage. This has negative implications for programming and program implementation.

4.2.4 Indicators of readiness for marriage

When asked about the appropriate age for marriage, many respondents felt it was acceptable for a person to choose to get married after their 18th birthday. However, the majority thought 21 years and older is best. Others also had the opinion that the man has to be older than the woman and so should only get married from 25 years. The reasons given to why a person can marry after a certain age (mostly given as 21) included the following:

- They are able to take care of themselves.
- They can manage the household work and work in the field.
- They can make decisions and choices on their own.
- They know what is good and what is bad.
- They have finished basic school.
- The body is mature enough to handle sexual activities and reproduction.
- They can earn a living.

4.3 Trends and patterns of child marriage (extent/prevalence, practices and causes)

4.3.1 Prevalence of child marriage

Based on the Namibia Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) of 2013, the men's data comprised 4,481 men, and of these, 1,840 (41%) were ever married and 4.1% were married as children. The women's data comprised 10,018 women, 4,685 (47%) of which had ever married and 18.4% were married below the age of 18 years. The problem of child marriage is much greater among girls when compared to boys and, therefore, this study, like most other child marriage studies, focused on girls. Figure 14 shows the prevalence of child marriage in the NDHS female sample.

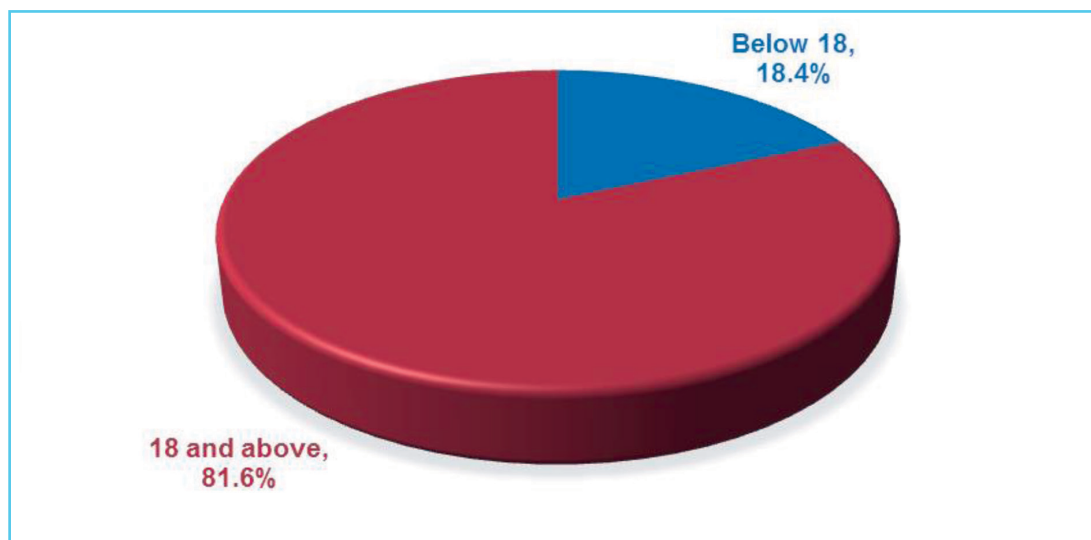


Figure 15: Prevalence of child marriage

The prevalence of child marriage for girls in Namibia is lower than that for Malawi (50%); Mozambique (48%); Kenya (26%); Uganda (40%); and Ethiopia (41%) (UNICEF, State of the World's Children, 2015; Maswikwa, Richter, Kaufman & Nandi, 2015). While Namibia's prevalence is lower than these countries, 18.4% remains significant and unacceptable. In line with NDHS 2013 results, qualitative findings from interviews conducted during this study indicated that child marriage/union mostly happens to girls. Study respondents reported that while the practice may also be seen in boys, girls are disproportionately involved.

“You can get even a 15-year-old woman or child who is married and I have noticed that in this area it is not like [...] It is not only females who are minors but even the men sometimes are also minors” (Law enforcement, KW).

“Poverty. The other thing is that girls like things that they cannot afford so they involve themselves with older men who can buy for them” (Traditional Authority, KW).

“Forced by parents for monetary gains, poverty” (Girls FGD 10-14 years, Kunene).

““The girls used to go out, whenever the boy used to call her, until she gets pregnant and she decides to go stay with the boy. That is how the marriage starts” (FBO, KW).

““I once told her that I do not want a person getting married at that age. She decided to do things her own way” (Parents, Omusati).

4.3.2 Distribution of Child marriage by region

Figure 15 shows region specific child marriage prevalence based on the NDHS (2013). Child marriage rates were highest in the former Kavango region (East and West combined) (40%). Other regions with considerably high prevalence were Kunene (24.0%), Zambezi (24%), Omaheke (23%) and Otjozondjupa (23%). The Oshana region scored lowest at 7%.

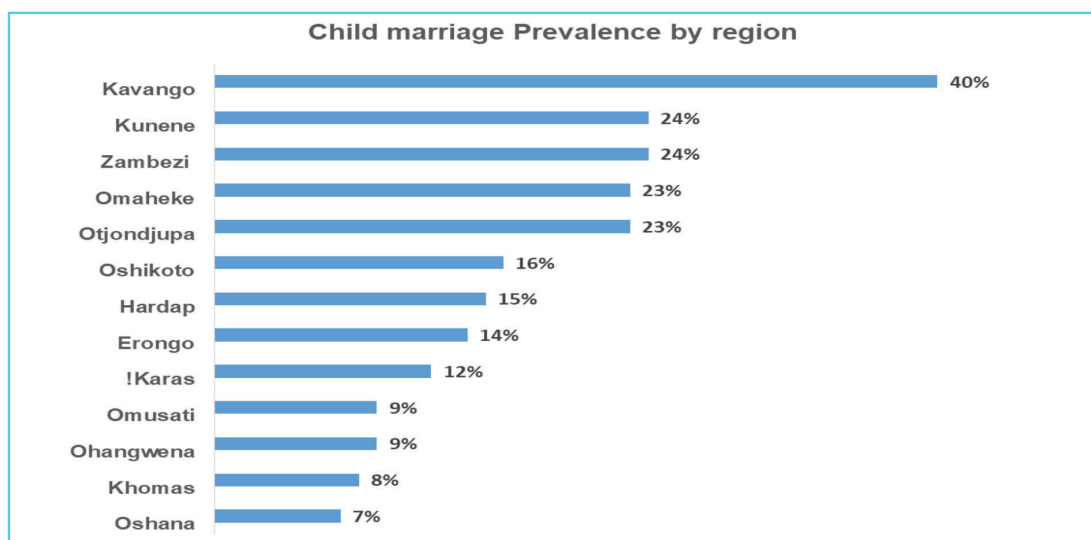


Figure 16: Child marriage prevalence by region (NDHS, 2013)

The quantitative findings displayed above are in agreement with qualitative findings gathered during this study. Respondents in Kavango West, Zambezi, and Kunene reported child marriage as common in their communities.

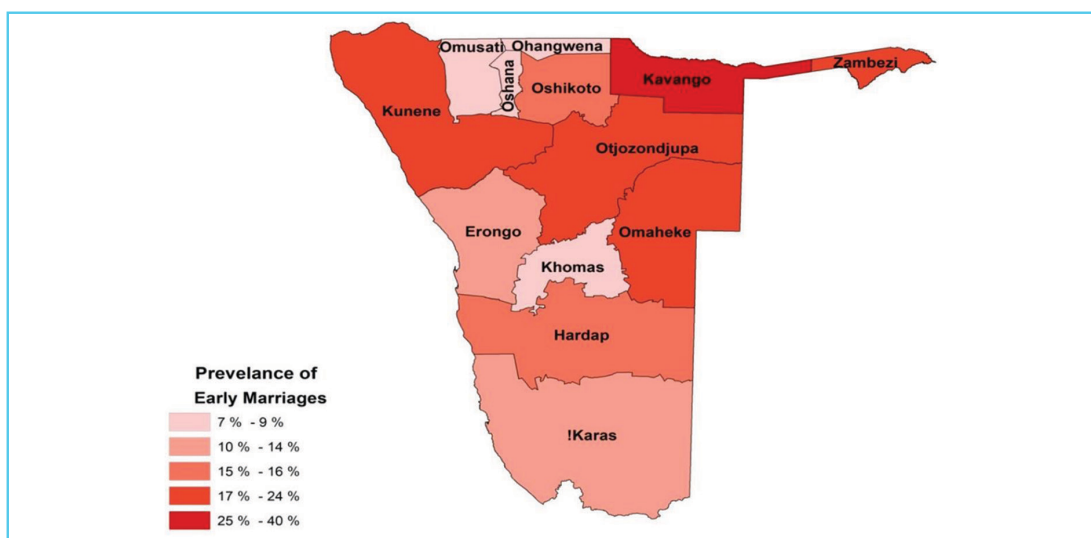


Figure 17: Child marriage prevalence map in Namibia

“It is common. It is a daily thing or it is in each and every house, where you can go, you will get a child who has a child or who is living with a man” (KW, Law enforcement).

“It is very common, but we don’t have statistics” (Regional level government official, KW).

“More in villages and not in towns” (Teacher, Kunene).

“...among Himbas” (Regional level government official, Kunene).

“...very common in Epupa” (Constituency level government official, Kunene).

“It is happening but it’s not being reported” (Regional level government official, Zambezi).

“Fairly common” (Girls FGD 10-14 years, Zambezi).

The picture from Omusati and Ohangwena was different and again in line with quantitative data presented in figure 15 above. Respondents reported child marriage as uncommon. While Omusati respondents indicated low incidence of child marriage (except for the Ovahimba tribe/community in the northern parts of the region), they reported a high frequency of teenage pregnancies.

“A lot of pregnancies, yes, but not child marriages” (HCW, Omusati).

“Child marriage is very low here” (NGO, Omusati).

“Child marriage is not common” (FBO, Ohangwena).

“It is rare”, “It is not common” (Teachers, Ohangwena).

4.3.3 Age at first cohabitation by Urban or Rural Residence

Child marriage was significantly associated with the woman’s place of residence ($p < 0.001$). The percentage of women who married early was higher in rural areas (22%) compared to urban areas (15%). This is consistent with findings presented by UNICEF (2015) stating that in Africa, child marriages are more common in poor rural communities than in urban settings.

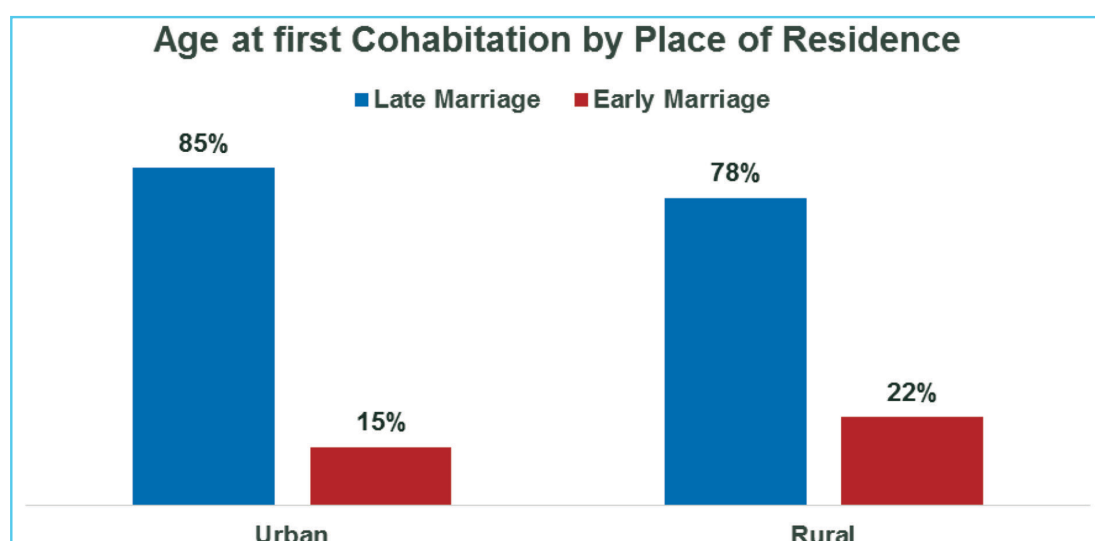


Figure 18: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by place of residence

From the qualitative findings, Kavango West respondents alluded to a lack of differences between urban and rural areas as the region is mostly rural with no major urban centres. Zambezi and Omusati region respondents, on the other hand, gave divergent views with some saying child marriage was more common in rural areas while others felt it is more common in urban settings. Qualitative findings in these three regions seem to suggest no clear differences between urban and rural settings with regards to child marriage.

4.3.4 Age at first marriage/cohabitation

From the analysis of the NDHS 2013 data, 81.6% of ever-married women get into marriage or start cohabiting after the age of 18 years. Of the 18.4% marrying before the age of 18 years, only 4.1% of them got married between the ages of 10 and 14 years, but as much as 14.3% got married for the first time between 15 and 17 years of age. This is the age in which they are probably getting pregnant and then deciding to cohabit, or marry customarily, since marriage (as stipulated by the law) is illegal at this age. Marriage/cohabitation debut plateaus between 18 and 21 years and declines steadily thereafter, with people continuing to enter marriage/cohabitation for the first time beyond the age of 50 years.

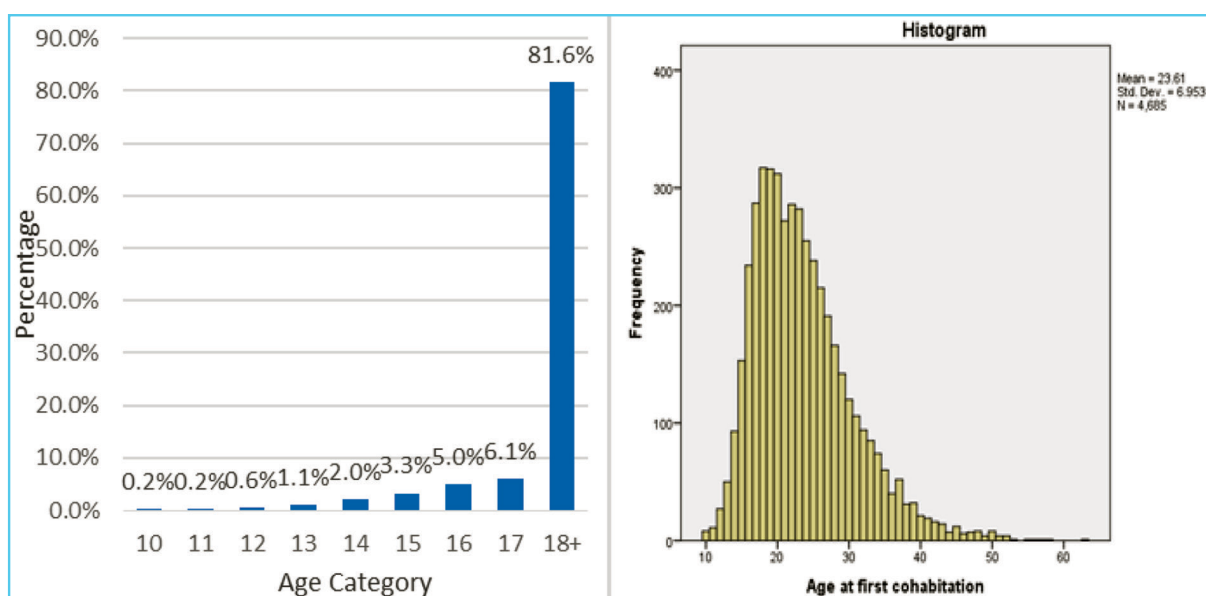


Figure 19: Age at first marriage/cohabitation

Findings from interviews seem to confirm presented quantitative data as informants stated that children are married from the age of 15-16 years but sometimes as low as 12 years.

“Now the age is just when they reach puberty. Because I can reflect back to a case where a 12-year-old was already staying with the boyfriend. The boyfriend came to stay in their house at one village. So, it can be as early as 12 years” (HCW, KW).

“You can get even a 15-year-old girl who is married, and I have noticed that in this area” (Law Enforcement, KW).

“Yes! Mostly in grade 6 there are a lot of kids that are involved in cohabitation....” (Teacher, Omusati).

4.4 Reasons for and drivers of child marriage

From the NDHS report, results of tests to establish whether socio-demographic variables were significantly associated with early cohabitation/marriage are presented in Annex 5. The results suggest a significant association between early cohabitation/marriage with wealth index, region/place of residence, early sexual debut and teenage pregnancies and religion. From the qualitative findings, poverty and teenage pregnancies were also confirmed, with additional ones, such as alcohol abuse, lack of educational opportunities and cultural practices also being highlighted. These drivers are presented below.

4.4.1 Poverty

Namibia has high levels of unemployment (34% according to CBS, 2016), especially in the rural areas, where most people depend on casual work or peasant farming. This translates to high levels of poverty (26,9%), with a huge gap between the rich and the poor (MPESW, 2016). From the NDHS 2013, differences in child marriage by wealth index were significant ($p < 0.001$). As can be seen in Figure 19 below, child marriage prevalence reduces across the wealth spectrum from 28% among the poorest to 8% among the richest wealth quintile, suggesting poverty as a driver of child marriage.

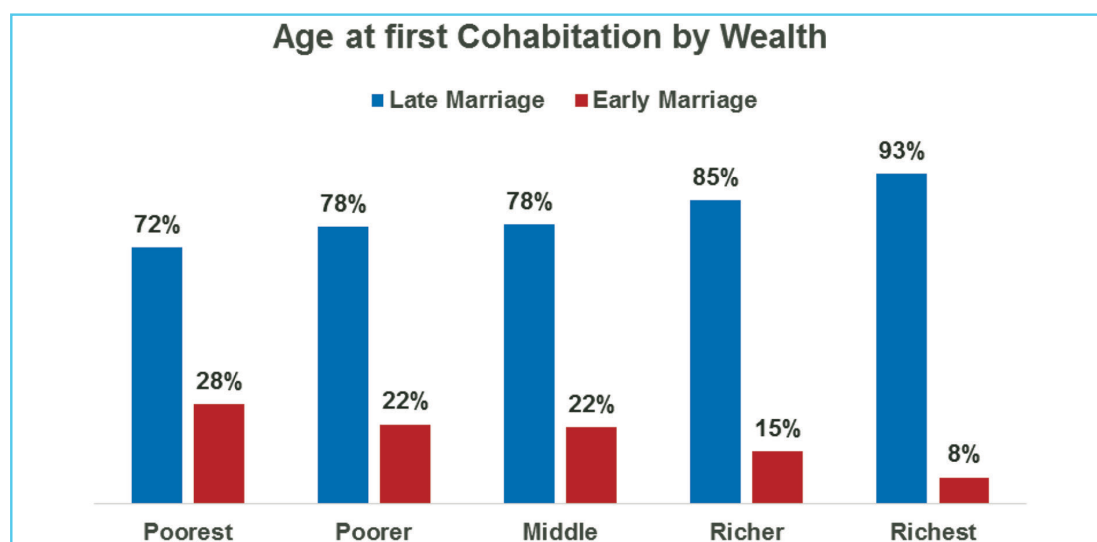


Figure 20: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by wealth index

Qualitative data from all studied regions ranks poverty as the main driver of child marriages, especially for the girl child, and this is in line with findings in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Pazvakawabwa & Wanjau, 2015). However, in Asia, social norms are reported to play the biggest role in driving child marriage (Mann, Quigley & Fischer, 2015; Chowdhury, 2004; The Refugee Commission, 2016).

According to respondents, the majority of cases are taking place in poor families with orphans and other vulnerable children. The ultimate hope is a better livelihood for the child and her family. While parents appear to be the biggest influencers in getting their children married for financial and economic reasons, peer pressure at times plays a part. Young girls may envy friends who enter economically stable marriages. However, peer pressure may not be due to poverty, as studies from elsewhere have shown peer influence, regardless of wealth background, being the major cause of generation gap relationships where yearning for material things is a determinant. Below are some of the responses from respondents;

“Apart from that it might be also be this thing of being vulnerable or orphaned. It might be they do not have anyone to look after them so what that person needs to do is to engage to someone who might be able to look after her or look after him” (HCW, KW).

“Sometimes it could be poverty. Because we are struggling to survive, and there’s this one who brings bread every day, and he wants also to marry, you give in just for your survival” (Regional level government official, Omusati).

“What causes child marriages, especially for young ones, is poverty. The girls, especially when a girl realise that she does not have anything, she will force herself to get married so that maybe she can get resources from the husband, especially working husbands” (Teacher, Zambezi)

“It has a lot of factors, but the first one is poverty; the first one is poverty. Let me say, for example, if I, I’m very poor and a rich man wants to marry my child, we know that maybe it is our getaway out of poverty. The person will support us in future...” (HCW, Ohangwena).

“The parents are the ones that allows it and you can’t eliminate that practice within the community” (Women, Kunene).

“Poverty and being an orphan”, (Girls FGD 15-18 years, Kunene).

“For financial benefit” (Girls FGD 10-14, Omusati).

“Children sometimes go after wealth” (Boys FGD 16-19 years, Ohangwena).

“...just copying others” (NGO, KW).

“Because some girls are coming from poor family”,

“Some they get married because of hunger”,

“Most of the parents, they are forcing their children to get married for them to get some money”,

“Maybe if they see others is wearing something nice and then she can’t afford to buy and then the girl will just marry so that that boy can give her money to buy that one that she saw from someone” (Girls FGD 15-18 years, Zambezi).

4.4.2 Customary and religious beliefs

A good proxy for culture and traditional beliefs is region/place of residence. There were significant regional differences in child marriage by region (Figure 15). Regions with notably high occurrences of child marriage include Kavango, Zambezi, Kunene, Omaheke, and Otjozondjupa, while Oshana, Khomas, Ohangwena and Omusati scored lowest.

Another proxy indicator for cultural factors that had significant association with child marriage is main language spoken at home (Figure 20). There was a significant association between child marriage and the main language spoken at home by the woman ($p < 0.001$), which corresponded with regions where the languages are spoken. Child marriage was relatively higher among individuals with the following home languages; Kwangali (39%); San (29%); Lozi (24%), Damara/Nama (23%); and Herero (20%). From both proxies, it would appear that culture is playing a central role in child marriage.

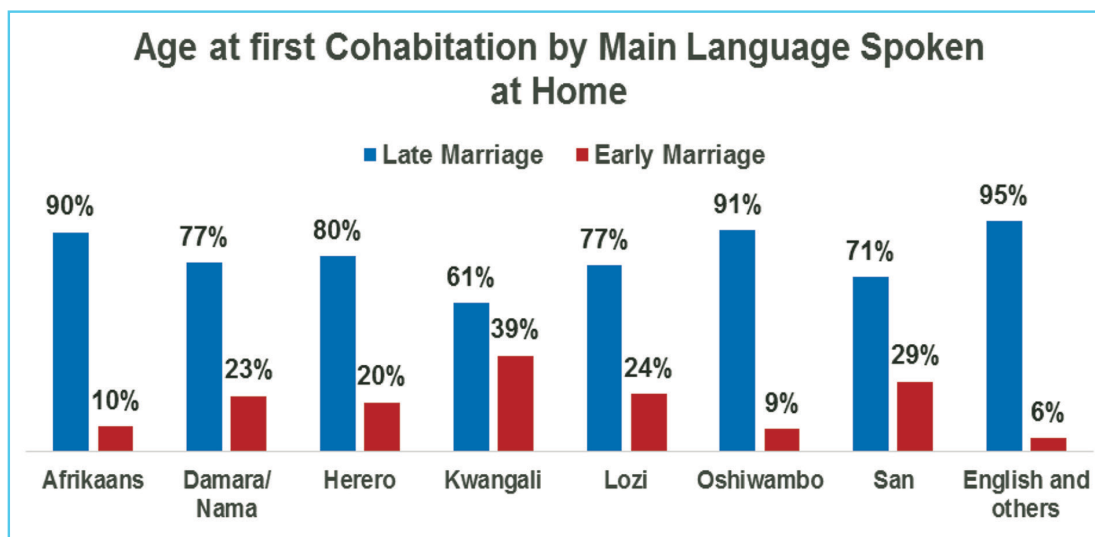


Figure 21: Age at first cohabitation by main language spoken at home

Interviews conducted suggest child marriage is deeply rooted in some Namibian cultures. In Kavango West, in addition to poverty, a traditional norm is once a child has reached puberty, they are regarded as an adult and therefore can be married and have children. Post-pubertal children are viewed as adults who can get married and have children, just like their parents before them.

“The first one should be culture, because back in the day, parents were getting married at a very young age. You would see that maybe at the age of 16 is when they got their first born. So, that culture it is still present now and that should be one aspect where parents see it as a normal thing for one to get married, even when they are still young. So, it is culture” (HCW, KW).

“To me I don’t think there is a proper reason apart from they are just practicing as a traditional thing, but I cannot really say if there is a reason. For me, I don’t know, but to me, it’s just a traditional thing that has been there for a long time” (HCW, Kunene).

“Tradition, we don’t keep our children unmarried, we don’t keep our children without ondjova (equivalent to western conventional honeymoon) even if she doesn’t get married, even if man don’t marry her we have to take off ondjova from her because she will go give birth one day” (Traditional Authority, Kunene).

“Sometimes, tradition rules, you know when you are growing you are going to marry your tjiramue (cousin’s daughter) (Men’s FGD, Kunene).

“Culture, our elders know that, if you are matured, even a woman, they will look at the breasts, they will see that now you are fully matured...” (Constituency level government official, Zambezi).

The church denomination of the woman was significantly associated with child marriage ($p < 0.001$). This appears to be consistent with practices by some religious sects in Zimbabwe where young girls are married off to older polygamous men (Plan International, 2012). The churches with high child marriage rates in Namibia were the Roman Catholic Church (24%) and Seventh Day Adventist Church (23%). Unlike the Zimbabwe example, neither of the two churches are known to promote child marriage. The relatively higher percentages of early cohabitation among Adventists could be explained by the fact that most Adventists are concentrated in the Zambezi and Kavango regions, where other indicators, like the culture of child marriage, are also found.

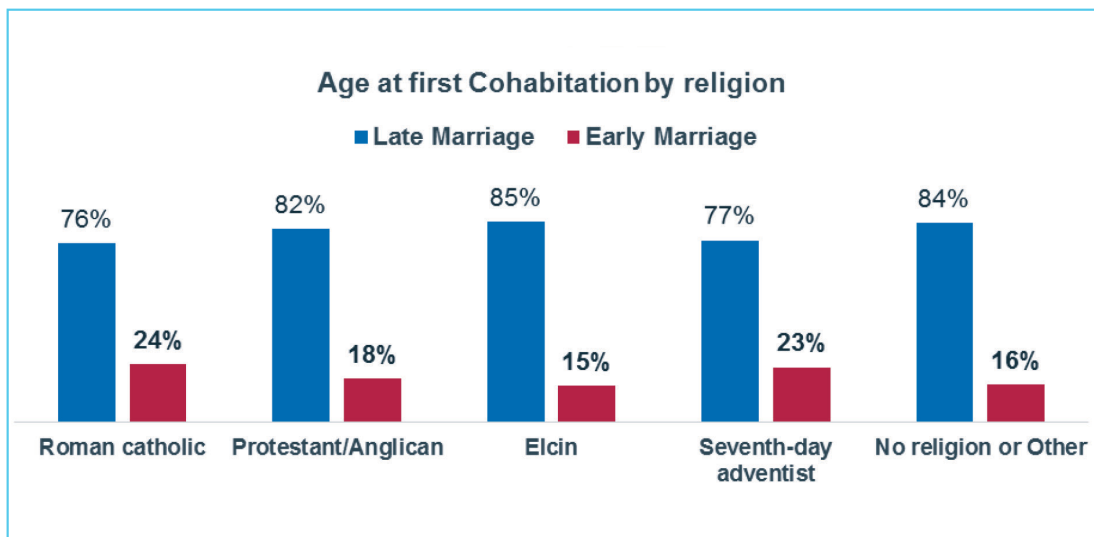


Figure 22: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by religion

Qualitative data from this study did not point to any links between church denomination and the probability of marrying early.

4.4.3 Early sexual debut and teenage pregnancies

In Namibia, sex begins at early ages. This makes girls susceptible to child marriage if they fall pregnant (Luseno et al., 2016; Montazeri, 2016). From the NDHS, an estimated 7% of women have their first sex between 12 and 14 years of age, 35% between 15 and 17 years of age, and 58% commence sex at 18 years or above

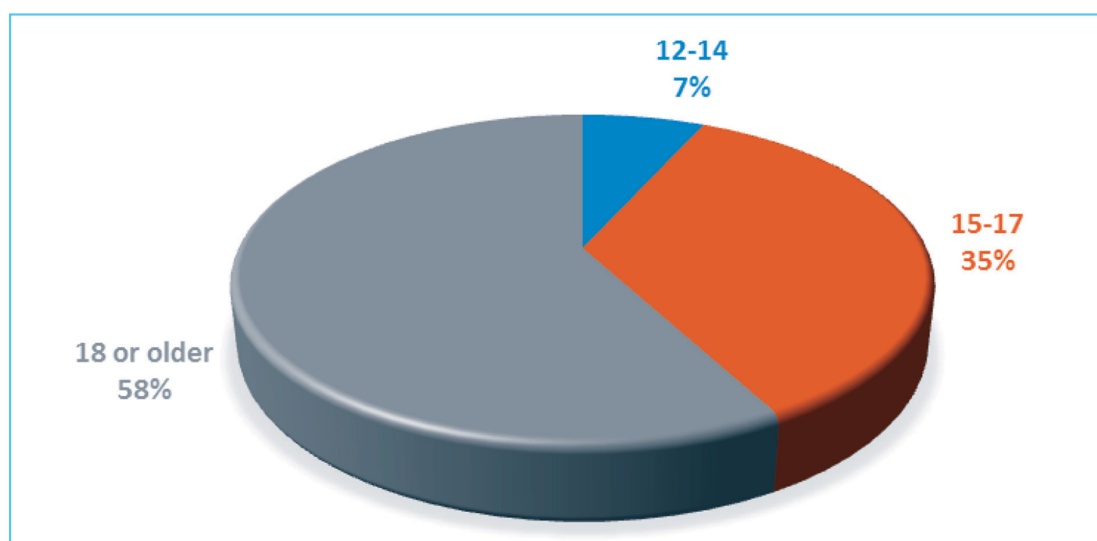


Figure 23: Age at sex debut

Pregnancy is one of the main reasons mentioned from the respondents as to why children are married early, particularly in the Kavango West Region. Teenage pregnancy (and poverty) seem to emerge as the main drivers of child marriage, coupled with social norms. Falling pregnant is not usually a reason for marriage if the belief is that a child cannot be married. However, if culture dictates that once you are pregnant you have to get married, then it becomes more of a norms issue.

“So, teenage pregnancy will also contribute in a way because this girl gets pregnant and the family members would say we are not going to take care of you now and they would say you are now an adult, so you need to go to your husband’s house. So in that way, they are already initiating the marriage between the two. These are the things that seems to be playing a big role in child marriage” (HCW, KW).

“Pregnancy – the girls used to go out, whenever the boy used to call her until she gets pregnant and she decides to go stay with the boy; that is how the marriage starts” (FBO, KW).

“...pregnancy also leads to child marriages” (Law Enforcement, KW).

“I did not know that I was going to get married. I found myself pregnant, so I just had to leave school” (Women, KW).

“Cohabitation is common, but after being pregnant, the man who is responsible will disappear” (Parent, KW).

4.4.4 Alcohol abuse

Alcohol abuse, though not commonly mentioned, was highlighted in some instances as a driving factor to teenage pregnancy and subsequently child marriage. Children who drink may end up having sex under the influence of alcohol and getting pregnant. This may lead to child marriage, as was highlighted by a few respondents. The Liquor Act No. 6 of 1998 prohibits sale of alcohol to children under the age of 18 years. Although this is the case, a study on alcohol use in Namibia by SIAPAC (2002) concluded that children under the age of 18 had easy access to alcohol and communities had become more tolerant of underage drinking.

“...and then [ja] nowadays with alcoholism its higher because they meet somewhere there at shebeens” (Regional level government official, KW).

“...and the other thing is alcohol abuse. I do not know. Maybe parents are failing to control their kids but kids, they are drinking more than the parents. It is also the effect. And when they go to bars they will meet with men and when they meet with men, they fall pregnant and when they fall pregnant, to them it is marriage because I am pregnant” (Law Enforcement, KW).

“Neglect by alcoholic parents” (Girls FGD 10-14 years, Kunene).

“...alcohol abuse” (Traditional Authorities, Omusati and Zambezi).

4.4.5 Lack of educational opportunities

Another problem raised as driving child marriages is lack of schools offering higher grades in some hard to reach areas. Children end up dropping out of school because of long travel distances. This was highlighted in Kavango West, Omusati and Ohangwena regions. Also fuelled by poverty, some families withdraw their children, especially girls, from school when they cannot afford to send them to faraway schools that offer upper grades. Uneducated girls are at a higher risk of child marriage than those with secondary or higher education.

“Like in the inlands, at least if the school will end up maybe at grade 7, at least it will keep them busy to go to school because some villages, there is only up to grade 5. Then when I finish my grade 5, maybe the next school where I can get grade 6 it is far from my village. Then I can just stay at home and get married and help my parents in the field. Especially deep in the bush, it is rare for us to get a school which end up to grade 12. It is rare for us to get hostels in the schools and the distances from schools is a bit far from one another and there is no hostel. I cannot go and stay at someone’s house and I cannot go each and every morning. I better stay at home and get married and help my parents” (Law Enforcement, KW).

“One might just decide to drop out of school or these kids they are staying in the inland and come here where there are schools to continue let me say upper primary schools. So they get here and the life is not very well like they are not being treated well at their house where they are staying. So, some of them might end up being married because there is no parental control... So, in that circumstances one might just end up getting someone to take care of them” (HCW, KW).

“Until recently, this school was just up to grade 4, now it’s up to grade 7. Some kids were taken to other schools, the nearby school, but they come back to their boyfriends and they end up in grade 9. Thus why they are introducing the hostel, so that we accommodate grade one to ten” (Teacher, Omusati).

“Build school hostels for children that are coming from remote areas” (Girls FGD, 10-14 years, Omusati).

4.5 Cultural practices and beliefs that have implications for child marriages

Cultural practices reflect values and beliefs held by a group of people or a community. This study explored different cultural practices that have influence on child marriages in the six study regions. The Namibian Constitution protects the equal rights and dignity of all our citizens, and outlaws torture and cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment. However, it was found in the study that there are still cultural or traditional practices taking place that violate the rights of children and drive child marriage. Arranged marriages of children under the age of 18, and even women without their free and full consent, is prohibited in the Namibian constitution.

Children have a right to be protected from bodily harm and sexual violence. However, these rights are violated when they are subjected to some of the initiations into womanhood. As cited for Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi, Namibia also has harmful cultural practices that directly or indirectly encourage sex with children and child marriage. These include holy fire, Olufuko, Tjiramue, arranged marriages, and traditional dances to celebrate womanhood, such as !hai-om #ui, Sikenge and eengoma.

Holy Fire

Holy fire is a traditional practice common among the Ovaherero, which includes the Ovahimba and Ovambanderu clans. Those who practice it consider it a place of blessing and communicating with ancestors. It is also a place where marriages are blessed and guidance given to new weds on how to conduct themselves in the marriage. Peculiar to this Holy Fire belief is the importance given to it and the fact that major family issues are resolved there. During traditional ceremonies done at the holy fire, married men are given more respect compared to unmarried men. Married men are given prominence and stature and this encourages young men to strive towards the same status through marriages, as men feel the need to achieve higher social standing.

“In our culture, when you turn 15, all the girls are called at the holy fire, the men will stay in the house wearing traditional dress. They go to the holy fire; the father will talk to them about the importance of marriage. Men in the house come out walking on their knees; they go under the tree and eat meat” (Girls FGD 14-18, Kunene).

“It is where the people, the headman of the home, they used to go and sit there and tell you that you are the man and need to marry a woman, so that they can give you rules and everything there. It is where you get the last chance to marry” (Boys FGD 16-19, Kunene).

Celebrating womanhood

Among the Ovaherero, Ovahimba and Damara traditions, it is a common practice to celebrate womanhood when a girl child experiences her first menstruation. During this ceremony, a girl stays in the house for a couple of days ranging from three to five days. A goat or a sheep is slaughtered.

This practice is done for all girls, regardless of their age, and it is a sign that the girl is now mature and ready for marriage. Among the Ovahimba tribe, this ceremony gives men an opportunity to claim their wives who were allocated to them when they were much younger. Although the Damara tribes also participate in similar celebrations, it rarely leads to child marriages as church marriages are more common in their communities.

“When a child is menstruating, they are celebrating that a girl has moved from childhood to womanhood and she is now mature. (Regional government official, Kunene).

“They throw a party. Sometimes, when a girl gets her menstruation, they know that you are growing up and responsible. Sometimes they can slaughter a goat for you that shows you are now mature enough to do what you want. The parents do not tell you about it, they make it as a surprise. The party can continue for five days; in those five days you just stay in the house.” (Girls FGD 15-18 years, Kunene).

Arranged marriages

An arranged marriage is when two families negotiate for marriage for their children with or without their consent. This practice is common among the Ovahimba and Ovaherero communities. A girl child as young as six years can have a future husband who is much older arranged for her. However, the young married girl will stay with her parents until she reaches puberty. When a young girl experiences her first menstruation and a womanhood ceremony is done for her, she may then be handed over to her husband. At this point, the girl may be as young as thirteen years. Here is what respondents from Kunene had to say:

“...well especially among the Himbas, the tradition was an old man like gets married to a 14-year-old is still taking part in this northern part of the region. When a child is born, then the man says this is going to be my wife, so by the time this young girl reaches the age of 14 and she is still in school he takes her into matrimony” (Regional government official, Kunene).

“The Himbas give their younger children to get married to old men. For them, if the child does not agree to get married, they disrespect the parent. You cannot say no” (Girls FGD 14-18 years, Kunene).

A MARRIED GIRL WHO IS STILL UNDER THE AGE OF 18 – OMUSATI REGION

I am girl (an Oshihimba) who was married at 11 years to a much older man (age not known). We are married traditionally and the marriage is not registered. I was forced by parents when I was in grade 1. Now I am in grade 2 and still in school, it is that today there is no school. We are married to each other but do not yet sleep or stay together. They will take me to him when I am “ready”. I have not enjoyed any benefit. I am not the only one at school married and our friends (age mates) have been laughing at us saying we were married to old men. I also think I might not be able to complete my schooling; they might take me out and say I should go to the husband. I did not know I could report the case; I would want it reported even to the Police. No one was against it, I was the only one against it. Child marriage is bad, it is something, I just I did not like it, I did not want an ugly husband. If I could go back in time, I would not have gone, I would have followed my schooling career and finish it. To end child marriage, they should go and report.

Tjiramue

Consistent with a literature review finding by NANGOF Trust (2015), common among the Ovaherero and Ovahimba tribes is a traditional practice called tjiramue. “Omuramwe” is directly translated as a cousin and culturally these people are permitted or allowed to have an intimate relationship amongst themselves and can also marry. There are two types of cousins and can be differentiated in terms of blood cousins (Brother and sisters children) and the other is the one that can be traced in terms of “eanda” which is derived from a matri-clan.

In this regard it means the marriage preferred for a man is one with a woman of his father’s matri-clan, which is a cross cousin who stands in the relationship to him of father’s sister’s daughter (Gibson, 1956). After celebrating womanhood, which usually happens when a girl is thirteen or fourteen years, sexual intimacy, and even marriage, between tjiramues is acceptable. Besides the unacceptable practice of child marriage, it also increases the girls’ chances of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, as well as teenage pregnancy.

“In Kunene North, we are having this tendency of cousins, whatever those ‘tjiramue’ according to the culture, no matter the age, how old or younger is this one, as long as they have slept together or if they are having a relationship, it’s allowed. It’s a cultural thing. They are, by birth, allowed to be like that” (Regional government official, Kunene).

“Sometimes, tradition rules, you know when you are growing you are going to marry your “tjiramue”. This is also a driver; it is a fact. Tjiramue ... is a child, you are playing a game in the house, you don’t want the products to go out, if you are working that money will only be in the house, like getting married to my cousins’ daughters” (Men’s FGD, Kunene).

Sikenge

As supported by literature (NANGOF Trust, 2015), Sikenge is a traditional initiation practice in the Zambezi region. It is a practice whereby women who are getting ready for marriage are taught about womanhood. It is also conducted for young girls when they start menstruating and the initiation period is one month. At initiation, the girls are taken to a secluded location where they are taught about womanhood, how to take care of their future husbands and how they should behave when they get married. It was also reported that they are also taught how to be responsible citizens.

However, some respondents felt Sikenge promotes child marriages. Here is what respondents from Zambezi had to say:

“Here in Zambezi, they do initiation ceremonies which is called ‘Sikenge’. It is your parents who decide that you have to go there, you have to go for preparations, they teach you how to behave and how to manage your own house and stuff and your husband. They teach you how to cook for him and they teach you how to please a man in the bedroom” (Girls FGD 15-18 years, Zambezi).

“...they have these initiations where a girl child, when she starts menstruating, they are taken, they are kept in the house, it is called ‘Sikenge’ where she will be told of things” (Regional government official, Zambezi).

“Sikenge has negative influences in that it signals that a girl is ready for marriage. No such practices done for boys” (NGO, Zambezi).

“Sikenge practice not helpful because it entices marriage among the initiates”, “when someone starts to menstruate that is when she goes for sikenge. They say you must do this with your husband, they are telling you that you can now get married” (Teachers, Zambezi).

Girls 15-18 FGD, Zambezi:

“Here in Zambezi they do initiation ceremonies which is called ‘Sikenge’. It is your parents who decide that you have to go there, you have to go for preparations, they teach you how to behave and how to manage your own house and stuff and your husband”

“Also, at Sikenge, girls are taught how to dance in bed and how to satisfy your man in bed”

“Most importantly girls attend Sikenge initiation around 13-14 years of age”

Eengoma

This is a traditional practice common in the Ohangwena region. It is an initiation ceremony where young girls who have started menstruation are engaged in a traditional wedding. At this ceremony, men can pick their future brides and they put a mark on them. After this ceremony, girls are declared ready for marriage and when they fall pregnant it is acceptable to the community. In the olden days, the ceremony used to be done for women who are ready for marriage, but nowadays, parents are sending young girls to avoid shame and disgrace if their children fall pregnant. Although this practice is decreasing, some parents still believe it is important and they send their children to Angola where the practice is still widely practiced. Here is what one respondent from Ohangwena had to say:

“That one is just a traditional wedding, that we call eengoma that is happening somewhere near here every year, it has been happening for a long time. Children are getting married traditionally. Even people from this village go and join. Parents are sending children to go there” (Health Care Worker, Ohangwena).

Olufuko

Olufuko is a traditional initiation ceremony for girls practiced in the Omusati region as a rite of passage into womanhood. This initiation takes place once a year, usually in the month of August. The ceremony is a seven-day event with planned activities for each day. In an effort to better understand this practice and how it may relate to child marriage, the Olufuko Coordinator and Olufuko graduates from four different years were interviewed to share their experience and understanding of this traditional practice. The study found out that parents from different tribes send their daughters to Olufuko after they have reached puberty to prepare them for womanhood. They are taught a variety of household chores such as pounding 'mahangu' (pearl millet) and beans as well as preparing a meal for the family. They are also taught about how to take care of themselves and their future husbands.

The initiation ceremony is facilitated by community elders known as 'Namunganga'. Only girls who are not pregnant and who have never given birth can participate in the ceremony. Consistent with literature, the 'Namungangas' use traditional medicine known as 'omalova' to test for pregnancy. On the first day of the ceremony, girls stay indoors and cover their faces with masks made from cow tails. They are taught basic home chores such as pounding mahangu. On the second day the girls go to a place called 'etambo', a platform where they are presented and eventually seen by the public. At 'etambo', the girls are involved in role-plays where men propose to them by offering chicken which will be prepared on day four. Day three, also known as 'beans day', involves teaching the girls on how to survive with limited resources in the house (preparing a meal just from beans).

Day five is 'ekululo', a day where girls plait their hair using 'Omalende' from baobab trees in preparation for day six. Day seven is the final day on which they graduate, celebrate and meet the olufuko patron and other dignitaries. They also receive waist-beads from both the maternal and paternal sides of their family. Throughout this seven-day initiation period, the girls are not allowed to take a bath but only use traditional creams to keep themselves clean. Contrary to NAMRIGHTS (2014), respondents in this study denied virginity testing and the facilitation of marriages at Olufuko. Below is what some of the Olufuko graduates had to say:

“The main aim is to prepare girls through adulthood because when you enter Olufuko, people are waiting for you, expecting you to know everything, work, rights, to be a good person, to know how to take care of your family. That is the way a girl who under Olufuko is expected to be, to prepare for marriage also”.

“No! there is no virginity testing...”

“Let me say if you are in school, you will continue with school. It doesn't mean that when you are done with Olufuko you will be given that permission to get married”.

“It is not even an engagement. You just have to act; it is like a drama. They just want to know how will you act and how will you, how you will go and handle your husband”.

“...I learned how to respect the parents, they were also taught that they should go back to school so that they can finish school. We also learned that Olufuko is not a wedding, that one can still do the church wedding...”

The Olufuko graduates highlighted that girls do not get married at Olufuko; instead, they are prepared to be hard working women who are able to respect their parents and elders. Moreover, they reported that they have learnt how to do housework, value their education, delay relationships with boys and how to take care of themselves. Contrary to general perceptions on Olufuko from respondents from other regions, Olufuko graduates and other respondents from Omusati region believe that it prevents child marriages because girls are being taught about the importance of staying in school. However, it was also reported that Olufuko graduates are being targeted by men because of the skills that they acquire from the initiation ceremony.

“...but for me, the understanding of Olufuko, it’s not promoting the child marriage” (NGO, Omusati).

“Children need to go to Olufuko and experience what others are experiencing there” (FBO, Omusati).

“Olufuko is part of our culture and we believe should continue as long as people understand that it does not give consent to people to go and get married before the age which was set by government” (HCW, Omusati).

“There is nothing wrong with the Olufuko initiations” (Traditional Authority, Omusati).

Olufuko graduates, Omusati:

“And it doesn’t mean when I am in Olufuko, from there you are go in to look for a husband who you think you can marry”.

“We learned how to abstain from boyfriends, stay in school and respect parents”.

“It discourages child marriage and promotes education”.

“The story that men go there to mark the girls, like ‘this one is mine and that one is mine’, is not true. No one gets married in Olufuko. In the past, you just get initiated and then go back to your house. I was initiated in 1983 and I went back home after that. I got married later. It does not mean that when a person is initiated that person is given men like that. In fact, Olufuko is the one that prevents people not be involved in sexual relationships. There we are informed that the fact that you initiated into womanhood does not mean you are free to do whatever you wish to do. We are warned to be patient and wait for the man to come and introduce himself to our parents asking for our hands in marriage. This will be well known by both parents” (Olufuko expert, Omusati).

As argued by NAMRIGHTS (2014) that the Olufuko practice is harmful and propagates child marriage, some respondents also shared the same sentiments.

“When you go through the process it means you are ready to be married. Men go to Olufuko to look for wives. If it (Olufuko) is happening the same way it used to happen in the past, then it is contributing to child marriage” (Regional level government official, Omusati).

“It is also encouraging child marriages because, on my observations, most of the kids who went through that, sometimes the child is still at school, that child will drop out of school, become pregnant and so forth” (Law Enforcement, Omusati).

“Yes, it does (lead to child marriage) because what happens is that from there you get to be proposed for marriage and get married” (Women, Omusati).

However it is documented that, all these cultural practices are harmful as they perpetuate early and forced marriages (WLC, 2010) as well as social norms around the value of girls and women.

Testing for fertility

Another cultural practice that was identified is the coercion of girls into falling pregnant as a way of testing for fertility and the cultural belief that one should have a child by a certain age. This came up in Kavango West. This study, however, found some of these cultural practices to be diminishing as fewer people know or practice.

4.6 Consequences/effects of child marriages on the child and community

Chi-squared tests of associations/linkages were conducted to assess the consequences and effects of child marriage. The results are presented in Annex 5. Women who were married below the age of 18, parents of children who were in child marriages as well as the other respondent categories were interviewed to share their views on consequences of child marriage on the child and community. It was apparent from the majority of respondents, including community members, children, government officials and traditional authority alike, that child marriage culminates to a gross violation of human rights. The following consequences of child marriage were reported by respondents: poor educational attainment; poor health outcomes; physical, emotional and sexual abuse; deprivation from childhood experiences and abandonment by husband.

4.6.1 Poor educational attainment and unemployment

Child marriage is a significant contributing factor to unemployment ($p < 0.001$). From the NHDS 2013 data analysis, a greater percentage (24%) of unemployed women were married early.

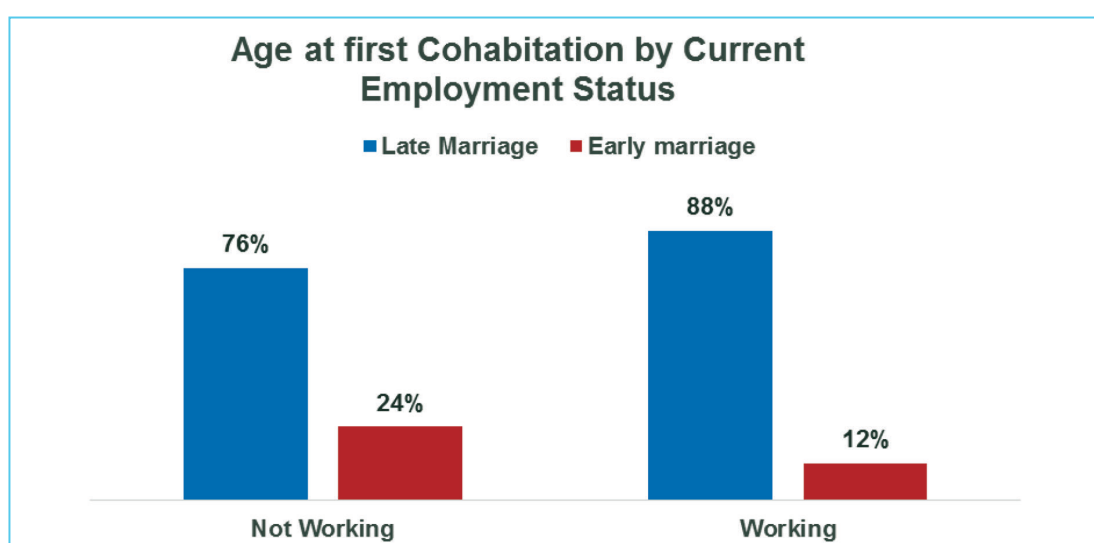


Figure 24: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by current employment

The current occupation of the women was also significantly influenced by child marriage ($p < 0.001$). From the NDHS data analysis, while women who married children only contributed 18.4% of total sample size, they were underrepresented in high skilled jobs and overrepresented in lower skilled occupations. Women who married early contributed only 4% to professional occupations, whereas they contributed as much as 20% to agricultural occupations, which are probably a proxy of unskilled labour. Child marriage driven by poverty worsens the intergenerational unemployment or casual employment and poverty cycles which in turn drive child marriage further. Due to the continued poverty, families continue to marry off their children for economic gain, generation after generation.

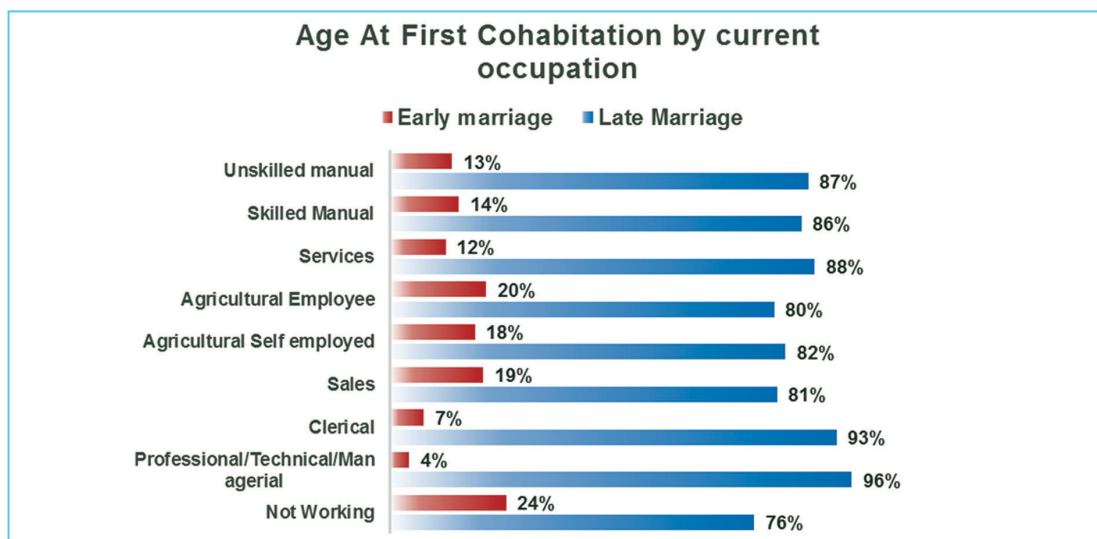


Figure 25: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by current occupation

A WOMAN MARRIED BEFORE THE AGE OF 18 YEARS – ZAMBEZI REGION

I was married at 17 years, to a 23-year-old man. The marriage is traditional and not registered. It was by choice, I dropped out of school when I was in grade 4. I cut reeds and sell them, doing some contractual work for others in return for money, and also build traditional houses in return for money. I think if I didn't get married earlier, I could have slept around with different man, and I could have been wasted.

With regard to literacy, NDHS 2013 quantitative analysis results indicated that women who married early were overrepresented (32%) among women who could not read at all and those could only read parts of a sentence (35%). They were underrepresented (15%) among those who could read full sentences. This finding was statistically significant indicating an association between marrying early and low literacy ($p < 0.001$).

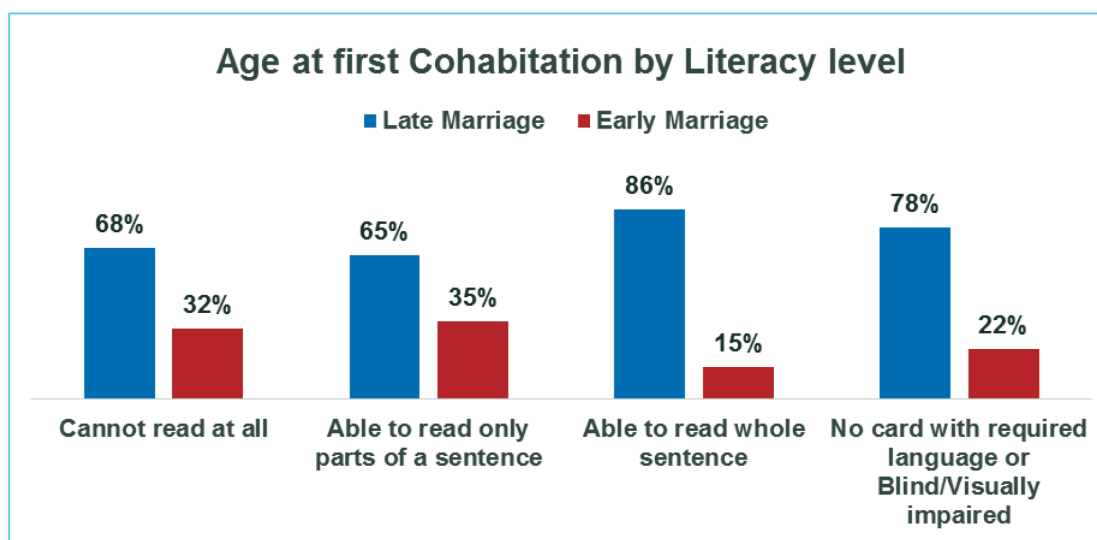


Figure 26: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by literacy level

There was a significant association between child marriage and highest educational level ($p < 0.001$). Women married early were overrepresented among women with no formal education (30%) and primary level education (28%), while they were under represented in the secondary and tertiary education level subgroup.

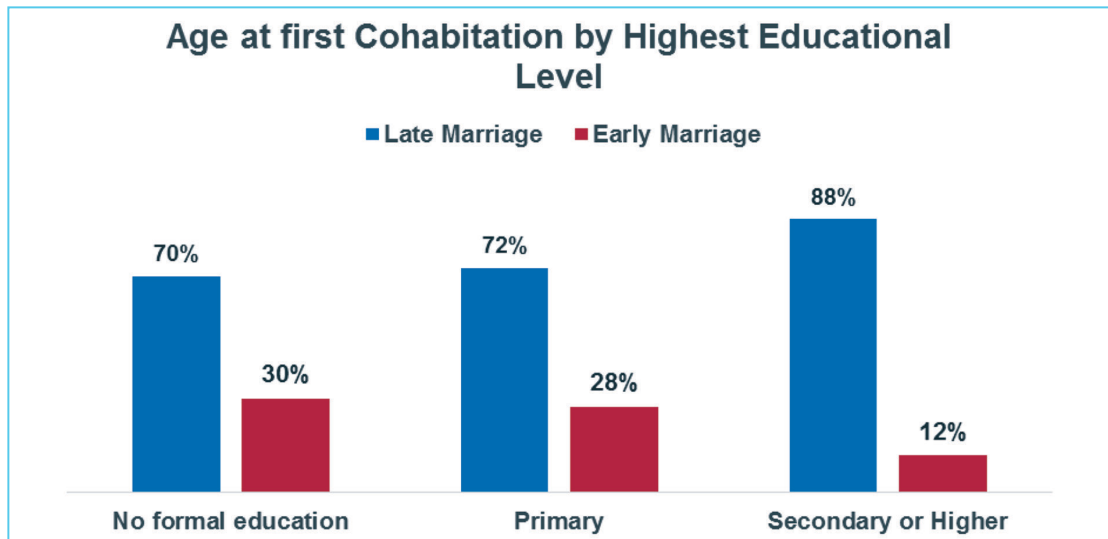


Figure 27: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by highest educational level

As found from the NDHS 2013, the poor educational outcomes for women married early were also reported in the qualitative findings. The majority of respondents from the five study regions pointed out school disruption as a direct consequence of child marriage, as most girls drop out of school after child marriage. When girls get married early they take on massive responsibilities of being a housewife and a mother. They fail to continue with school.

This is a problem in all regions but is particularly prominent in northern Kunene with the Ovahimba communities where school attendance rates are lowest, according to UNICEF (Ninnes, 2011). Young married girls who fail to complete their education often find it difficult to secure jobs because of lack of skills. In addition, they are frequently abandoned by their husbands and they have to fend themselves and their children, thus creating a perpetual cycle of poverty.

“...when the married child is in school it will have an impact on the performance because this child will be having so many roles, she is going to be a wife, she is going to be a care giver then she must also concentrate at school. This will be too many responsibilities, so you find that she cannot manage to perform very well in class. In some cases you find that this child is married and the father of the children is not even at home. He is usually out doing some part time jobs and all those things and then this girl will be struggling alone at home and in the end, you find this child will not perform very well and drop out of school and in the end, there is no future for this child” (Regional level, government official, KW).

“...because once they fall pregnant they drop out of school and stay home without education, most of them drop out only in grade 7, they are already pregnant” (Traditional Authority, KW).

“Poor concentration on studies” (Girls FGD 15-18, KW).

“Life was difficult, especially when I fell pregnant. We lived in the bush and there was no money for transport ... I dropped out of school to take care of the baby” (Women, KW).

“Child marriage is a bad thing that affects education negatively” (Teacher, KW).

“Education is affected. Poor academic performance, school dropout” (Teacher, Kunene).

Though efforts are available to keep pregnant girls in school and allow continuation of education after delivery, a government official from MGECSW in Kavango West had this to say about married girls that remain in school: “the performance is not good and they are not obedient to their teachers because they perceive themselves as parents and also having a household to look after”.

A WOMAN WHO MARRIED BEFORE THE AGE OF 18 YEARS - KUNENE REGION

I got married at 15 years to a 26-year-old husband. It was a traditional wedding and I was just forced into marriage by my parents; it was never my will or desire. Though me and my husband were fine, I was grade 7 and I didn't return to school. I dropped out. I'm not an educated person at all; instead, I have little education and I am just a house lady. The case was not reported, I don't know, it should be left and not be investigated. But I feel it should not be allowed for an underage child to get married, it's not a good thing at all to give your child to be married while under age. I should have been in nursing or even part of this research group journey that you guys are busy with. If it was not for this thing of being married while under age.

4.6.2 Poor Health Outcomes

Poor health outcomes as a result of child marriage also came out strongly in the study. Healthcare workers interviewed, especially those from Kunene region, reported attending to married pregnant girls as young as 13 years old. It was evident that child marriage contributes substantially to teenage pregnancies. Healthcare workers further reported that young pregnant girls are a health risk because of the pre-natal, peri-natal and postnatal challenges due to their underdeveloped bodies.

Some of the girls are not able to take care of themselves through failure to eat the right food, smoking and drinking alcohol, resulting in underweight babies. Girls in child marriages lack autonomy, hence their sexual reproductive health rights are violated, thus increasing their risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

..when they come to deliver the child is either premature or they are not able to deliver or that she does not have knowledge of pregnancies, so even if you give knowledge of pregnancy, they may not understand because they are not mature to understand. So as the complications come, it is a risk of life for both, mother and child” (Healthcare worker, Kunene).

A WOMAN MARRIED BEFORE THE AGE OF 18 YEARS - KAVANGO WEST REGION

I was 15 years and my husband 19 years when we got married. I got pregnant when I was in grade 7 and we just decided ourselves to get married, traditionally. The marriage is not registered. I am not in school but I passed my grade 7 and I was promoted to grade 8. But I stopped going to school during my pregnancy, after a while I went back to school which was in grade 8 but then my child got sick and was admitted at the hospital and that is when I completely stopped going to school. **I was operated on when I gave birth** because I was still young and currently I am just at home, I do not work. I could not report this case, because the parents refused and I was afraid if I reported something bad would happen to me.

What the parents said to me, the way they were talking to me made me to be afraid. Even my aunt from town said we should go to the office of gender, but my mother refused and said they were talking too many things.

4.6.3 Gender Based Violence

The respondents reported that GBV is quite prevalent in child marriages in their communities. Abuse is often in the form of physical, sexual or emotional and is usually worse with husbands who abuse alcohol. A majority of the respondents, including children, reported sexual abuse as the most common form of abuse in child marriages.

Often husbands make decisions which might be against the will of the wife, a situation which one respondent termed “living in oppression”. It was also reported that young girls in marriage are often too immature to understand the demands of marriage, often leading to arguments, physical violence and in some cases ‘passion’ killings. Verbal abuse was also mentioned as quite common in child marriages and often escalated into physical violence. These findings were consistent with evidence in the literature, for example, studies by Lemmon et al., (2014) and Perczynska and Colye (2016) reported that child marriage is associated with domestic violence, marital rape and abandonment of girls by their husbands. However, quantitative findings did not suggest a significant association between GBV and child marriage.

“...once a child is forced into marriage there is already statutory rape, there is emotional abuse, there is sexual abuse, there could be physical abuse because if she is not willing to consent to give sex. You never know what will happen. Maybe the husband might be beating the child and all these things, so it involves all forms of violence.” (Regional level government official, KW).

4.7 Linkages between child marriage, HIV, GBV and SRHR

Statistical tests were done to determine associations between child marriage, HIV, GBV and SRHR. The findings were complimented by qualitative data from key informant interviews and focus group discussions. These are presented in the following sections.

4.7.1 Age at first cohabitation by GBV

From the NDHS data analysis, there were no significant associations between child marriage and Gender Based violence (GBV) ($p = 0.721$) even though women who married early were slightly more represented among GBV victims (21%) than they were in the GBV free subset (20%). This lack of association is contrary to available literature. Erulkar (2013) pointed to women who married early as more likely to experience forced first marital sex. Stockl et al., (2014) also concluded a higher intimate partner violence (IPV) risk among younger women than older women.

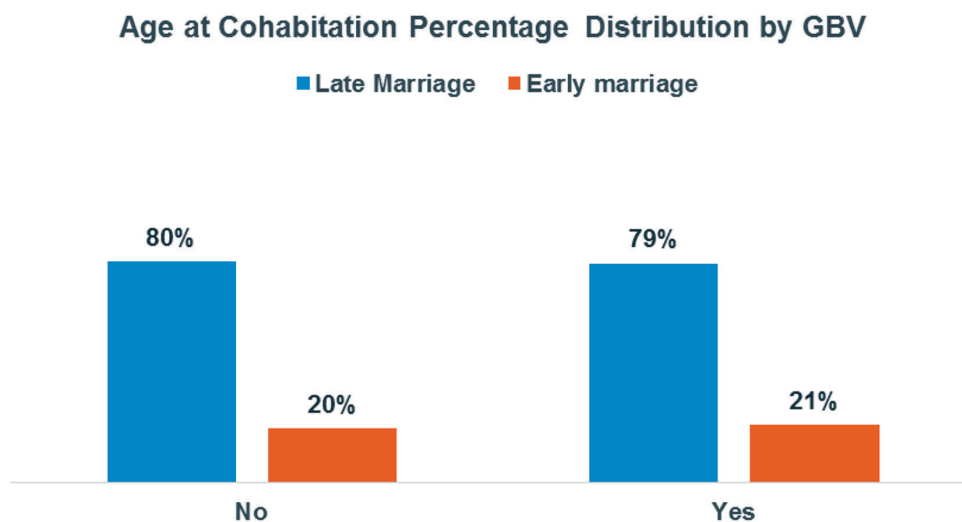


Figure 28: Age at cohabitation percentage distribution by GBV

A WOMAN WHO MARRIED EARLY AND EXPERIENCED GBV - OHANGWENA REGION

I was married at 16 years to a man between 40 and 45 years. We are now separated. The marriage was traditional and not registered. We got married through the initiation when I was grade 7. After I was initiated, he told me to go stay with him. I regret doing that, but my parents are the ones that forced me. It was not my will to get married. I dropped out of school, when I went to be initiated through traditional weddings, one cannot go back to school afterwards, but sometimes one can do that. I did not go back. My husband was always mistreating me.

He would beat me up and abuse me because I had no income. Even you are pregnant; you are still subjected to abuse. You could be asking for something and the person will not give it to you. If you say something further, you will be beaten. I only go work during summer when people are ploughing. And then after I could be the cleaner or something else. I did not report, in the past we did not really have that knowledge to bring something forth when you realize that something is wrong or right. Child marriage is not good. It is because I have never liked it, it was not something good, I did not want it. It was not my will. I would not have done it. If I knew, I would tell them at least to wait a little bit because I am still young. To end child marriage, I think advise children that education is very important and they should take it serious.

Also contrary to the analysis of NDHS quantitative data and in line with existing literature, government officials, law enforcement agents and children interviewed reported a strong link between GBV and child marriages. They reported GBV as common in arranged marriages because love was not the basis of these relationships. Children in child marriages are sexually and physically abused by their much senior husbands. Below are some of the comments from the respondents.

“Sometimes when the husband is drinking, sometimes the husband is abusive; when he comes home, she will be beaten. Sometimes if she says she doesn’t want sex he can beat her. If you do not cook you can be beaten” (FGD Girls 14-18, Kunene).

*“It is just the husband to make all the decisions at home and you will find that this child, they are always in the abusive relationships, they can be abused sexually, physically and mentally” (Teacher, Kunene).
“There was a girl on her way to get married and when she got from the ceremony, the other school girls teased her and she got scared. After 2 weeks she killed herself then that is good, she is still small and cannot control her feelings” (Boys FGD 15-18 years, Kunene).*

“They try to solve things and they are not yet mature, which end up maybe people fighting and killing each other” (Regional government official, Omusati).

“GBV – the domestic violence is playing a role. The kids are really being beaten by those boys they are married to” (Traditional Authority, Omusati).

“Sometimes ... she does not want to involve herself in that relationship but the man will overpower her, beat her, he will do whatever, he will threaten her then she will just end up being in that marriage...” (Regional government official, KW).

“GBV – physical abuse by husband” (Law Enforcement, KW).

*“Some of the challenges of child marriage are drinking, GBV, fighting, infidelity” (Parent, Ohangwena).
“Girls are physically and mentally abused by their husbands” (Girls FGD 15-18 years, Zambezi).*

4.7.2 Age at first Cohabitation by HIV Status

From self-reported prior HIV testing (NDHS, 2013), the proportion of women who married early was slightly higher among HIV negative women (17%) than among the HIV positive group (16%). This difference was statistically insignificant ($p=0.754$). Child marriage did not significantly influence the HIV status of the women.

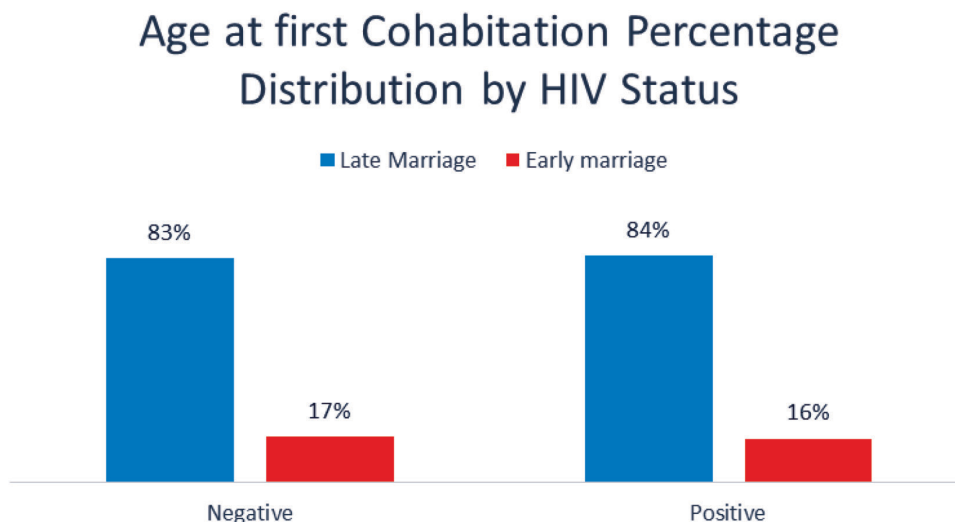


Figure 29: Age at first cohabitation/marriage by HIV status

Contrary to the statistical non-association described above, healthcare workers who were interviewed from all the study regions highlighted a link between child marriage and HIV acquisition. They reported that the age difference between the spouses increased the risk of HIV infection. This is because the husband might come into the relationship with an established HIV infection or have multiple partners during the marriage.

4.7.3 Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) include the right to decide on when and whether to have children, as well as the number and spacing of those children and breastfeeding options. They also include the right to choose a method of contraception, the right to self-protection from HIV and other STIs, as well as the right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence.

According to the 2011 Census Fertility report as cited in the 2017 Namibia Gender analysis study (p114), girls and young women aged 12-19 with no formal education were more likely to give birth early than those who attained some level of education, particularly those in rural areas. The 2017 Gender Analysis Report also reported that 11 out of 14 regions had an average ideal number of children lower than the total fertility rate which could be attributed to a lack of information on family planning or women/girls not having sufficient control over their fertility.

With regards to unwanted births, the Gender Analysis Study highlighted that 41% of births were wanted but at a later stage, 10% were unwanted and younger women were more likely to have mistimed births. The same report noted with concern that 5% of married girls aged 15-19 years were using unspecified traditional methods of contraception and 8% discontinued use of the male condom due to husband's disapproval.

Sexual Reproductive Health encompasses efforts to eliminate preventable maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity through quality sexual and reproductive health services (WHO, 2014).

In this study, healthcare workers highlighted various challenges they are facing with regards to children in child marriages. Their sexual and reproductive health rights are infringed upon as they are often forced to engage in sexual activity by their husbands. They may also lack maturity to understand the importance of using healthcare services during pregnancy, thus posing a health risk to themselves and their unborn babies.

Moreover, young girls in marriage lack autonomy, as such they cannot make choices about contraception and may not be able to fully protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases. Therefore, based on the above study findings, it is clear that children in child marriages do not fully enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

“Risk of HIV infection” (Girls FGD 15-18 years, Kunene).

“We get lot of complications from maternal side, from child side. It’s like the mothers are not well developed physically, the babies will be born with less birth weight; sometimes they are even using alcohol which they don’t know it’s affecting the baby” (Healthcare worker, Kunene).

“So, if they are sitting with someone who is older than them that person would be the one in charge and in control. So, they can do whatever they want with this child. The child would not have any decision on when to get pregnant and when not to” (Healthcare worker, KW).

“The girls often do not have any support from partners during the pregnancy” (HCW, Zambezi).

4.8 Knowledge and use of existing legislation, programs and interventions against child marriages

4.8.1 Knowledge on children’s rights

Children’s rights are human rights, with particular attention to special protection and care afforded to the young (Ambunda & Mugadza, 2009). In Namibia, the Child Care and Protection Act No. 3 of 2015 gives effect to the rights of children as contained in the Namibian constitution and international law. Most respondents, including children, community members and government officials, had partial understanding of children’s rights including rights to education, identity, health, shelter and protection by their parents. With regards to marriage, children expressed knowledge and understanding of their right to choose who to marry and when to marry.

“...right to education, work, to obey parents, to marry someone that she desires” (FBO, Kunene).

“Whether you are married or living with your parents, I think you still don’t have rights. You must be more than 18” (Constituency level government official, Omusati).

“Right to education, to get a name, to do my homework; Right to talk, freedom of speech, right to shelter, right to play” (Boys FGD 16-19 years, Zambezi).

“Children should not have rights” (Parent, Kunene).

“No, they do not have rights” (FBO, KW).

The apparent limited knowledge of specific rights of children may lead to violations. It also has implications for programming, as some implementers and officials exhibited varying degrees of ignorance.

4.8.2 General knowledge on laws/policies governing marriage

Most children interviewed indicated they wanted to be married in their twenties or later but were not aware of the laws that protect them from child marriages. Instead, children had good knowledge of child labour laws as they emphasized that they should not be involved in hard labour such as working in mines and farms. Except for a MGECW official, most government officials were not aware of specific laws that protect children from child marriages, only highlighting the Namibian constitution.

“Not aware of the laws that protect children” (HCWs, Kunene).

“Should not be beaten, no hard labour, no employment under age” (FBO, Kunene).

“Labour laws for children” (Teacher, Kunene).

On the issues of children already in marriage and education, some teachers felt that laws protected girls that are pregnant but fail to do the same for non-pregnant married girls. With regards to marriage, children expressed knowledge and understanding of their right to choose who to marry and when to marry. However, arranged marriages organised by their parents, especially in northern Kunene and parts of the Omusati regions, take away some of these rights.

4.8.3 Knowledge on organisations and interventions for child marriage

According to literature, the most effective interventions are those integrated within existing programs (USAID, 2012). A multi-sectoral response is required for optimum results. Although most respondents were not aware of any organisations and interventions to address child marriage in their communities, those who knew shared names of organisations and interventions believe they are contributing to the eradication of child marriage in Namibia (Table 4, page 59).

Table 4: Organisations and interventions perceived to be as working toward reducing child marriage

| REGION | ORGANISATION, MINISTRY, AGENCY | INTERVENTIONS |
|--------------|---|---|
| Kavango West | MGE CW, Churches, MoSS, MoHSS Health extension workers, MoEAC, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Poverty Eradication, Lifeline-Childline, OYO, Project HOPE, FAWENA girls club, Chisume program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safe School, Safe Communities targets teachers, church leaders and communities on how to teach their children. - Positive parenting is targeting teenage mothers and fathers. - Childline/Lifeline 116 & 106 are toll free lines where children can report gender-based violence cases. - Churches are encouraging marriage in the church to curb child marriages. - Nurses, doctors, social workers and police officers collaborate in the management of rape cases and other child abuse cases. They also do awareness meetings to learners in schools. - Ministry of Home affairs pick up cases of child marriages when persons under the age of 18 attempts to register their children. - FAWENA mobilizes young mothers that dropped out of school and encourages them to continue with their education. |
| Kunene | OYO, MoEAC (Life Skills teachers), MGE CW, HealthCare Workers for MoHSS, MoSS (Gender based violence unit), Red Cross, Lifeline Childline, Girls Club in schools, OYO. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My Future is My Life. - Life Skills program through MoEAC in schools. - Social clubs in schools. - Community awareness and outreach program facilitated by MGE CW in collaboration with MoHSS and MoSS. - Health education for girls in schools facilitated by MoHSS. - Community education on the rape act and immoral practices. - Educating boys and girls on child marriages. |
| Ohangwena | MGE CW, MoHSS, MoSS. COCOC. MoEAC. Red Cross Society. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community meetings by CACOC, CCP forum. - Community meetings and outreach program with MoHSS, MGE CW & the MoSS. - Life skills teachers, healthcare workers collaborate with Red Cross society to raise awareness to schools and the community on child marriages. |
| Omusati | Child care protection forum, MGE CW. Good HOPE, Red Cross, MoEAC – Life Skills teachers. MoHSS – Social workers. TCE. Window of Hope. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MGE CW and MoSS outreach program where they sensitize learners in schools on the issue of child marriage. - Child care and protection forum in each constituency addresses child marriage issues. |
| Zambezi | MGE CW, NAPP A; TUSEME; OYO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPP A CBHRA program educating communities on GBV. - Life skills training by MoEAC. |

The government officials mainly identified MGE CW, MoHSS, MoEAC and MoSS as the main government ministries currently involved in the fight against child marriages. Cadres identified from the government workers were social workers from both MoHSS and MGE CW, nurses, doctors, community health workers, Life Skills teachers and police officers. Children identified other stakeholders in the form of NGOs, such as Red Cross, OYO and Lifeline Childline. Interventions reported by respondents include My Future is My Choice, girl clubs in schools and joint community outreach programs from different ministries. In the Zambezi region, NAPPA and TUSEME are implementing activities to educate communities on gender-based violence and life skills respectively.

“Ministry of Gender has these programs of going in the schools like on a monthly basis we go out of town and talk about child marriages, rape, gender-based violence, domestic violence and all these, alcohol and drug abuse” (Regional government official, Zambezi).

“They teach kids the good and bad things about child marriages” (Teacher, Kunene).

“Raising awareness of the effects of child marriages in the communities” (Regional level government official, Kunene).

“Children receive advice on child marriages at girls’ clubs” (Girls FGD, 10-14, KW).

“We do awareness programs in schools” (Law Enforcement, Omusati).

“Organisations give advice to school children and have meetings with parents.” (Parent, Omusati).

“There are community meetings with MGE CW & the police” (HCW, Ohangwena).

4.9 Cultural/traditional/religious protective factors against child marriage

Most respondents were of the opinion that there are no protective factors in place at the community level to prevent child marriage and protect children from the adverse effects of this practice. In some communities in Kavango West and Omusati, it was reported that men who are marrying or impregnating young girls are fined by the traditional authorities as a way of discouraging the practice. In most instances, cases go unreported and fines cannot be enforced. Some government officials expressed reservations with regards to this practice as they felt men will continue to violate the law just because they can afford it.

“A fine is being paid for a person marrying early or in charge of the pregnancy” (Traditional authority, KW).

“If you get a girl pregnant under the age of 18 you will be punished to pay ten cattle by the chief” (Boys FGD 15-19 years, KW).

“They (the perpetrators) are being charged with a fine” (FGD, men, KW).

“A fine is being paid for a person marrying early or in charge of the pregnancy” (Traditional Authority, Omusati).

“A fine to be paid only if it’s reported, in most cases they don’t report the case because they are in fear and scared” (Parent, KW).

“If a man or you impregnate a woman, then you will be fined or pay. Those are some of the laws that can prevent child marriage” (Teacher, Kunene).

“I’m not in favour of that one and we are trying to discourage it even in our community meetings. We don’t see how compensation benefits the child. It just benefits the grownups, the parents, while the child will continue being in that relationship, not happy, continuously being violated or abused. If a man pays a fine, he will still marry the child, that child will still be in that marriage. But if it’s reported, maybe with the police or with the social workers who will also engage the police to come in, cases will be opened and there will be punishment will be imposed on the perpetrators. That may discourage other man from marrying children” (Regional level government official, KW).

Another protective factor cited was that of parents refusing to marry off their children early. In such instances, the man has to wait until the child is 18 years old or older as the parents deem appropriate. Sending and keeping children in school was also highlighted as a way of protecting children, especially girls, from child marriage. Lastly, the church is also playing a role by teaching and discouraging children from immorality, alcohol and pre-marital sex.

“The religious one, the churches, we have got this the youth groups we call it whereby they used to sometimes they had to go there for the weekend and through those classes are being taught about the dangers in involving in these sexual relationship when we talk about pregnancy the STIs. Maybe those are the ways many elders are trying and individual capacity and tell their children that at the end of the day if you involve yourself in these activities you are going to be on a suffering situation and result in a bad way” (Teacher, Kunene).

“Sometimes the pastors at church intervene when they realize that the person is too young. They refuse to wed the couples even at the magistrate” (Women, Omusati).

“The church may refuse to officiate over marriages involving children” (Women, Ohangwena).

Respondents who felt there is currently nothing in place to protect children from child marriages also suggested education, particularly boarding schools, and the Church as some of the strategies that could be adopted by government.

4.10 Gaps in child marriage response

The study found gaps and challenges in Namibia’s child marriage response. These include lack of enforcement of current laws, conflicting legal framework, the general lack of reporting of child marriage and statutory rape cases by both survivors and duty bearers, the embeddedness of the child marriage issue into culture as well as the lack of knowledge of children’s rights and existing laws. Instruments such as the CCPA, Namibian Constitution, Combating of Rape Act, No. 8 of 2000, Marriage Persons Equality Act, No. 1 of 1996, Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child have been adopted.

Marrying a child under the age of 18 years, having sexual relations with a child under the age of 16 years, marrying someone without their free and full consent are all prohibited in Namibia. However, enforcement of these laws is inconsistent.

Government officials in Kunene, including law enforcement agents, reported statutory rape as prevalent but under-reported. The main barrier to reporting, among the Ovahimba and Ovaherero is that most cases happen between family members as part of their culture. Some of the children interviewed reported that they will engage in child marriages if their parents asked them because of fear of being disowned by their families.

“They are not reporting these types of cases if they are close families, people are protecting suspects. Reporting is done by social workers from MoHSS” (Law Enforcement, Kunene).

“We were having one case of a 15-year-old Dhemba (local tribe) girl who was cohabiting with a man who is older than her. On behalf of the state, we opened the case under combating of immoral practice. We took the perpetrator to court, but the case could not continue. The child, she was insisting it is my boyfriend. The family came forth as well, this is our son in-law” (Law Enforcement, Omusati).

“Cases not being reported because of culture”, “how can you implement protection on something which is right according to our culture”, “Because you know, her father and my father are brothers, so, if I rape this one even if she wants to report me the parents will say no, you cannot do that to him, you are one blood” (Constituency level government official, Kunene).

“When traditional things come up, the law enforcement is weak...not taken any legal action because it’s the family issues” (HCW, Kunene).

Other factors contributing to poor reporting of statutory rape cases are lack of knowledge of the existing laws, fear of loss of compensation from the perpetrator, avoidance of family conflict and remoteness of some villages. Some respondents also felt law enforcement procedures are weak with regards to traditional issues resulting in inefficient prosecution of the perpetrators.

In the Zambezi and Ohangwena regions, cases of statutory rape are being reported to the police and the victims are referred to the MGECW social workers. However, some health care workers in the studied regions were not aware of the procedures to follow when they attend to children under the age of 16 who are pregnant. They were not aware that this could point to statutory rape and follow-up of these cases is weak.

“...lack of guidelines for HCW on dealing with statutory rape cases. Some healthcare workers don’t know what statutory rape is” (HCW, Kunene).

“Let me give an example of the one who was raped by the uncle, it was a young one, I called the police and they tell me they don’t have transport and they told me they are going to follow up with the lady. I should give the details, they are going there tomorrow morning. Because the lady had to go back home, I had to let the doctor treat her. I don’t know if the police followed up as promised, we don’t get feedback” (Healthcare Worker, Ohangwena).

Other reasons mentioned to explain the lack of reporting of child marriages and statutory rape were:

Traditional leaders do not oppose child marriage

- Lack of evidence
- Family pressures
- The need for compensation
- Lack of coordination among relevant ministries and departments
- Threats from perpetrators
- Community not aware of the need and possibility to report
- Fear of loss of income and security

Alcohol abuse, though not commonly mentioned, was highlighted in some instances as a driving factor to teenage pregnancy and subsequently child marriage, as children who drink may end up having sex under the influence of alcohol and getting pregnant. There is lack of implementation and enforcement of the Liquor Act, No. 6 of 1998. The act prohibits sale of alcohol to children under the age of 18 years and despite this legislation, children under the age of 18 years have easy access to alcohol and communities have become more tolerant of underage drinking.

It was also found that some legal frameworks are conflicting, namely the Combating of Immoral Practices Act, No. 21 of 1980 and the Combating of Rape Act, No. 8 of 2000. The former sets the age of consent to sex at 16 years while the later sets the same threshold at 14 years. In both instances, the sex act is not an offence if the partner is less than 3 years older than the minor. On the other hand, the age of marriage is 18 years.

While children 16 years and older can consent to having sex under both the combating Rape and Immoral Practices Acts, they cannot be married as it is prohibited to marry someone under the age of 18 years unless permission is granted by the law.

Meaning if a girl between the ages of 16 to 18 years is impregnated, she may be married customarily or cohabitate. Article 66 (1) of the Namibian Constitution allows customary law to exist if it does not conflict with the Constitution or any civil laws. However, some customary laws and practices that drive child marriage have not been explicitly condemned as conflicting with legislation.

CHAPTER 5 - SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

5.1.1 Knowledge, attitude and practices

A community level lack of knowledge of the legal definition of child was evident. Adulthood was linked to physical development and other changes that come with puberty and these qualified a person for marriage and child bearing. While knowledge among district and regional level officials was higher than levels observed for community members, it was not comprehensive. The lack of knowledge has potential implications on children's rights and protection.

The common forms of child marriage happening in Namibia are traditional marriages and cohabitation, with the latter being most prevalent. Traditional marriages ranged from arranged/forced marriages to courtship followed by 'consensual' payment of bride price. People are fairly knowledgeable on what constitutes child marriage and the stipulated legal age for marriage is also fairly known. The majority of respondents across all categories considered child marriages a bad practice because of the mostly negative consequences on the married child. Community members considered the appropriate age of marriage for females to be from 21 years, while the threshold for men was set much higher at 25 years.

5.1.2 The extent of child marriage in Namibia

The prevalence of child marriage in Namibia is 18.4% for women and 4.1% for men. There were significant regional differences with Kavango reporting the highest rates. Early pregnancy was also common in Zambezi, Kunene, Omaheke, and Otjozondjupa. Child marriage in Namibia is influenced by region, rural-urban place of residence, highest educational level, age, sexual debut, and culture. Child unions are higher in rural areas compared to urban areas and mostly happen to girls. Most of the marriages were traditional or cohabitation.

5.1.3 Factors driving child marriages

Respondents from all categories believed poverty was the most common risk factor for child marriage. This is in line with quantitative NDHS data which showed a higher prevalence of early unions in poor households. The lack of upper grade classes in hard to reach areas is also highlighted as encouraging child marriage as children are left idle with no other aspiration beyond getting married. Another factor is child marriage has long been a way of life in many Namibian communities. As such, it has become a tradition such that once a child has reached puberty, they are regarded as an adult and can be married off. In some cases, however, girls get pregnant and are then forced into child marriage. Falling pregnant first has other reasons which may include limited awareness of sexual and reproductive health and unmet need for contraceptives.

5.1.4 The consequences/effects of child carriage on the child and community

Consequences of child marriage include poor education attainment; poor health outcomes; physical, emotional and sexual abuse; deprivation of childhood experiences and abandonment by husband. It was found that most of the children marrying young often drop out of school, leading to unemployment and a vicious poverty cycle. The lack of love as a basis for marriage in arranged marriages was thought to result in high divorce rates. Young pregnant girls are also at risk of pre-natal, peri-natal and postnatal complications due to their underdeveloped bodies and lack of maturity.

Girls in child marriages also lack autonomy, hence their sexual reproductive health rights are violated resulting in increased risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Qualitative information shows that they are also at higher risk of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. However, secondary quantitative information did not find any statistical significance between child marriage and GBV.

5.1.5 Knowledge and use of existing legislation, programs and interventions against child marriage

Government officials, community members and children have partial understanding of children's rights, including rights to education, identity, health, shelter and protection by their parents. Except for MGECW officials, most government officials and community members were not aware of specific laws that protect children from child marriages or abuse. Stakeholders intervening in child marriage related issues include MGECW, MoHSS, MOSS, MoEAC, and MIHA. NGOs such as FAWENA, OYO, Lifeline/Childline, Project Hope, Red Cross, NAPPA, TUSEME and FBOs are also involved. Interventions currently being implemented include Life Skills training, GBV awareness raising, community awareness on child marriages, SRHR, promotion of the education of married and pregnant girls and the active management of rape and child abuse cases.

5.1.6 Linkages between child marriage, HIV, GBV and SRHR

No statistically significant associations were established between Gender-Based Violence (GBV), HIV status and child marriage from the quantitative data. However, qualitative data suggests sexual, physical and emotional abuse of children in child marriage by their much older husbands. The age gaps were also said to be associated with the increased risk of HIV infection.

5.1.7 Cultural practices that have implications for child marriages

Cultural practices that were identified as promoting child marriage were arranged marriages, initiations and celebrations of adulthood. The initiations and celebrations include holy fire, Olufuko, traditional dances to celebrate womanhood such as hai-om #ui, Sikenge, Eengoma, and Tjiramue. Most of these ceremonies are conducted to announce and celebrate the attainment of puberty and they appear to set a platform for child marriage.

5.1.8 Good practices/protective factors for child marriage prevention

Distribution of fines to the men who marry young girls, parental shunning of child marriage, religious teaching shunning immorality including early sex and keeping children in school were listed as some of the factors that help to protect children from child marriage. Children in school were found to be exposed to information regarding their rights, SRHR and protective services available. The distribution of fines is, however, viewed by some as an acknowledgement and facilitator of child marriage.

5.1.9 Gaps in combatting child marriage

Gaps exist in implementation and enforcement of laws that protect children from abuse and child marriage, mostly because in some cultures, child marriage practices are acceptable. In some cases, because child marriage is deeply rooted in culture, duty bearers struggle to enforce the law, particularly at community level. It is against this background that there is poor reporting by the community and poor enforcement of existing legislation.

Other factors contributing to poor reporting of child marriages are the fear of loss of income if the

perpetrator is a potential breadwinner as well as lost revenue in the form of compensation from the perpetrator. Payment of fines in the form of livestock or money imposed by some traditional authorities as compensation allow perpetrators to escape prosecution through the formal justice system.

Remoteness of some villages also contributes to lack of reporting as victims have to travel long distances to the nearest police station or MGECHW office. It was also felt that law enforcement procedures are weak with regards to traditional issues resulting in inefficient prosecution of perpetrators. Gaps in the coordination of services between MGECHW, Law Enforcement and MoHSS on child marriage violations were also identified as some health care workers in the studied regions were not aware of the procedures to follow when they attend to children under the age of 16 who are pregnant. Follow-up of these cases through law enforcement agents is weak.

5.2 Recommendations

The most effective interventions were found to be those that are integrated within and across multiple sectors and implemented into existing programming. Approaches must be positioned to speak to risk factors for child marriage. In that regard, and based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended to reduce child marriages and their impact in the Namibian context:

5.2.1 Law reform and dissemination

Gaps currently exist in the implementation and enforcement of legislation such as the Child Care and Protection Act (CCPA), Namibian Constitution, Combating of Rape Act, Married Persons Equality Act and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Liquor Act.

Another gap found in the study was lack of a coordinated service among protective services that include MoHSS, MGECHW, MHAJ and law enforcement. Most of the children in child marriages become pregnant, deliver at MOHSS centres and register their children with MHAJ. These are all opportunities to capture and report cases but most times, these opportunities are lost. In some cultures, child marriage practices are acceptable practices.

Some legal provisions, such as age of consent to sex, statutory rape law and the age of marriage, are conflicting. This means a child who is 16 years and above can consent to having sex, but at the same time, they cannot be married because they are under the age of 18 years. The Namibian Constitution allows customary law to exist if it does not conflict with the constitution or any civil laws. However, customary laws and practices that drive these practices have not been unequivocally condemned as violating national laws. There is also a lack of knowledge of official laws amongst duty bearers, communities and victims. Strategies that can be employed to address the above issues are as follows:

- Strengthen consistent implementation and improve the operation of available legislation, such as the Combating of Rape Act, the Married Persons Act and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
- Enforce enacted legislation such as the Child Care Protection Act (CCPA).
- Refine the legal and policy framework to align conflicting instruments such as the Namibian constitution, customary law and the Statutory law.
- Develop and gazette a national policy and strategy on ending child marriage in Namibia.
- Orient law enforcement officers, judicial members and traditional leaders to consistently enforce national laws.

- Increase public awareness of child marriage related laws and services.
- Improve coordination of services between organisations working against unions involving children.

5.2.2 Community mobilization

This involves raising awareness among community members through interventions that enable education to shift attitudes, norms and cultures that perpetuate child marriages. Social behaviour change is key in preventing child marriages. Communities lack knowledge of what defines a child as well as what child marriage means. Traditional practices and beliefs around child marriages are accepted.

Working with parents, men, traditional leaders, young people and school going children to shift attitudes, encourage behaviour change and discourage harmful practices is one way of addressing child marriages. This can be done in the following ways:

- Conduct periodic country-wide campaigns aimed at educating communities (parents, men, women, traditional leaders, school going boys and girls, youths) on child marriage, especially in the regions with high prevalence of child marriages, such as Kavango, Zambezi and Kunene.
- Integration of community mobilization, education and outreach into already existing programs run by line ministries like MOHSS, MGECW, MHAI, MYOSS, MOEAC as well as civil society organisations.
- Engage traditional leaders, political leaders, social figures, churches, faith-based organisations and the media in preventative initiatives.
- Establish community level teams to spearhead preventative programs at community level.

5.2.3 Empowerment of married children, divorced or separated children

Most of the children marrying young drop out of school, are abandoned by their husbands and are living in poverty. Article 20(1) of the Namibian Constitution states, “all persons shall have the right to education”. It was also suggested that girls who marry early are at higher risk of SRH-related problems such as complicated pregnancy and delivery, HIV infection and GBV. These women to develop resilient livelihoods is crucial and recommended strategies are as follows:

- Enhance married girls’ formal education, vocational skills and life skills (HIV prevention methods, SRHR).
- Develop support networks for married children.
- Improve coordination of efforts by protective services through reporting of identified cases of child marriage or cohabitation.
- Strengthen social protection services, such as economic incentives and legal help against GBV.
- Provide adolescent friendly health services to deal with grave health issues identified in the study, such as complicated pregnancies, STIs including HIV and substance abuse.
- Facilitate safe spaces for the provision of education, health and socioeconomic services and information to young mothers and their families and encourage the development of support networks.

5.2.4 Enhanced education of children

Uneducated girls are at a higher risk of child marriage than those with secondary or higher education. Keeping girls in school is one way of avoiding child marriages as the education system promotes ambition as well as information about child marriage. Some relatively remote areas lack schools offering higher grades which results in children dropping out of school and marrying early. Strategies that can be employed to keep children in schools include:

- Promote education and school completion in communities, particularly for the girl child.
- Ensuring equal and equitable access to school for both boys and girls through scholarships, subsidies and establishment of schools that offer all grades in hard to reach areas.
- Meet the needs of school going girls, such as providing sanitary wear, to prevent drop outs.

5.2.5 Enhanced Adolescent and Youth Sexual Reproductive Health

Teenage pregnancy was found to be a driver of child marriage, especially in the Kavango region. After getting pregnant, they mostly cohabitate or marry customarily, since marriage as stipulated by the law is illegal under the age of 18 years. The Education Sector Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy, which applies to all government and government subsidized primary and secondary schools in Namibia, was developed to address the issue of learner pregnancy.

Having factual and relevant information about pregnancy, fertility and contraception, sexually transmitted infections and HIV, and access to family planning options are crucial in preventing unwanted pregnancies. Strategies that can be employed to address teenage pregnancy issues include:

- Strengthen the implementation of the Education Sector Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy by offering a consistent provision of information on sexual and reproductive health to both girls and boys; promoting life skills programs; ensuring the school is a safe environment for learners, free from sexual harassment or sexual abuse by learners, teachers or other staff and involving the community at large in preventative measures against pregnancy.
- Improve access to quality, adolescent- and youth-friendly health services, particularly for sexual and reproductive health.

5.2.6 Addressing Gender based violence and harmful cultural practices

The Namibian Constitution promotes equal rights and dignity of all citizens. It outlaws torture and cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment. This study found the existence of cultural practices that violate the rights of children and drive child marriage.

These include arranged and or forced marriages, initiations and celebrations of womanhood. Child marriages are prohibited in the Namibian constitution but several traditional initiation ceremonies that celebrate womanhood appear to promote them. Strategies that can be employed to address all the above-mentioned issues include:

- Advocate for the abolishment of all harmful and discriminatory customary laws and practices which expose children, especially the girl child, to child marriage and violate their rights.

- Promote alternative culturally grounded practices that do not violate rights and put children at risk.
- Harmonise traditional laws with the legal and policy framework to align with various national and international human rights instruments.
- Educate traditional and religious leaders to uphold the law and protect the rights of children.
- Implement awareness raising campaigns aimed at educating communities on harmful cultural and traditional practices, the rights of children and laws to protect them.
- Empower girls and women to challenge and reject harmful traditional practices by taking control and making their own choices regarding sexuality.
- Address GBV and sexual abuse.

5.2.7 Economic incentives to address poverty

Poverty is one of the most common risk factors behind child marriages in Namibia. Improving the socio-economic status of poor families and vulnerable groups of children was found to delay child marriage. This can be achieved in Namibia through already existing programs under the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare's Wealth redistribution and poverty eradication blueprint. The newly launched Sustainable Livelihoods Project for Rural Communities in Namibia also provides an avenue for action. Strategies that can be employed to address economic challenges include the following:

- Increase food productivity, security and nutrition.
- Strengthen establishment of food banks.
- Strengthen the provision of the social grant to poor and vulnerable persons including child state grants.

5.2.8 Conduct research on specific child marriage issues

The following issues, raised by this study, warrant further research:

- The inclusion of cohabitation as part of a broader description of marriage demands further investigation of cohabitation to determine its prevalence among children. Furthermore, a standard definition of cohabitation is needed for effective programing.
- System failures in responding to child marriage issues such as statutory rape and teenage pregnancy need to be reviewed to give a better understanding of the lack of reporting and lack of duty bearer response.
- Traditional initiations such as Olufuko, and harmful practices that are part of customary law, need to be studied further to establish their role, if any, in child marriages.
- Extensive research be conducted on harmful cultural practices.

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ANNEXURES

Annex 1: Study Tools

Annex 2: Respondent Table

Annex 3: Terms of Reference

Annex 4: Descriptive statistics

Annex 5: Chi-square Test results



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