



Revelations of the National Formative Study on Child Marriage

Child marriage is a human right violation. The Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare (MGEPEWSW) conducted a formative study on Child Marriage in Kunene, Omusati, Ohangwena, Kavango East, Kavango West, and Zambezi regions during 2017. The aim of the study was to understand the magnitude of Child Marriage in order to inform the development and implementation of evidence base prevention and response interventions.

1. The extent of child marriage in Namibia

According to the secondary data from Namibia Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2013, the prevalence of child marriage in Namibia was 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.