

Child Marriages in Rural Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this article was to understand the causes, effects and measures to reduce child marriages in rural Zimbabwe. Child marriages have serious social, economic, health and political implications on young girls and their communities. Young girls are also robbed of their locally and internationally recognised rights. Ending child marriages demands a multi-sectoral approach where all actors, such as parents, national governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local culture, and religion are involved. This article relies on qualitative methodology to gather data. Purposive sampling and snow ball sampling methods were used to identify key informants and women who were victims of child marriages. Stakeholders involved in children's rights should provide reproductive health and education services to local communities in order to end child marriages.

KEYWORDS

Child Brides, Child Marriage, Child, Marriage, Poverty, Reproductive Health, Young Girls, Young Women

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INTRODUCTION

UNICEF (2014) estimated that globally 700 million were married before attaining the age of 18. It further indicated that about 250 million girls were married before the age of fifteen years. Child marriage is an indication of gender inequality in most African societies. It reflects social and cultural norms that are used to perpetuate gender discrimination in society. Child marriages are commonly practised in Southern Africa and South Asian countries. Ten countries with the highest rates of child marriages are found in the two continents. According to a UNICEF Report (2014) over 280 million girls are likely to become child brides before turning 18 if there are no sufficient efforts to reduce child marriage. The report further states that the figure is estimated to rise to about 320 million by 2050 due to increased population growth. The number of women married during child hood is further estimated to rise from 700 million to 950 million by 2030 and further rise to 1, 2 billion by 2050. Each year it is estimated that the number of girls married before attaining the age of 18 will rise from 15 million to 16,5 million by 2030 (UNICEF, 2014). The report also indicated that in Sub-Saharan Africa 39 percent of girls are married before the age of 18 while 31 percent of girls in Zimbabwe are married before the age of 18 putting the country among four southern African countries with the highest rates of girl child marriages. Girls living in rural areas are mainly affected by child marriage. Poorest households are more than four times likely to have girls married before the age of 18 than girls from the 20 percent of the richest households (UNICEF, 2016). A UNICEF Report (2015) indicated that in Zimbabwe child marriages in Mashonaland Central province recorded 50 percent, Mashonaland West 42 percent, Mashonaland East 36 percent, Midlands 31 percent, Manicaland 30 percent, and Bulawayo 10 percent.

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in July 2015 unanimously adopted a resolution to 'eliminate child, early and forced marriages'. One of the targets (5.3) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically includes the elimination of child marriage as one of its targets (www.girlsnotbrides.org). A number of International organisations and NGOs have invested a lot in developing interventions that raise awareness about the negative consequences of child marriage. They have also come up with incentives for parents to postpone marriage for young children. Parents have been urged to provide young girls and boys new opportunities to acquire skills and alternatives instead of engaging in early marriages and early motherhood.

There are various international, continental, regional, and domestic legislations that prohibit child marriages. However, despite these legislations, the practice of child marriages is still very rampant in rural Zimbabwe. A number of reasons have been given to justify the high rates of child marriages in rural areas. Some of the reasons relate to high incidences of poverty, protection of girls, fear of loss of virginity before marriage, family honour, provision of stability during unstable social periods, lack of education, and discriminatory customary and religious norms and practices (International Humanist and Ethical Union, 2007). The reasons cited above have a serious impact on women and girls. It is important to examine the framework within

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