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ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF CRIMINALIZING CHILD MARRIAGES IN ZIMUNYA,
MUTARE RURAL DISTRICT

BY

CAROLINE NYAMAYARO

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Abstract

This study investigates the economic benefits of enforcing laws against child marriages in Zimunya, Mutare Rural District. The researcher aimed to explore the relationship between the criminalization of child marriages and its effects on the local economy, particularly focusing on household incomes, educational attainment, and employment opportunities. The central research problem addresses whether the enforcement of these laws results in economic benefits or challenges for families and the broader community in Zimunya. To achieve this, the researcher employed qualitative research methods, which included interviews to gather in-depth insights from community members. The sample size consisted of 20 participants, including parents/guardians of child marriage survivors (15), community leaders (3), and representatives from the Department of Social Development (2). Purposive sampling was employed to specifically target individuals with firsthand experience or in-depth knowledge of child marriage, ensuring the study's relevance while optimizing resource use. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the local context and the diverse perspectives of stakeholders, including parents, educators, and community leaders. However, a significant challenge encountered was the sensitivity of the topic, which made some participants uncomfortable sharing their experiences. This discomfort potentially limited the depth of data collected, highlighting the need for careful handling of sensitive issues in future research. The findings indicate that criminalizing child marriages can lead to positive economic outcomes. For instance, increased educational opportunities for girls were noted, as families began to prioritize schooling over early marriages. This shift not only enhances individual prospects but also contributes to the overall economic development of the community by fostering a more educated workforce. Additionally, the study revealed that families who delayed marriages for their daughters experienced improved household incomes, as parents could invest more in education and skills development, leading to better employment opportunities. However, the transition to a legal framework that prohibits child marriages is not without its challenges. The research uncovered resistance from traditional practices and cultural norms that favor early marriages, which can create friction within communities. Some families expressed concerns about the economic benefits of delaying marriages, fearing that it might lead to increased financial burdens. Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of community engagement and education in addressing these cultural barriers, suggesting that legal enforcement alone may not be sufficient to change deeply rooted practices. The implications of this research suggest that while legal frameworks are essential for protecting children, comprehensive community engagement and support systems are crucial for facilitating the transition and maximizing the benefits of such laws. Policymakers are encouraged to implement educational programs that raise awareness about the long-term benefits of delaying marriage and investing in children's education. The research underscores the complex interplay between legal measures and economic factors in addressing child marriages. The findings advocate for a holistic approach that combines legal enforcement with community education and support to ensure sustainable economic development. The research output does not appear to be patentable, as it primarily consists of qualitative findings and insights rather than a novel invention or process.

Keywords: Criminalization, Child Marriage, Zimunya

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my original work and that it has neither been submitted nor is being concurrently submitted for any degree in any other institution.

Caroline Nyamayaro



Student's Full Name

Student's Signature &

Date Dr. Elizabeth Rutsate



25/10/2024

Main Supervisor's Full Name

Supervisor's Signature &

Date

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents for being my pillar of strength.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACRWC - African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

AU - African Union

AUREC- Africa University Research Ethics Committee

CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CRC - Convention on the Rights of the Child

CSOs - Civil Society Organizations

HRBA- Human Rights-Based Approach

MICS- Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

NGOs- Non-Governmental Organizations

SADC- Southern African Development Community

UN - United Nations

UNICEF - United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNWOMEN- United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

ZIMSTAT - Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Child marriage is still a widespread problem with significant socioeconomic ramifications, especially for underprivileged and rural populations. A critical area of intervention in Zimunya, a district distinguished by its distinct socioeconomic terrain, is the criminalization of child marriages. The socioeconomic effects of this legislative change are examined in this dissertation, with a particular emphasis on how the outlawing of child marriages impacts individuals, families and community at large. Significant socioeconomic obstacles, such as high rates of poverty, restricted access to education, and deeply ingrained traditional customs, confront Zimunya in Zimbabwe. Child marriage exacerbates these issues by limiting options for young girls and perpetuating cycles of poverty. It is frequently motivated by cultural conventions or economic need. The legislative framework designed to stop this behavior is a vital step in defending children's rights and advancing gender equality. This dissertation will also examine the possibilities for policy-driven reform to address the underlying economic reasons contributing to child marriage, as well as the larger implications for community development.

1.2 Background to the study

Child marriage is a prevalent practice in developing countries, including Zimbabwe, and it poses serious threats to the health, education, and overall well-being of girls. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), nearly twelve million girls worldwide marry before the age of eighteen each year. In Zimbabwe, where child marriage is a significant concern, some girls are forced into marriage before they reach the age of consent, jeopardizing their aspirations for education and employment opportunities.

(UNICEF, 2023) Child marriages has led to a significant number of deaths among young pregnant women and high maternal mortality rates in some parts of Zimbabwe, with teenage pregnancies being the primary cause. Poverty, religious beliefs, and cultural norms that endorse early marriages contribute to the prevalence of child marriage, particularly among members of the apostolic sect (Plan International, 2016). Outrageously, 34% of girls in Zimbabwe marry before the age of eighteen, while only 2% of boys do (Girls Not Brides, 2024). For numerous years, this has resulted in a significant number of deaths among young pregnant women, as well as high maternal mortality rates in parts of Zimbabwe.

Teenage pregnancies have been shown to be the primary cause of maternal mortality in Zimbabwe. (SolidarMed, 2023). Religion, particularly within some apostolic sects, has played a significant role in perpetuating child marriages, as it encourages polygamous unions and marrying young girls. While child marriage is considered taboo in some societies, such as the Roman Catholic Church, it is tolerated and widely practiced within some apostolic and certain Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe (Dr David Foya & Ncube, 2022). Child marriage is a typical issue among members of some apostolic sects, as a religious practice. (Girls Not Brides, 2024).

Child marriages are promoted within some apostolic sects in Zimbabwe due to a combination of cultural, religious, economic, and gender-related factors. Cultural norms prioritize early marriages as a means to protect virtue, preserve family honor, and maintain societal conformity (Tembo, 2021). Religious beliefs within the sects often interpret scriptures as endorsing child marriages for spiritual purity or as divine commandments. Economic considerations, including poverty and limited opportunities, drive families to view early marriages as a way to alleviate financial burdens. (Mavhinga, 2015).

It is acknowledged that child marriage violates human rights and impedes progress. Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals which focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls specifically target 5.3 which calls for the elimination of all harmful practices, including child marriage and female genital mutilation set forth by the UN is to end harmful practices like child marriage by the year 2030. (United Nations, 2015). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) are two international conventions and accords that demand the end of child marriage (UNICEF, 2023). The African Union, in 1990, took action to address child marriage at the regional level by enacting the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), which forbids child marriage and advocates for its abolition.

To further expedite efforts to eradicate child marriage in Southern Africa by 2030, the Southern African Development Community has also produced a Regional Strategy on Ending Child Marriage. (UNICEF, 2023) In 2022, the Zimbabwean Government also passed an amendment to the Marriage Act, which establishes the legal minimum age of marriage at eighteen years old, as part of its efforts to combat child marriage (Veritas Zimbabwe, 2022). Nonetheless, there are still issues with this laws implementation and enforcement, especially in rural areas where child marriage is most common. Realizing the negative impact of child marriages on girls' well-being and growth, there has been a renewed global focus on tackling the issue.

One strategy that has received substantial attention is the criminalization of child marriages. Criminalization includes passing laws that specifically prohibit and penalizes the act in order to deter abusers while also protecting children's rights. Although criminalization is supported as a strategy of combating child marriages, its ramifications,

viability, and potential obstacles in the Zimbabwean context need additional investigation. Addressing the specific repercussions, possibilities, and challenges involved with criminalizing child marriages in Zimbabwe is critical for policymakers, practitioners, and actors developing effective measures to combat this damaging practice and defend the rights of young girls. Adding on, Child marriage is still a major socioeconomic problem in many places, including Zimbabwe's Zimunya, Mutare Rural District. The purpose of this study is to investigate, particularly in the context of Zimunya, Mutare Rural District, the socioeconomic ramifications of such criminalization. Like many other African countries, Zimbabwe has always struggled with the issue of child marriage. Poverty, cultural customs, and a lack of educational opportunities are some of the factors that contribute to this occurrence, especially in rural places like Zimunya. (Girls Not Brides, 2024). Prior to laws being changed, cultural norms and financial pressures frequently encouraged and supported child marriages. The socioeconomic impact of child marriage is highlighted by how common it is in Zimunya. Early marriages have been associated with increased risks for young mothers' health, higher fertility rates, and the continuation of poverty cycles (CAMFED, 2017).

Girls who marry young have lower educational achievement because they are less likely to finish their education, which limits their opportunities for future success and economic empowerment. Making child marriages illegal in Zimunya presents opportunities as well as obstacles. Legal reform, on the one hand, promotes the health, education, and general well-being of vulnerable children by offering a protective framework (Moyo, 2020). Girls who postpone marriage have more opportunity to pursue their education and career goals, which will enable them to make significant long-term economic contributions. The shift

away from deeply ingrained cultural norms and economic realities, however, is fraught with difficulties (girlsnotbrides, 2017).

1.3 Statement of the problem

Child marriage is a centuries-old tradition that raises concerns for human rights, education, public health, and development worldwide (Ellsberg, 2015). Because it impacts adolescent females more than any other social group, it poses a major risk to their health and welfare. Adolescent girls are especially at risk of child marriage in disadvantaged rural areas, according to (Mukombachoto, 2016). Adolescent girls seldom negotiate their marriages in these sometimes impoverished communities; instead, parents and/or other community elders have the last say in the matter (Mukombachoto, 2016). Adolescent females are, in fact, pressured or pushed into marriages against their will (Fegurson, 2017.). In certain cultures, child marriages are sometimes rooted in religious beliefs and traditions that have been passed down through generations (Rembe, 2015).

Despite the criminalization of child marriages in Zimbabwe, the practice persists, as evidenced by a 34% prevalence rate among girls married before the age of eighteen and a 5% rate among those married before the age of fifteen (Butaumacho, 2024). This can be attributed to the under-reporting of cases which is influenced by societal pressures and fear of legal consequences for perpetrators. Recent incidents, such as the abuse of minors by religious leaders and the death of young girls during childbirth, highlight the ongoing issue of child marriage and the need for stronger enforcement of existing laws and protection of children's rights. In light of the above, while the criminalization of child marriages in Zimbabwe is a significant legal and social milestone, its economic impact on

the community is not well understood. This study seeks to explore how the enforcement of laws against child marriages affects the local economy, including potential shifts in household incomes, educational attainment, and employment opportunities. Specifically, the research will investigate whether criminalizing child marriages leads to economic benefits or challenges for families and the broader community in Zimunya.

1.4 Research Objectives

The main objective of the study is to evaluate the economic benefits of criminalizing child marriages in Zimunya, Mutare Rural District, focusing on how such a measure could improve economic outcomes, reduce poverty, and enhance opportunities for girls' education and empowerment.

1. To analyze the economic implications of child marriages on families in Zimunya
2. Assessing the potential economic benefits of educating girls as an alternative to early marriage
3. To evaluate the role of community awareness and legal frameworks in reducing child marriages and their economic impacts

1.5 Research Questions

1. How does early marriage affect the long-term financial stability of families in the community?
2. What economic advantages do families experience when girls remain in school instead of marrying early?
3. What impact does increased awareness of laws against child marriage have on community attitudes towards early marriage in Zimunya?

1.6 Assumptions

The study assumes that community awareness of the legal prohibition of child marriages exists in Zimunya, alongside entrenched cultural influences that sustain the practice. It presupposes that economic factors like poverty and limited educational opportunities contribute significantly to the prevalence of child marriages. It further assumes that criminalizing these marriages may enhance educational attainment and health outcomes for girls while posing challenges in enforcement due to community attitudes and resource constraints. Additionally, it posits that child marriages have adverse economic effects on households, perpetuating cycles of poverty in the region.

1.7 Significance of the study

The study provides critical evidence to justify and strengthen laws criminalizing child marriage by highlighting its economic benefits, offering policymakers quantifiable data to support decisions and allocate resources effectively. It empowers communities and advocacy groups to challenge harmful cultural norms by demonstrating the financial and developmental advantages of ending child marriage. By linking child marriage to economic stagnation, the study emphasizes its role in limiting education and economic opportunities for girls, while showcasing the potential of criminalization to reduce poverty, improve workforce productivity, and drive long-term economic growth. It guides targeted interventions in underprivileged areas like Zimunya, ensuring efforts align with broader developmental goals. Furthermore, the study aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5 and SDG 1), reinforcing Zimbabwe's commitment to gender equality, poverty reduction, and sustainable development.

1.8 Delimitation of the study

The study focused on the national level, rather than on regional or global trends and initiatives. The study was conducted through the analysis of secondary data and literature, it also include primary research in selected areas in Zimunya.

1.9 Limitation of the study

There was limited data and evidence on the implications of criminalizing child marriages in Zimbabwe, particularly regarding long-term impacts and unintended consequences, which made it difficult to draw firm conclusions or make evidence-based recommendations. Additionally, the issue of child marriage was deeply ingrained in cultural and social norms in many parts of the country, making it challenging to gather accurate information or implement policies perceived as opposing these norms. These limitations were addressed by employing purposive sampling to target individuals with firsthand knowledge of the issue, including community leaders, social development representatives, and parents/guardians of survivors. Culturally sensitive approaches, such as engaging trusted community leaders and using participatory methods, were utilized to foster openness and ensure the reliability of the data collected.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

1.1 Introduction

Child marriage remains a critical global issue, with far-reaching consequences for the rights and well-being of millions of children worldwide. Child marriages, defined as unions between individuals under the age of 18, are common in many areas, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds. (United Nations Population Fund, n.d.). This practice disproportionately impacts girls, limiting their access to education, health, and personal development while increasing their risk of violence, poverty, and limited life options. While international accords, policy reforms, and awareness campaigns have been used to oppose child marriages, the complex and diverse nature of the issue requires ongoing attention and action to defend children's rights and well-being around the world (Haarr). In addition about 125 million of the 650 million women and girls who married before the age of 18 still live in Africa and 12 million children marry each year, with Sub-Saharan Africa having the highest rate of child marriage at 38% (Unicef, 2022). Child marriage rates in the region are decreasing but need to be expedited for major change. At current rates, eliminating child marriage in Africa will take at least 100 years. Africa's rapid population expansion may counterbalance the reduction in prevalence rates, thereby increasing the number of child brides (Unicef, 2022). As the burden of child marriage moves to Africa, it may soon surpass Asia as the region with the highest number of child marriages globally. Currently, Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for one-third of girls who married before their 18th birthday, up from one-seventh 25 years ago (Unicef, 2022). With this in mind, the African human rights system continue to strengthen efforts to eliminate child marriage in the area. This chapter provides an overview of the human rights framework from an international to a national perspective before discussing the social

consequences, child rights, and protection issues of criminalizing child marriages in Africa.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: Structural-Functional Theory

This sociological theory sees society as a complex system with components that work together to foster solidarity and stability (Allen, 2023). The Structural-Functional Theory emphasizes the role of social institutions like the legal system in preserving social order and controlling conduct.

2.2.1 Relevance of the theory

The Structural Functional Theory is relevant to the topic of “Economic Benefits of Criminalizing Child Marriages in Zimunya, Mutare Rural District” as it emphasizes how societal structures and institutions work together to maintain stability and promote development. Criminalizing child marriages reinforces the roles of key institutions, such as education, family, and law enforcement, by protecting children, promoting gender equality, and encouraging girls to pursue education and participate in the labor force. This, in turn, creates a more skilled and productive workforce, reduces poverty, and fosters economic growth in the region. The theory also provides insight into how societal norms can evolve over time by instituting legal measures against child marriage, communities are guided toward adopting cultural values that align with modern economic and developmental goals. Furthermore, the theory addresses the dysfunctions caused by child marriage, such as the perpetuation of poverty, poor health outcomes, and gender inequality, demonstrating how criminalization contributes to a healthier, more stable, and

economically thriving society. This approach ensures that societal structures adapt to meet the needs of the community while fostering long-term progress and resilience.

2.3 International and National Human Rights Legal and Policy Frameworks used in Protecting Children's Rights

Advocacy campaigns, national laws, and international agreements are essential in defending children's rights, especially the freedom from child marriage. These programs and frameworks give attempts to stop child marriage, advance children's best interests, and make sure children aren't pushed into marriages against their will a legal and normative foundation. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) are just a few of the international conventions and agreements that offer a framework for addressing child marriage. These treaties require states to take action to prevent and outlaw child marriage and establish children's right to be free from violence and discrimination (BetterCareNetwork). I strongly believe that advocacy campaigns, national laws, and international agreements play a crucial role in protecting children's rights, particularly in combatting child marriage. These initiatives provide a legal and normative foundation for addressing this harmful practice and ensuring that children are not forced into marriages against their will. International conventions such as the CRC, CEDAW, and ACRWC offer a framework that obliges states to take action in preventing and prohibiting child marriage while upholding children's rights to freedom from violence and discrimination. These efforts are essential in promoting children's best interests and safeguarding their well-being. Many nations have created laws and regulations at the national level to protect

survivors and forbid child marriage. For instance, the government of Ethiopia has created a national strategy to combat child marriage that consists of support services for girls and their families, legal reforms, and education and awareness-raising initiatives (World Vision, n.d.). A government-run cash transfer program in Bangladesh offers families financial incentives to keep their girls in school and postpone marriage (Field, Glennerster, Buchmann, & Murphy, 2016). Encouraging grassroots movements, civil society organisations (CSOs), and activists to advocate for the rights of children and advance the goal of ending child marriage are also essential. Educating people about the negative effects of child marriage, advocating for legislative and policy changes, and offering assistance and support to survivors and their families are a few examples of these initiatives. For instance, the Girls Not Brides coalition in India has pushed for the adoption of laws that would help survivors and raise the legal age of marriage for girls (Girls Not Brides, 2021). A multilevel framework is offered by international conventions, state regulations, and advocacy initiatives to combat child marriage and advance the rights of children. Progress towards the abolition of child marriage and the achievement of children's rights and well-being can be made through the establishment of legal and normative norms, the implementation of evidence-based policies and initiatives, and the involvement of communities and stakeholders.

The criminalization of child marriage is a critical step towards protecting and promoting children's rights, particularly the rights of girls who are disproportionately affected by this harmful practice. By establishing a legal minimum age for marriage and imposing penalties for violations, governments can help to prevent child marriage, promote the best interests of children, and ensure that children are not forced into marriages against their will. The rights of children to health, education, and protection from exploitation and

violence can all be strengthened by criminalization. In addition to limiting girls' access to economic and educational possibilities, child marriage is linked to a number of detrimental health effects, including as an increased risk of maternal and newborn mortality (Unicef, 2023). Governments can guarantee that girls can realize their rights to health, education, and development by working to prevent child marriage. But in the case of child marriage, criminalization is not enough to properly safeguard and advance children's rights. It must be used in conjunction with other strategies, such as campaigns to combat poverty, gender inequality, and social norms that devalue women and girls, as well as education and awareness-raising campaigns, support services for survivors, and other measures (Veritas Zimbabwe, 2016). Additionally, it's critical to make sure that initiatives to outlaw child marriage don't unintentionally hurt or violate children's rights. Laws that, for instance, severely penalize parents or guardians who assist in child marriages may result in the prosecution and incarceration of caregivers, which may have detrimental effects on the growth and well-being of children.

Adding on, promoting the rights and welfare of children requires addressing the underlying causes of child marriage. Child marriage is often caused by poverty, since families may view marriage as a means of securing financial stability through the payment of a bride price or dowry, or as a way to lessen the financial burden of raising their daughters (Plan International, n.d.). Child marriage can be less common if efforts to combat poverty are made, such as giving girls and their families' access to the workforce. Child marriage is also largely caused by social standards that devalue women and girls as well as gender inequity. Girls' roles are typically restricted to marriage and parenting in many civilizations where girls are viewed as less valuable than boys (Girls Not Brides, n.d.) By giving girls access to leadership and educational opportunities, among other

things, efforts to advance gender equality and empower girls can assist to subvert these damaging stereotypes and advance the agency and rights of girls. Support and resources for girls who are at risk of or impacted by child marriage should be provided in addition to addressing the underlying causes of child marriage. This could entail giving them access to legal aid and other forms of support, as well as counseling, health services, and education (Unicef, 2017). It is feasible to assist girls in overcoming the negative effects of child marriage and creating better futures for themselves and their family by offering them all-encompassing support.

Criminalizing child marriage is a crucial instrument for safeguarding and advancing children's rights, but it needs to be a part of an all-encompassing strategy that takes into account the many causes and effects of child marriage. All children can live in a more just and equitable world if education, support services, and community involvement are combined with legislative and policy changes.

2.3.1 Child marriage and the African human rights system

Africa has one of the world's three most established regional human rights systems. The African human rights system, like other regional ones, was inspired by global institutions established to further human rights protection. Africa's human rights system is part of the African Union (AU), which was created in 1963 as the Organization of African Unity. The African human rights system relies heavily on the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights for its prescriptive aspects. This charter has been supplemented by further normative texts that have been adopted and they include three texts that address concerns of child marriage, namely, the 2003 Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child (a treaty addressing

children's rights) and the 2006 African Youth Charter. These three measures, in addition to the 2008 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development and the new (2016) Model Law on Ending Child Marriage, focus on child marriage in Africa. Each of these contains clauses that prohibit underage marriage, as stated below.

2.3.1.1. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) Article 21 (2)

“Child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be eighteen years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory.”

2.3.1.2. The African Youth Charter (2006) Article 8 (2):

“Young men and women of full age who enter into marriage shall do so based on their free consent and shall enjoy equal rights and responsibilities.”

2.3.1.3. Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) (Maputo Protocol) Article 6 (a):

“State Parties shall ensure that women and men enjoy equal rights and are regarded as equal partners in marriage. They shall enact appropriate national legislative measures to guarantee that no marriage shall take place without the free and full consent of both parties.” - Article 6 (b): “The minimum age of marriage for women shall be eighteen years.

2.3.1.4. SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008) Article 8 (2):

“Legislation on marriage shall ensure: (a) that no person under the age of 18 shall marry, unless otherwise specified by law which takes into account the best interests and welfare of the child. (b) Every marriage takes place with the free and full consent of both parties.”

Several efforts and commitments aim to address child marriage, including:

2.3.1.5. The Africa we want Agenda 2063 (2013) which prioritizes the promotion and protection of human rights, particularly children’s rights, and commits to eradicating harmful cultural practices, such as child marriage, through legal reforms, awareness campaigns, and community engagement. (Africa Union, 2015)

2.3.1.6. Addis Ababa Declaration on Child Marriage (2014) The African Union Summit endorsed the Addis Ababa Declaration against Child Marriage in 2014. Member nations of the African Union have committed to accelerating efforts to eradicate child marriage and defend girls’ rights. The declaration establishes specific goals and actions for governments, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders to address the root causes of child marriage, improve access to education, healthcare, and social services, and implement and enforce laws that protect girls from early and forced marriages (United Nations Population Fund, 2014).

2.3.1.7. African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa (2014-2016)
The African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa was officially launched in 2014 as a continent-wide movement to organize governments, civil society organisations, traditional leaders, and communities to combat child marriage. The campaign intends to increase awareness about the harmful consequences of child marriage, push for legal

reforms and policy changes, strengthen child protection systems, and give support and assistance to child marriage survivors (Girls Not Brides, 2024).

While many African countries, like Zimbabwe, have ratified all of the above-mentioned instruments and are part of the commitments made and initiatives being rolled out, dealing with child marriage remains a daunting task, and the general rate of child marriage in Africa exceeds the world's average (centrepublishings, 2018). Child marriage persists in Africa due to poor execution of laws and obligations made. Poverty, a lack of education, and inadequate birth and marriage registration standards are just a few of the other factors that contribute to child marriage (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

2.4 Legal and Policy Frameworks used to Address Child Marriage in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, child marriage is a serious problem, with one in three girls getting married before turning eighteen (Unicef, 2023). Numerous causes, such as poverty, social and cultural norms, and girls' limited access to economic and educational prospects, are what fuel this (Girls Not Brides, n.d.). Girls who are married as children have serious repercussions, such as early pregnancy health concerns, restricted access to economic and educational possibilities, and exposure to gender-based violence, including domestic abuse (Mikyas Abera, 2020). Zimbabwe has taken a number of national, regional, and international pledges in response to this problem. Zimbabwe has ratified a number of international human rights treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which forbid child marriage (Unicef, 2023).

It is disheartening to acknowledge the significant issue of child marriage in Zimbabwe, where one in three girls is forced into marriage before the age of eighteen. The causes

behind this practice, including poverty, social and cultural norms, and limited opportunities for girls, exacerbate the problem. The consequences faced by these young girls, such as health risks due to early pregnancy, restricted access to education and economic prospects, and exposure to gender-based violence, are deeply concerning. However, it is encouraging to note that Zimbabwe has taken steps to address this issue by ratifying international human rights treaties like the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which explicitly prohibit child marriage. It is my hope that these commitments will translate into effective measures and actions to protect the rights and well-being of girls in Zimbabwe, ensuring they can grow up in a safe and supportive environment. Zimbabwe is a member of the African Union, a regional organization that has enacted a number of laws pertaining to child marriage, including the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Africa Union, 2013).

Zimbabwe has implemented a number of national initiatives to address child marriage. Zimbabwe's National Strategy for Ending Child Marriage was introduced in 2016 and lays out a thorough plan for dealing with the problem (Government of Zimbabwe, 2016). Furthermore, laws against child marriage have been passed in Zimbabwe; one such law is the Marriages Act of 2014, which establishes the legal minimum age of marriage at 18 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2014). But there are still issues with upholding these regulations and addressing the underlying reasons of child marriage. It is encouraging to see Zimbabwe, as a member of the African Union, actively participating in regional efforts to combat child marriage. The African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child demonstrate the country's

commitment to addressing this issue at a regional level. At the national level, the introduction of Zimbabwe's National Strategy for Ending Child Marriage in 2016 reflects an important step towards tackling this problem comprehensively.

The passage of laws, such as the Marriages Act of 2014, which sets the legal minimum age of marriage at 18, is a positive development in aligning national legislation with international standards. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that despite these advancements, challenges remain in effectively implementing and enforcing these regulations and addressing the root causes of child marriage. It is essential for Zimbabwe to continue working towards strengthening institutional mechanisms, raising awareness, and providing support services to ensure the effective protection of children's rights and the prevention of child marriage in the country.

Zimbabwe has laws and a legal framework in place to deal with child marriages, but there are still issues with implementation and enforcement. Adding on, Zimbabwe has made further measures to address child marriages in addition to other laws and legal framework. For instance, the Marriage Act of 2022 (Chapter 5:15) which sets the minimum age of marriage to eighteen years of age, and the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage, which outlines a multi-sectoral strategy to address the problem, incorporating changes to laws and policies, social protection, and education (Government of Zimbabwe, 2016). The plan also stresses how crucial it is to interact with traditional leaders and communities in order to change the social and cultural norms that support child marriage. Zimbabwe has created Child Protection Committees at the national, provincial, and district levels to coordinate efforts to address child protection concerns, including child marriage, in terms of implementation and enforcement (Taruvunga & Molin., 2015). In addition, the government has created special courts to hear instances involving gender-based violence,

including child marriage, and taught judges and law enforcement officers on the legal framework surrounding it. Nonetheless, there are still issues with tackling child marriage in Zimbabwe. These include the need for more data and research on the prevalence and reasons of child marriage in the nation, the lack of resources for implementation and enforcement, and opposition from some communities and traditional authorities. It will take sustained work and cooperation between the government, civic society, and other stakeholders to address these issues.

Although they are a crucial part of attempts to combat child marriage in Zimbabwe, legal measures have not always been successful in stopping the practice. On the one hand, the adoption of legislation banning child marriage and raising the legal age of marriage to 18 has given rise to a legal framework for resolving the matter and increased public awareness of the detrimental effects of child marriage. Victims' access to justice has also increased with the creation of special courts to address cases involving gender-based violence, including child marriage. However, a number of issues have hampered these legal measures' efficacy. Among them are the insufficient resources for execution and enforcement, especially in remote and underprivileged areas. Furthermore, claiming cultural and religious customs, certain communities and traditional authorities have opposed efforts to end child marriage (UN Women Africa, 2021). This emphasizes how crucial it is to address the social and cultural norms as well as the legal ones that support child marriage.

Furthermore, in Zimbabwe, there are a number of additional obstacles that restrict the efficacy of legal actions to resolve child marriage. One of these is that many girls in the nation, especially those living in rural regions, lack birth certificates and other forms of identity. This may make it more difficult to enforce regulations pertaining to the age of

marriage and may expose girls to abuse and exploitation. Girls' restricted access to economic and educational possibilities is another issue, especially in rural and marginalized regions (Gray Group International, 2024). Due to this, families may view marriage as a means of ensuring their daughters' financial security or may fail to recognize the need of investing in their education, which can leave them more susceptible to child marriage. To effectively and sustainably address child marriage, it is imperative to address these underlying social and economic challenges. In order to effectively address child marriage in Zimbabwe, government institutions, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders must work together more and coordinate their efforts. There has been some coordination of efforts through the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage, for example, but more may be done to make sure that resources and interventions are directed appropriately and that knowledge is dispersed between sectors and geographical areas.

2.5 Recent legal responses to child marriage and children's rights in Zimbabwe

In response to its obligations Zimbabwe enacted various Acts addressing child marriage. The 2013 Constitution serves as the cornerstone of this legal structure. Subsections 78(1) and (2) of the Constitution establish the minimum marital age of eighteen years and ban forced marriage. These sub-sections also require the state to take adequate steps to guarantee that no marriage is entered into without the free and informed agreement of the intending spouses. More pertinent to addressing cultural traditions such as kuzvarira, in which a girl is forced to marry her sister's husband in order to have children, the Constitution compels the state to take steps to ensure that children are not pledged in marriage (MADZIVIRE, 2019). Aside from the Constitution, the Customary Marriage Act (Cap 5:07), which governs registered customary marriages in Zimbabwe, is also

applicable. Section 11 of the Act prevents girls from promising themselves in marriage. However, the Act does not specify the marriage age.

The Plan+18 Programme notes that this provision falls short in addressing child marriage because puberty is considered a marriageable age according to custom (Mwambene, 2018). The Mudzuru case in Zimbabwe's Constitutional Court is a more recent and celebrated attempt to address child marriage. In Mudzuru, two young women, ages 18 and 19, filed the case to the Constitutional Court under section 85(1) of Zimbabwe's Constitution (Mudzuru & Anor v Ministry of Justice, Legal & Parliamentary Affairs N.O. & Ors , 2016). The two applicants pushed for the protection of children's rights, particularly girl children who face the hardships of child marriage. The Court had to rule whether Section 78(1) of the Zimbabwean Constitution has the effect of making eighteen years the minimum age for marriage in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the Court had to decide whether section 22(1) of the Marriage Act, which prohibited the marriage of a boy under the age of 18 and a girl under the age of 16, except with the Minister of Justice's written permission, and the Customary Marriages Act¹⁰³, which has no predetermined marriage age, were constitutional (Mudzuru & Anor v Ministry of Justice, Legal & Parliamentary Affairs N.O. & Ors , 2016).

2.6 Drivers of Child Marriages

In most African countries including Zimbabwe, child marriage is still a persistent issue with concerning social underpinnings that support this harmful practice. The reality on the ground depicts a far more complex picture, despite Zimbabwe's laws setting the minimum age of marriage at 18. Poverty, cultural norms, humanitarian crises and other factors all

combine to force many young girls into marriage at ages that violate their fundamental human rights.

The Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (Zimstat) reports that 33.7% of girls under the age of eighteen are married. Out of three girls under the age of eighteen, this is the case. As an illustration, 2% of guys marry before turning eighteen.

Zimbabwe is one of the twenty African nations with the highest rate of underage marriages.

Country	Girls married by 15	Girls married by 18	Boys married by 18
Niger	28%	76%	6%
Central African Republic	26%	61%	17%
Chad	24%	61%	8%
Mali	16%	54%	2%
Mozambique	17%	53%	10%
Burkina Faso	10%	52%	4%

South Sudan	9%	52%	—
Guinea	17%	47%	2%
Nigeria	16%	43%	3%
Malawi	9%	42%	7%
Eritrea	13%	41%	2%
Ethiopia	14%	40%	5%
Madagascar	13%	40%	12%
Mauritania	18%	37%	2%
Somalia	17%	36%	6%
Liberia	9%	36%	9%
Sudan	12%	34%	—
Uganda	7%	34%	6%
Zimbabwe	5%	34%	2%

Senegal	9%	31%	1%
Tanzania	5%	31%	4%

Source: UNICEF data, updated February 2021

2.6.1. Prevalence rate of child marriages by geographic area

Mashonaland Central has the highest rate of child marriages, with 49.5% of girls and 6.7% of boys getting married before turning 18; Bulawayo has the lowest rate, with 13.5% of girls getting married before turning 18, and Matabeleland South has the lowest rate, with 1.7% of boys getting married before turning 18.

Province	Girls	Boys
Bulawayo	13.5%	2.7%
Manicaland	36%	3.4%
Mashonaland Central	49.5%	6.7%
Mashonaland East	37.8%	3.9%
Mashonaland West	41.7%	5.6%
Matabeleland North	32.9%	5.5%
Matabeleland South	22.2%	1.7%

Midlands	30.4%	2.7%
Masvingo	35.3%	4.2%
Harare	21.7%	2.7%

Source: Zimstat MICS 2019(Zimbabwe Gender Commission: Provincial and National Gender Forum Report)

2.6.2. The religious factor

According to a journal paper's findings: Causes of Child Marriages in Zimbabwe: A Case of Mashonaland Province in Zimbabwe by Cynthia Dzimiri, Plaxcedes Chikunda and Viola Ingwani shows how religious beliefs also contribute to child marriages (Dzimiri, Chikunda, & Ingwani, 2017). The findings proving that religious beliefs are also a cause are of a church leader who vigorously denied that religious beliefs are a major driver of child marriages and defended the practice, stating that it is done after mutual consent even in cases where the man is older than the girl and therefore there is no crime. Another explanation given by a boy in form four was that; the majority of these young girls at school do not want to be in relationships with us boys our own age because we do not have money. Instead, these girls are more interested in getting married to the "rich" church elders so that they can attend church gatherings wearing pricey clothing and eating delicious food. While the majority of the girls remained silent during the discussions, one girl affirmed the above, stating that these boys are lying because older people respect us and, in the end, it is a person's choice to fall in love with an older person. However, she did not advocate for girls to marry older men. (Dzimiri, Chikunda, & Ingwani, 2017) Adding on, child abuse and exploitation are other causes of early child marriages, however

people tend to hide behind tradition and religion. Typically, they take use of their prophetic role by personally selecting women for the older church members who are already married. (Sibanda)

According to Zimstat’ 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), families with heads who classified their faith as “traditional” had the greatest rate of child marriages—50.9%.

Protestants, which include Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Adventists, and Anglicans, have the lowest rate of child marriages (16.2%).

Religion of household head	Share of girls married before 18
Traditional	50.9%
Apostolic sect	46.2%
No religion	46.2%
Zion	36.4%
Other Christian	29.4%
Pentecostal	23.6%
Roman Catholic	17.4%

Protestant	16.2%
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Source: Zimstat MICS 2019

2.6.3. Poverty

According to Girls Not Brides (2017), child marriage is more common among children from underprivileged families and communities, particularly those who struggle to provide for their own needs. Based on statistics, 50 percent of girls from impoverished homes in developing nations get married when they are still young, and girls from such families are more than three times as likely to get married before turning eighteen. In Africa, poverty stands in the way of so many girls' opportunities. (Tafadzwa Mabemba, 2023) Adding on, young girls from poor families are you usually married off at a young age because they are considered as an economic burden to the family. There is a case of a young girl who was married off to a 40-year-old man in 2001 in order to obtain food. She was married off to a sum of 2000 Zimbabwean Dollars which was equivalent to USD\$7 by that time. (Basiyange) Despite the perception that child marriage breaks the cycle of poverty, it actually makes intergenerational poverty worse. Emphasizing the fundamental connection between the size of the apostolic sects and the economic downturn is also crucial. Some of these activities are carried out by the children's parents for financial benefit. By uniting a girl child in marriage to an older male, child marriage not only prolongs the cycle of poverty and opportunity deprivation across generations, but it also strengthens the subservient character of communities that have historically catered to the wealthy classes. (Sibanda)

Statistics indicates a favorable relationship between child marriages and poverty. Children from lower-income families are more likely than those from higher-income families to marry at a young age

Wealth index quintile	Share of girls married before 18
Poorest	50.8%
Second	51.7%
Middle	39.7%
Fourth	31.2%
Richest	13.2%

Source: Zimstat MICS 2019

More so, child marriage is mostly brought about by Zimbabwe's marriage system, which is closely entwined with customs and culture. Families are encouraged to marry off their young daughters as valuable commodities by paying bride prices, or lobola (bride price), but the frequency of early and arranged marriages denies them agency over their own lives. Due to Zimbabwe's dual legal system, which frequently allows for younger marriage ages under customary law than under civil law, the practice is perpetuated by loopholes. Gender inequality and deeply ingrained patriarchal standards that see girls as primarily fit for domestic and childrearing responsibilities and as subservient are the foundations of

these dynamics (Mabemba & Ntombela, 2023). The fact that the family is the guardian of culture and that some cultural customs, like paying lobola (bride price), expose girls to other detrimental customs like child marriage, exacerbate this practice even more. The most powerful force is still culture. While culture is dynamic and ever-evolving, some features of it have mostly endured. (Jeffrey & Nyasha, 2018) For instance, paying lobola (bride price) is a cultural custom that persists in Zimbabwe despite protests alleging that it treats women like commodities in the marketplace. Women's labor is shifted to the family of her husband as a result of this tradition. In addition to receiving exclusive sexual privileges, the guy can anticipate having children in order to continue the family line. In many cultures, a woman's predicted childbearing number should be reflected in the quantity of cattle she receives. (Jeffrey & Nyasha, 2018)

Adding on, Child marriage is also influenced by a girl's lack of education. Most young girls who marry are not well educated. Plan International Policy Brief 2016 states that the implementation of school fees and economic factors have resulted in a decline in access to education (Mutandwa, 2016). The net enrolment ratio fell from 98.5 percent in 2002 to 91% in 2009, and over 300,000 secondary school-age children miss school annually, leaving about thirty percent of children unable to complete their primary education (Mutandwa, 2016). Breaking the cycle of poverty, sexual discrimination, and male oppression requires education. Given that they lack education and have no other opportunity to pursue a life in which they can work for themselves, provide for their family, and feed themselves, these young ladies are marrying early and sometimes are forced into marriage (Chingachirere, 2017). Lack of education affects both the parents of young children who marry them and the young girls who marry young because, while they

are aware of the terrible effects of child marriages, they are unaware of how it affects the girl child's health and life as well. (Chingachirere, 2017).

Another factor contributing to child marriages is the unequal treatment of girls' compared to boys'. The stigmatization of women worldwide and the disparity between men and women are additional causes of child marriage (Offard Kanjanda, 2016). Girls are typically viewed as a burden to their family rather than as valuable individuals who should be respected more than boy children. Therefore, marrying a female child at a younger age is seen by Save the Children as a solution to lessen financial challenges by shifting the responsibility of raising a girl child to the spouse (Chingachirere, 2017). Because children mimic their upbringing, the environments in which they grow up have an impact on the life experiences that they will have as adults. For example, young people raised in some apostolic sects are constantly rushing to get married since that's what they're taught at church (Offard Kanjanda, 2016). As a result, the children raised in some apostolic sects that support child marriages feel that getting married young is a good idea for everyone to follow. This is because their parents instilled in them the belief that they should marry church elder men when they grow up.

2.6.4. Perpetrators in Early Marriages

Early child marriages are influenced by parents and guardians. Most of the time, especially in rural regions, parents pressure their kids to marry young in order to profit financially. Children of sex workers' mothers can expose their kids to sleeping with their clients; as a result, kids start engaging in sexual activities at an early age, which might result in child marriages (Mashayamombe., Makoni., & Tonodzai, 2017). In other instances, parents marry off their young daughters in order to reinforce their bonds with affluent families.

Some religious leaders of apostolic sects also arrange child marriages by conjuring up visions, during church services, that they are identifying young girls under the 'ministry of the holy spirit' to be their wife. Due to patriarchy and other gender imbalances in society, men are a primary cause of child marriages as they actively participate in the arranged marriage of young girls (Mashayamombe., Makoni., & Tonodzai, 2017).

2.7 Effects of child marriages

Child marriages have long-lasting physical, psychological, mental, and emotional impacts on young girls. A girl's development is frequently jeopardized by child marriage, which can lead to early pregnancy, social isolation, school disruption, limited career and vocational growth options, and an increased risk of domestic abuse (Chiweshe, 2020). Beyond puberty, the disadvantages of child marriage persist as these women battle the health consequences of becoming pregnant too young and too frequently, lack of education and financial independence, domestic abuse, and marital rape (NewsDay, 2014). The health and wellbeing of girls are directly threatened by child marriage: in underdeveloped nations, pregnancy-related illnesses account for the majority of deaths among adolescent girls aged 15 to 19. Girls under the age of 15 have a five times higher chance of dying during childbirth, and those between the ages of 15 and 20 have a double higher chance than those in their 20s (Chiweshe, 2020). Girls' physical immaturity, when the pelvis and birth canal are not fully grown, is primarily to blame for these effects. Where there are few emergency obstetric care available, as is the situation in many communities where child marriage is common, labor complications are made worse (Chiweshe, 2020). Adolescent girls are more likely to experience obstructed labor due to their smaller pelvises, which increases the chance of developing obstetric fistula during pregnancy.

Incontinence due to feces or urine can result in fistula patients experiencing discomfort, infection, and an unpleasant odor. Compared to children born to women 19 and older, children born to girls under the age of 18 have a 60% higher probability of dying in the first year of life (Human Rights Watch, 2013). A girl's education is frequently permanently ended by child marriage. Young wives are frequently encouraged to prioritize taking care of their home above going to school. Girls' options and prospects are restricted by a lack of education not only in their early years but also in their adult lives. Many times, poverty is the cost of this exclusion. Furthermore, married girls and young women with low levels of education between the ages of 15 and 19 are far more vulnerable to domestic and sexual abuse from their spouses than are older, better-educated women (NewsDay, 2015).

2.8 Summary

Previous studies have revealed the ongoing prevalence of child marriage practices in Zimbabwe, which can be attributed to a complicated web of cultural customs, difficult economic conditions, and inadequate enforcement of the laws that forbid the practice. Studies have shown how parents, local elders, and even some religious leaders have been major offenders in the marriage off of young girls for dowries or other perceived benefits, or to relieve financial constraints on the family.

This study differs from earlier research in that it examines in detail the complex socioeconomic effects that result from making child marriage illegal in a particular locality. In contrast to earlier studies, this one focuses exclusively on Zimunya, an area that hasn't received much attention in this particular context. The research offers a localized analysis of how making child marriages illegal affects communities on a micro level, in contrast to larger national studies. Additionally, by investigating how local

enforcement methods and community views affect the efficacy of criminalization, this study adds a new perspective to the field. It draws attention to how grassroots organizations, local government, and community leaders can help or hurt the effectiveness of legal actions.

This study's primary contribution is its thorough analysis of the socioeconomic effects of making child marriages illegal in a specific region. It shows that although criminalization can have good effects like raising awareness and lowering the number of child marriages, it can also have negative effects that are frequently disregarded in larger research. This dissertation bridges the gap between local realities and national policy, which advances the scholarly conversation. It provides a more nuanced viewpoint on the criminalization of child marriage and its ramifications by highlighting the significance of comprehending the distinctive socioeconomic dynamics of particular places. This tailored strategy adds to the body of knowledge already in existence while also offering helpful suggestions for improving the efficacy of legal reforms in addressing child marriage.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter was on the methodology that was used in this research study. This research adopted a qualitative research methodology. This chapter outlined the empirical approach that was adopted in collecting data. In the sections below, a detailed description of the research concepts engaged with is provided. These included, but were not limited to, the research design, target population, sample size, and sampling procedures. In addition to this, research instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis strategies that were adopted were described in detail.

3.2 Research Approach

This research adopted the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is when Individuals' behaviors, attitudes, and experiences are examined (Dawson, 2019). This strategy often necessitates fewer participants but more time with each participant (Dawson, 2019). It allows study subjects to express their own views on a particular topic. Qualitative research is also a type of research method that seeks to understand human behavior, beliefs, experiences, and social interactions through observation, interviews, and analysis of texts and other forms of non-numerical data (Mohajan, 2018). This type of research is often exploratory in nature and aims to uncover underlying meanings, patterns, and themes. (Creswell, 2014)

3.3 Population and sampling

The population for this qualitative research consisted of various stakeholders affected by or involved in the criminalization of child marriages in Zimbabwe. These included parents and guardians of child marriage survivors, community leaders and members,

representatives from civil society organizations working on child marriage issues, lawyers, and the department of social development. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants from each stakeholder group. This method ensured the inclusion of individuals with diverse experiences, perspectives, and expertise related to the criminalization of child marriages in Zimbabwe. (Campbell et al., 2020). Overall the researcher interviewed 20 people.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

In order to gather data, the researcher took an integrated strategy, combining document analysis, structured interview guides, and an exhaustive review of the body of previous research. In particular, semi-structured interview guides were created to support in-depth discussions with a chosen number of participants who had been selected according to their pertinence and subject-matter competence. These guides ensured that important subjects were presented in a consistent manner while providing flexibility to investigate new ideas. In addition, an extensive examination of the current body of literature was carried out to place the findings in the context of the larger scholarly conversation. A thorough search of academic journals, books, and other pertinent sources was conducted as part of this review in order to discover current theories, knowledge gaps, and trends that were relevant to the study topics.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

To obtain permission to conduct research, the researcher requested a letter from the School of Law and another clearance letter from the Africa University Research Committee (AUREC). After receiving the necessary research documentation, all participants were informed before the interviews were performed. A pre-test was conducted on both the

interview questions and the questionnaires to assess their effectiveness in addressing the study topics.

3.6 Analysis and Organization of Data

Data analysis is the process of examining and interpreting data to extract useful insights and draw conclusions (Matt & Adel, 2023). It involves the use of various statistical and computational techniques to analyze large amounts of data and identify patterns, trends, and relationships (Groves, 2009). Data was analyzed using a thematic analysis. The researcher analyzed data collected to develop new ideas and clearly clarify the impacts of criminalizing child marriages in Zimbabwe as drawn from the study in Zimunya.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are crucial in research because ethics are standards and norms for behavior that distinguish what is wrong and what is acceptable (Resnik, 2020). They aid in distinguishing between what is deemed acceptable and inappropriate behavior. Ethical concerns should be given credence in every research study since these ethical standards prevent data falsification; thus, the promotion of truthfulness should be the major goal of every research (Bhandari, 2021). Ethical issues should be viewed as important because they establish and encourage a research climate of trust, accountability, and mutual respect among researchers (Halej, 2017). Because ethics should be a consideration in any research study, the researcher obtained a clearance letter from the School of Law, a clearance letter from the Africa University Research Committee (AUREC), and a permission letter of research from Mutare Rural Council. This research also adhered to the research ethics requirements established by the Africa University Research Ethics Committee (AUREC). In conducting the study ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, and

non-maleficence were strictly observed. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and risks, and their privacy was safeguarded throughout the process. Efforts were made to minimize harm, and the study ensured that participants' autonomy was respected. Cultural sensitivity was maintained, and the research was designed to be fair, avoiding any exploitation of vulnerable individuals.

3.8 Summary

The focus of this chapter was on the methodology that was used in this research study. A detailed description of the research instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis was outlined and explained in detail in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will illustrate the cumulative results received from the researcher's interview forms used to collect data. In qualitative research, the process of data analysis and interpretation is time-consuming and involves preparing data for analysis, transcribing audio data into written form, conducting the analysis, gaining a deeper understanding of the data, and interpreting the data to obtain a holistic meaning and picture

4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

Individual interviews, physical and online interview guides with a total of 28 individuals were used to perform this component of the study. This part of the research reflects on the interviews' findings and emphasizes individual conversations with interviewees. Themes were created to present data.

4.3 Demographics

A total of 5 officials (two village leaders, one member of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and one member of the Department of Social Development) and twenty-six villagers participated in this study. This section focuses on the characteristics of the participants of this study as background information in terms of gender and education level. The summaries of the demographic profiles of the four (5) officials and twenty-six (15) participants (community members, victims and guardians to victims) from Zimunya are hereby presented below;

Table 4.3.1 Demographics Profile of Participants

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency
Gender	Male	7
	Female	13
	Total	20
Age	15-24	5
	25-34	7
	35+	8
	Total	20
Education Level	Primary	4
	Secondary	10
	Tertiary	6

Source: Field Data

Table 4.3.1 shows that 13 out of 20 people who participated in this study were females and 7

Were males. Four participants had primary school education, ten had secondary school education while six participants had tertiary education as their highest level of education. Ages of participants ranged from 15 to 35 years and above.

4.4 Persistence of Child Marriages in Zimunya

Even though child marriage is illegal in Zimunya, the practice nevertheless occurs there due to a complex interaction of institutional, cultural, and social variables. Participants frequently emphasized how deeply ingrained these routines are. One local elder, for instance, said, “We have been marrying off daughters for generations. It's difficult to understand why it should end right now”. This perception aligns with the literature's focus on the lasting influence of cultural customs that see marriage as a social status symbol and rite of passage for young girls (Girls Not Brides, 2024). Therefore Child marriage in Zimunya persists due to deeply ingrained cultural customs that view it as a rite of passage and symbol of social status. As noted by a local elder, such traditions resist legal reforms. Addressing this requires culturally sensitive strategies, like involving traditional leaders and promoting education as an alternative marker of maturity and respectability.

The study revealed that the legislative structures intended to protect children are frequently overshadowed by traditional norms. Marriage for females is still viewed as a source of security and family honor, according to many participants. A teenage girl commented, “In my community, being married means you're respected; staying in school sometimes means you're wasting time.” This is in line with research showing that, especially in economically disadvantaged areas, child marriage is commonly associated with cultural views of girls' respectability and maturity (Plan International, 2016). The study underscores the challenge of aligning legal protections with traditional views, where early marriage is still seen as a symbol of respect and security. This highlights the difficulty of enforcing laws in communities where cultural norms outweigh legal frameworks.

The behavior is further supported by economic factors. A number of respondents mentioned that dowries or bride prices offer financial assistance when daughters are married off. “The bride price helps us cover basic needs when times are tough,” one participant clarified. This is in line with the literature's finding that dowry systems are a significant financial motivator for underage marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2021). However, this financial approach has a long-term cost because it frequently results in girls losing access to economic and educational prospects, which keeps families stuck in poverty cycles that span generations (UNICEF, 2023). Hence the study underscores the challenge of aligning legal protections with traditional views, where early marriage is still seen as a symbol of respect and security. This highlights the difficulty of enforcing laws in communities where cultural norms outweigh legal frameworks.

The community's poor knowledge of the laws aimed at preventing child marriage is another significant factor. Older generations showed notable knowledge gaps, whereas younger survey participants particularly those enrolled in school were better knowledgeable about the legislation. “Many people don't even know that marrying under 18 is illegal. “Said a community leader. Because cultural values frequently take precedence over legal requirements when making decisions, this information gap makes it more difficult to enforce laws against child marriage. Hence the study shows a significant knowledge gap about child marriage laws, especially among older generations, hindering enforcement. While younger, educated people are more informed, many in the community remain unaware, limiting legal impact.

Additionally, peer and cultural forces exacerbate resistance to change. “When you see your friends getting married, you feel like you should do the same,” a teenage girl shared. The pressure is difficult to withstand. This supports the literature's claim that social norms and peer pressure are major factors in the normalization of underage marriage (UN Women Africa, 2021). The fact that child weddings are still common in Zimunya shows how inadequate it is to rely only on legislative reforms. Laws offer a vital starting point, but in order to address the root causes that keep the practice going, they must be combined with focused community involvement, education, and financial assistance. Therefore, peer pressure and cultural norms strongly influence the persistence of child marriage. Social expectations to conform make it hard to resist, showing that laws alone are not enough community engagement and support are essential to addressing the root causes.

4.5 Economic Drivers of Early Child Marriages

Participants frequently underlined the interconnected aspects of gender inequality and economic hardship as the main causes of child marriages in Zimunya. Due to their extreme financial hardships, many families in the area see child marriage as a workable way to get out of their financial bind. “For some families, it's about survival,” one respondent said. You will have fewer people to feed if you marry off your daughter. This is consistent with existing literature, which show that poverty is a major factor in child marriage, especially in rural and economically underdeveloped areas (Plan International, 2016).The above highlights how gender inequality and economic struggles are closely linked to the persistence of child marriage. In financially strained families, marrying off daughters is seen as a survival strategy, reflecting the broader impact of poverty on decision-making.

Bride prices and dowers are also important economic considerations. According to a community member, “The bride price is frequently viewed as a means of ensuring the family's financial stability. We rely on it, particularly in difficult times. Although this practice offers temporary financial comfort, research shows that it has negative long-term implications. Daughters who are married off too young are frequently excluded from economic and educational prospects, which prolongs poverty in the family and society (Gray Group International, 2024). Hence the practice of bride prices and dowers is seen as a way to provide short-term financial relief for families, but it often has lasting negative effects. While it may offer immediate economic benefits, marrying off young daughters limits their future opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and restricting social progress.

An important factor in this dynamic is education. According to the report, financial strains frequently compel families to put short-term financial demands ahead of long-term expenditures in their daughters’ education. A participant commented, “Girls are often pulled out of school when families can’t afford the fees, and marriage becomes the default option.” This finding is in line with research that shows school dropouts are a contributing factor to and a result of child marriage (Plan International, 2016). The study reveals that financial pressures often force families to prioritize immediate needs over long-term investments like education, leading to girls being pulled from school and married off. This cycle of dropping out and early marriage underscores the need for solutions that balance economic support with opportunities for education to break the cycle of poverty and child marriage.

The situation is made worse by gender disparity. Traditional gender norms in Zimunya sometimes limit women to household responsibilities, which perpetuates the idea that girls' education is less significant. According to one reply, "In our society, males are supposed to support the family while women take care of the house. Girls' education is not viewed as essential". This mirrors the literature's emphasis on how ingrained patriarchal standards limit girls' autonomy and opportunities, making early marriage appear as the most socially acceptable path (Chivasa, 2019). Gender inequality in Zimunya reinforces the belief that girls' education is secondary to domestic roles, limiting their opportunities for independence and growth. These entrenched gender norms not only restrict girls' potential but also make early marriage seem like a natural, socially accepted choice.

The study also discovered that girls in rural areas are disproportionately impacted by the intersections of gender inequality and poverty. For example, low-income households frequently place a higher priority on the education of their male offspring because they see daughters as financial liabilities. A community elder said, "When resources are tight, families often choose to invest in their sons' education, leaving girls with no other option but marriage." This approach supports research on how patriarchal societies 'gendered resource distribution undercuts initiatives to advance gender equality and prevent child marriage (Jeffrey & Nyasha, 2018). Hence this highlights how the intersection of gender inequality and poverty disproportionately affects girls in rural areas, with families prioritizing boys' education due to limited resources. This gendered approach to resource allocation reinforces existing inequalities and leaves girls with few alternatives, often leading to early marriage.

4.6 Educational Barriers and Legal Challenges

In Zimunya, child marriages seriously impair girls' education, restricting their chances for both personal and professional growth and sustaining a cycle of poverty. The difficulties in putting legal frameworks intended to prevent child marriages into practice are directly related to these educational hurdles. Collectively, they draw attention to the societal and structural barriers that impede advancement.

According to the study, females are frequently forced to drop out of school due to early marriage. "I wanted to finish school, but my parents said I needed to take care of my husband and home," a young respondent revealed. This is consistent with research showing that in patriarchal societies, females' education frequently takes a backseat to marriage (Mutandwa, 2016). Participants often mentioned that because marriage is viewed as the ultimate objective of girls, social norms hinder families from funding their education. This highlights how societal norms in patriarchal cultures limit girls' educational opportunities, as marriage is often seen as their primary goal. This mindset leads to girls being pulled out of school to fulfill domestic roles, reinforcing the cycle of inequality and restricting their future potential.

Disrupted schooling has far-reaching consequences. Without education, ladies are more dependent on their husbands, have fewer job options, and have lower earning potential. One participant clarified, "When girls marry early, they forfeit their opportunity to be self-sufficient. They depend on their husbands, so if the marriage doesn't work out, they could be in risk. These outcomes coincide with the literature's claim that girls who do not receive an education are caught in cycles of poverty and reliance, which affects their communities and futures (Chingachirere, 2017). Hence disrupted education due to early marriage leads

to long-term consequences for women, including financial dependency and limited opportunities. This increases their vulnerability, particularly if the marriage ends, trapping them in cycles of poverty and dependence.

Furthermore, disruptions in education affect more than just individual girls. Participants underlined that when females are denied an education, communities lose out on important contributions. A local leader said, “Educated women are more likely to invest in their children's education and health, creating benefits for the entire community.” This is in line with studies which emphasize how educated women contribute to sustained social and economic advancement (UNICEF, 2023). Therefore, the impact of denied education extends beyond individuals, as communities lose out on the broader benefits that educated women bring, such as investing in their children's education and improving health outcomes, contributing to long-term social and economic growth.

The Marriage Act (Chapter 5:11) and constitutional clauses establishing the minimum marriage age at 18 are two examples of Zimbabwe's robust legal frameworks, but enforcement is still lacking. A member of the community stated, “The law exists, but many people in our community do not know that marrying off a girl under 18 is illegal.” As long as families and local officials continue to put cultural customs ahead of the law, this understanding gap will make legal measures less effective. Despite Zimbabwe's strong legal frameworks setting the minimum marriage age at 18, the lack of awareness and cultural practices often undermine enforcement, highlighting the gap between legislation and community understanding.

Participants also emphasized the lack of accountability for those who violate the law. According to a community member, “Even when cases are reported, there is often no follow-up or legal action.” Child marriage is illegal, but it continues because of the climate of impunity created by this lack of enforcement. Existing literature highlights that in many rural communities, anti-child marriage laws are ineffective due to a lack of resources and lax implementation (Veritas Zimbabwe, 2016). A significant issue in tackling child marriage is the lack of accountability for lawbreakers. Even when cases are reported, weak enforcement and a culture of impunity prevent meaningful legal action, allowing child marriage to persist despite its illegality.

Increasing awareness of the negative effects of child marriage and the value of education for females became a crucial tactic. The necessity of educational initiatives to educate families about the legal, social, and financial ramifications of marrying off their daughters was repeatedly underlined by participants. A participant in the area stated, “We need to teach parents and community members that keeping girls in school benefits everyone in the long run.” Raising awareness about the negative effects of child marriage and the importance of education for girls is vital. Educating families about the long-term benefits of keeping girls in school can shift attitudes and reduce child marriage rates

This strategy is supported by the research, which emphasizes the importance of community-based activism and education in upending long-standing cultural norms. Advocacy has been effective in changing attitudes and advancing the rights of girls through initiatives like the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2021). Involving community centers, schools, and places of worship in advocacy initiatives could guarantee broad outreach in Zimunya.

Another important suggestion was to include instruction on gender equality and children's rights in school curricula. According to a participant, “Teaching children about their rights helps them make informed decisions and resist pressures to marry early.” This supports the literature's focus on incorporating legal knowledge into educational programs to encourage a change in attitudes across generations (Plan International, 2016). The results shows that integrating gender equality and children's rights into school curricula can empower students to resist early marriage and make informed choices about their futures, fostering long-term societal change through education.

Child marriage is still largely caused by economic hardship, hence measures to lessen the financial strain on families are required. Participants recommended offering cash transfer programs or scholarships as financial incentives to families so they will continue to send their daughters to school. A member of the community clarified, “If families see that educating their daughters comes with financial benefits, they might reconsider marrying them off.” Addressing the economic challenges that drive child marriage is essential. Providing financial incentives such as scholarships or cash transfer programs could encourage families to prioritize their daughters’ education over early marriage

The significance of tackling gender inequity through community-led projects that question conventional gender norms was emphasized by the participants. A participant stated, “We need programs that show families the value of investing in their daughters’ futures, not just their sons’.” This viewpoint corresponds with the literature's focus on promoting gender parity by giving females access to school and career possibilities (Chingachirere, 2017). Adding on, tackling gender inequality through community-driven projects that

challenge traditional gender norms is crucial. Educating families on the importance of investing in daughters' futures can help shift cultural attitudes toward gender parity and education.

From findings, traditional leaders in Zimunya have a big say in cultural customs. Participants suggested using these figures in lobbying efforts to highlight the advantages of postponing marriage and funding girls' education. According to a local elder, "If respected leaders speak out against child marriage, people will listen and start to question the practice." Finally, participants underlined the necessity of a persistent effort to change societal views on gender roles and marriage. A community leader proposed, "We should celebrate girls who achieve in school just as much as we celebrate marriages." Redefining cultural values and establishing role models for young females can be accomplished through initiatives that honor academic and professional accomplishments. Traditional leaders have significant influence in shaping cultural practices, and involving them in advocacy efforts could help challenge the normalization of child marriage. Celebrating academic achievements and promoting positive role models for girls can gradually transform societal views on marriage and gender roles.

4.7 Community Perspectives on Child Marriages

Zimunya community views on child marriages show a varied terrain of attitudes and beliefs, characterized by a combination of recognition of the negative effects and the enduring influence of cultural customs. Many interviewees acknowledged the negative effects of child marriages on the futures of girls, but they also acknowledged how deeply ingrained these practices are. "I see how deeply rooted our traditions are, even though I understand the law," said a revered elder. It takes time for change to occur. This phrase

emphasizes how difficult it is to balance legal requirements with cultural customs, implying that any attempt to stop child marriage must take into account the slow process of shifting social norms.

Younger respondents, who emphasized the value of education and individual agency, were frequently more outspoken in their criticism of child marriage. “I want to be a doctor, but if I marry young, my dreams will end,” one young woman said passionately. Our community's perception of girls has to alter. Her viewpoint is in line with younger generations' increasing recognition of the importance of education and the opportunity for girls to follow challenging career routes. Other young people share this drive for change, viewing education as a means of achieving independence and empowerment.

The importance of peer pressure in sustaining child marriage was another topic covered by the participants. Many pointed out that seeing friends get married early can normalize the behavior and make girls feel like it's inevitable. “We need to create role models in our community girls who succeed despite the pressure to marry young,” a local youth leader proposed. The community may encourage young girls to follow their aspirations and question the status quo by sharing the experiences of accomplished women who have defied social norms.

Some responders also emphasized the importance of including boys and men in conversations regarding child marriage. “Boys need to understand that supporting their peers in their education is just as important as marrying young,” said a male participant. We must establish a culture that prioritizes education for all. This emphasizes how crucial it is to have discussions with everyone in the community about the negative effects of child marriage and how to provide a safe space for girls.

Furthermore, it was commonly brought out how traditional authorities and community leaders either encouraged or discouraged child marriages. Many participants said they thought powerful people may be crucial in changing the mindset of the community. “If we can get respected leaders to advocate for girls' education, it would change how people think about marriage,” said one community elder. This emphasizes how using current social systems to encourage constructive change can have a significant influence.

The conflict between cultural customs and the growing desire for change is reflected in Zimunya's community views on child marriages. Although many people agree that early marriage has negative impacts, there is also recognition of the deeply ingrained customs that make efforts to end it more difficult. In order to challenge social conventions and advance girls' education as a priority, it is imperative to include community leaders, engage younger generations, and create role models. The community may strive toward a future where girls can follow their dreams without being constrained by early marriage by tackling these intricate dynamics.

In Zimunya, cultural factors greatly impact opinions regarding child marriages, resulting in a complex setting where customs frequently determine the community's social structure. Many participants emphasized that marriage is viewed as a woman's ultimate aim in their cultural environment. Getting married is viewed as a woman's ultimate ambition in our culture, according to one participant. We find it difficult to envision our daughters having a different future. This viewpoint demonstrates how deeply ingrained societal norms can restrict young women's possibilities and aspirations. Although many respondents agreed that these customs are deeply ingrained, there is also a growing awareness of the need for

community reform. “We need to figure out how to combine our traditions with contemporary values,” a community member stressed. To protect our children, we must adapt our culture rather than give it up. This point of view indicates a readiness to modify cultural customs in order to better conform to modern conceptions of women's rights and empowerment, implying that change is achievable with careful consideration.

It was commonly mentioned that one of the most important factors influencing how the community views child marriage is the influence of traditional authorities and community leaders. Many participants noted that local opinions can be greatly impacted when these well-known individuals speak out against child marriages. “If we can get respected elders to speak out against child marriages, it could inspire others to follow suit,” one educator proposed. Since community members frequently look to these individuals for advice on moral and social issues, this shows the potential power of leadership in promoting social change. Some participants also offered their perspectives on how some traditional customs should be rethought to encourage rather than impede girls' empowerment and education. An elder in the community said, for instance, “We can design new rituals that honor ladies' academic accomplishments instead of only their marriages”. This would support education and respect our culture. By promoting an atmosphere that prioritizes education and individual development, such programs may aid in changing the conversation about women's roles and goals.

The discussion of Zimunya's cultural influences and underage marriages highlights the necessity for a nuanced strategy that upholds customs while promoting the rights and prospects of girls. The community can strive toward a balanced viewpoint that respects its history while fostering the goals of young women by enlisting the help of community

leaders, clarifying traditional customs, and advancing education. In the end, preventing child marriage and advancing gender equality will require cultivating a culture change that prioritizes education and individual agency.

In order to successfully prevent child marriages, participants indicated a significant desire for cooperation between community members, local organizations, and governmental entities. In order to create comprehensive policies that address the underlying reasons of child marriage and advance the rights of girls, this collaborative approach is thought to be essential. “We need to work together to create a united front against child marriages,” a community leader stressed. Everybody has a part to perform. This sentiment shows that the problem is too complicated for one organization to handle on its own instead, a coordinated effort utilizing the resources and capabilities of multiple stakeholders is needed.

Participants called for more government funding for social activities and educational projects that empower girls. “Funding for economic development and education programs is essential,” said a representative of a local NGO. We have a steep uphill battle without it. This emphasizes the need for sufficient funding to support initiatives that can give females access to school, career training, and support networks to help them avoid getting married young. Participants emphasized how crucial it is for the government to get involved in policymaking that puts girls' welfare and education first, in addition to providing financing. They also underlined how important community involvement is to these initiatives and further emphasized that in order to guarantee the relevance and efficacy of any initiatives, they must be culturally aware and incorporate local perspectives. “We need to make sure that the community feels ownership of the solutions,”

said a teenage activist. The goal is to create a future together. This emphasizes how crucial it is to involve community members in the development and execution of programs since their perspectives might assist in customizing solutions to the particular cultural setting of Zimunya.

4.7 Summary

Despite being prohibited, child marriages in Zimunya continue to occur, which highlights the intricate interactions between socioeconomic, cultural, and educational elements that have a significant impact on young girls' lives. According to the information received from community members, traditional norms continue to reinforce the idea that marriage is the ultimate aim for women, while economic difficulties frequently leads families to see early marriage as a workable solution to financial burden. In addition to limiting young women's goals, this cultural viewpoint also prevents them from obtaining an education and becoming financially independent. Furthermore, the effects of child marriage go beyond specific families; they also contribute to a poverty cycle that affects the community as a whole. Educational setbacks, like the ones grade 7 students had when they couldn't take examinations because they were pregnant, highlight the urgent need for all-encompassing treatments. Zimunya can endeavor to halt the cycle of child marriage by putting specific recommendations into practice that involve all parties involved. This would finally enable young girls to follow their aspirations and make valuable contributions to their communities. By doing this, the community embraces a future that values education and personal responsibility for each and every one of its members, while also honoring its traditions

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will synthesize the findings of the research, encapsulating the main points discussed in the preceding chapters and highlighting the most significant results and their relevance to the research questions posed at the outset. Following this, it will present the conclusions, which reflect on the overall impact of the findings on the existing body of knowledge, providing a thoughtful interpretation of the results and considering their broader implications. Finally, the recommendations will offer practical guidance based on the conclusions drawn, suggesting actionable steps that stakeholders can take to leverage the insights gained from the research for future initiatives, policy-making, or further studies. Together, these elements will provide a comprehensive wrap-up of the research, ensuring that the reader is left with a clear understanding of the study's contributions and potential pathways for future exploration.

5.2 Discussions

The research provides a comprehensive overview of child marriage laws in Zimbabwe, shedding light on the legal framework, challenges, and the awareness of laws in the Zimunya community. It underscores the significance of the Marriage Act, specifically highlighting its role in setting the legal minimum age for marriage at 18 for both men and women, aligning with international norms and children's rights as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Additionally, the research emphasizes the strong emphasis placed on protecting children's rights in Zimbabwe's Constitution, emphasizing

the crucial need to safeguard children from practices that could jeopardize their general well-being, education, and health. Despite the existence of robust legal frameworks, the research brings to attention the prevalent lack of awareness and understanding of the laws within the community. It reports instances where community members, including local health workers and leaders, expressed uncertainty regarding the precise provisions, methods of enforcement, and penalties for violators. There is a common theme of limited knowledge about the laws that forbid child marriage, which often leads to cases of young girls being married off without the families being aware that it is against the law. Furthermore, the research highlights the challenges posed by cultural customs and traditions, which often take precedence over legal requirements. It discusses how traditional views on marriage and women's duties can supersede the laws in place, leading to the persistence of child marriage and similar practices. Additionally, the lack of enforcement of current legislation is outlined as a crucial problem, with families participating in child marriages often facing few repercussions, thus creating a climate of impunity. In the context of the Zimunya community, the research draws attention to significant differences in knowledge of child marriage regulations, indicating the impact of educational programs and a generational divide. While younger participants demonstrate a higher understanding of the legal marriage age, attributed to educational initiatives and campaigns, older individuals, particularly parents and community elders, exhibit a clear lack of understanding about these regulations. This generational divide reflects the challenges in changing deeply entrenched cultural views and practices that value early marriage as a solution to financial difficulties or social pressures. The research also underscores the importance of outreach and education programs in the community to increase knowledge of these regulations. It emphasizes the need for legal education

programs, particularly those offered in schools and community centers, as crucial tools to educate families about children's rights and the consequences of child marriage. It also stresses the significance of changing mindsets through education, particularly targeting the next generation.

The research highlights the significant obstacles that exist despite Zimbabwe's strong legal framework to prevent child marriages. It emphasizes the need to address the challenges through community education and heightened enforcement to protect children's rights and prevent future child marriages.

5.3 Conclusions

The researcher drew the following main conclusions based on the findings of this study:

1. There is a significant lack of awareness about child marriage laws among community members, particularly older generations, which is compounded by cultural norms that prioritize early marriage over legal protections.
2. Despite the existence of strong legal frameworks against child marriage, inadequate enforcement and accountability allow the practice to continue, highlighting the need for improved legal action and community engagement to protect children's rights.
3. Child marriages in Zimunya persist primarily due to economic hardships and cultural attitudes that view early marriage as a viable solution to financial struggles and a rite of passage, leading families to prioritize short-term financial relief over long-term opportunities for girls.

4. Child marriages in Zimunya lead to the termination of girls' education, significantly limiting their future earning potential and trapping them in a cycle of poverty and dependency, as many young brides are expected to prioritize household duties over academic pursuits.
5. The prevalence of child marriage not only affects individual girls but also hinders community development by reducing the number of educated women who can contribute to social and economic growth, perpetuating a cycle of low educational achievement and financial instability within families and the community at large.
6. There is a strong consensus on the importance of community education programs to raise awareness about the negative impacts of child marriage, the legal implications, and the benefits of education, with a focus on involving both parents and youth to shift societal attitudes.
7. Engaging respected community leaders and creating role models who exemplify the value of education can help challenge traditional norms, foster support for girls' education, and encourage a cultural shift away from the acceptance of child marriage.
8. There is a strong emphasis on the necessity of collaboration among community members, local organizations, and government entities to create comprehensive policies and programs that address the root causes of child marriage and promote girls' education and empowerment.
9. Respondents highlighted the importance of culturally sensitive approaches that respect traditional values while promoting girls' rights, emphasizing the need for community ownership in developing and implementing solutions to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

5.4 Implications

Families are urged to prioritize education over child marriage, the enforcement of laws against child marriage can greatly increase household incomes. This change encourages more extensive societal development in addition to the individual economic contributions of educated girls. Greater legal enforcement will also make it easier for girls to get an education, which will raise their level of education overall and create a workforce with greater skills. However, significant community engagement and education are necessary for these laws to be implemented effectively. Raising knowledge of the long-term social and economic advantages of postponing marriage should be a top priority for policymakers, who should also stress the significance of altering deeply ingrained cultural norms. Cultural sensitivity is a crucial aspect of lobbying efforts since addressing these deeply ingrained habits is necessary to promote acceptance of legislative changes. Furthermore, putting off child marriage can lower maternal death rates linked to adolescent pregnancies and improve community health overall, which has long-term health benefits for young women. The findings of the research also support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, especially those pertaining to poverty alleviation and gender equality, highlighting the need of global frameworks in regional settings. In order to combat detrimental cultural norms and advance girls' rights, it is imperative that advocacy and awareness efforts be ongoing and that communities are made aware of the detrimental effects of child marriage. All things considered, these implications point to a

means to raise Zimunya's economic standing while promoting a more just and sustainable community.

5.5 Recommendations

Listed below are some of the recommendations drawn from this study's findings;

1. Local NGOs, community leaders, and educational institutions should develop and implement workshops and seminars that educate community members about the negative impacts of child marriage and the benefits of education for girls they should use culturally sensitive materials and involve respected local figures to foster acceptance and participation.
2. Traditional leaders should advocate for the abandonment of child marriage practices. These leaders can help disseminate information and influence community attitudes through community gatherings and local ceremonies.
3. The government should collaborate with other development partners to establish support programs that provide financial incentives for families to keep girls in school. This could include scholarship programs, grants for educational materials, or microloans to assist with household expenses while girls pursue their education.
4. Local educational authorities should integrate gender studies and human rights education into school curricula to raise awareness among students from an early age. This can help shift perceptions and empower future generations to advocate against child marriage.

5.6 Suggestions for future studies

1. To monitor the long-term impacts of making child marriage illegal on Zimunya girls' educational and economic outcomes, conduct longitudinal research. This will assist in evaluating the long-term effects of law reforms.
2. Examining how particular cultural behaviors and beliefs affect the continuation of child marriage. Knowing these elements can help develop focused interventions that support transformation while honoring cultural circumstances.
3. To find best practices and practical tactics that may be modified and applied in locations where child marriages are most prevalent, compare studies between areas with differing degrees of enforcement of child marriage laws.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT GUIDE

My name is Caroline Nyamayaro, a final year Human Rights Peace and Development Master's student from Africa University I am carrying out a study on. Socio-Economic Implications of criminalizing child marriages. I am kindly asking you to participate in this study by answering /filling in the interview guide form

What you should know about the study:

Purpose of the study:

The purpose of the study is to end child marriages without any other barriers. You were selected for the study because you live in a community where these cases keep happening

Procedures and duration

If you decide to participate you will answer asked questions or fill in the interview guide.

It is expected that this will take about 15 minutes

Risks and discomforts

Potential risks include psychological distress and breach of confidentiality. Incidence of re-traumatization is minimal but will be monitored closely

Benefits and/or compensation

Participants will benefit from increased awareness of child marriages.

Confidentiality

Sensitive information gathered: Personal experiences related to child marriages.

Data location, access and security: Data will be stored in a password-protected laptop accessible only by the researcher

Responsible person: Data security will be the responsibility of the researcher, who can be reached on 0777967197

Data disposal: Upon completion of the research, all physical documents containing sensitive data will be securely shredded to maintain confidentiality. Additionally, all electronic data stored on the password-protected laptop will be permanently deleted, while anonymous data maybe be archived for future research purposes

Voluntary participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. If participant decides not to participate in this study, their decision will not affect their future relationship with the researcher. If they

chose to participate, they are free to withdraw their consent and to discontinue participation without penalty.

Offer to answer questions

Before you sign this form, please ask any questions on any aspect of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to think it over.

Authorisation

If you have decided to participate in this study please sign this form in the space provide below as an indication that you have read and understood the information provided above and have agreed to participate.

Name of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Research Participant or legally authorised representative

If you have any questions concerning this study or consent form beyond those answered by the researcher including questions about the research, your rights as a research participant, or if you feel that you have been treated unfairly and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, please feel free to contact the Africa University Research Ethics Committee on telephone (020) 60075 or 60026 extension 2156 email aurec@africau.edu

Name of Researcher

End of document ■

Appendix 2-Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE.

Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your highest level of education?
3. What is your occupation or role in the community?
4. How common do you believe child marriages are in Zimunya?
5. What factors do you think contribute to the prevalence of child marriages in this area?
6. What are the economic consequences of child marriages for young girls and their families?
7. How do child marriages affect the educational opportunities and future prospects of girls in your community?
8. In what ways do you think child marriages impact the overall economic development of Zimunya?
9. What is your perspective on the criminalization of child marriages?
10. How do you think criminalizing child marriages could change the social dynamics within the community?
11. What challenges do you foresee in enforcing laws against child marriages in Zimunya?
12. How does the local culture influence attitudes towards child marriages?

13. What role do community leaders and traditional practices play in either supporting or opposing child marriages?

14. What strategies do you believe should be implemented to effectively combat child marriages in your community?

15. How can local organizations, government, and community members collaborate to address the issue of child marriages?



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September 04, 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This letter serves to confirm that Caroline NYAMAYARO student number 230254, is a student at Africa University in the School of Law. Her studies in the Master in Human Rights, Peace and Development began in August 2023 and she is expected to complete them by the 30th of June 2025. The language of instruction throughout the programme is English.

Any assistance given to her will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,



Chisedzi, W (Mr.)

Records and Scheduling Assistant, Academic Affairs

cc. Assistant Registrar, Academic Affairs

Appendix 4-Research Clearance Mutare Rural District



All Communications to be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer

MUTARE RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

HEAD OFFICE

Cnr. 'C' Avenue & Riverside Drive
P.O. Box 604
MUTARE
Tel: 020 - 61587/64737
Fax: 020 69125
admin@mutarerdc.org

SUBOFFICE

Box 958
Zimunya Township
MUTARE

Workshop

REF: XC/157/13

9 September 2024

Caroline Nyamayaro
Africa University

Dear Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CARRYOUT RESEARCH PROJECT IN MUTARE RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

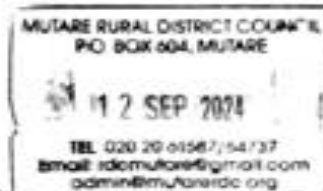
Reference is made to your letter seeking authority to carry out a research in our Council on
"Socio-Economic Implications of criminalizing child marriages in Zimunya.

We hereby grant you permission to undertake your research in our District under the following conditions:

1. You shall abide by the requirements of the Official Secrecy Act during the course of your research.
2. Information gathered shall be used for academic purposes only.
3. You shall avail a copy of your research to Council upon completion.

Yours faithfully


S.D. CHINAKA
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



I Caroline Nyamayaro student number 230254 do accept to carry out my research in Mutare District under the above conditions.

Signed:  Date: 12/09/24
(Caroline Nyamayaro)

Cell: 0718 252 699