

## Partnerships: A Panacea to end Child Marriages in Bindura and Mount Darwin Districts of Mashonaland Central province, Zimbabwe.

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**ABSTRACT:** Child marriages have become a thorny issue in Zimbabwe even though the country's 2013 Constitution has clauses which try to curtail such abuses. Zimbabwe's Mashonaland Central province is no exception, as the phenomenon is rampant in the province's two districts of Bindura and Mount Darwin. This research is an effort to establish the reasons why children engage in marriages in Bindura and Mount Darwin districts of Mashonaland Central province. Using the phenomenological research design, the study sought to: establish the causes of child marriages; analyze the gender and ages of children most affected by child marriages; and to analyze the current mechanisms in place to protect children against child marriages in the two districts. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches with interviews and questionnaires administered to a sample of 66 participants. The findings were that the causes of child marriages included harmful religious practices, poor policies, poverty, lack of access to education, and death of a child's parents. The study further found that on gender basis, females are affected more by child marriages as compared to males. In addition, there was lack of partnership between the government and other organizations in the fight to end child marriages. The major recommendation of the study is that the government should enter into partnership with other organizations in the province to deal with the problem of child marriages. Also, income generating projects and civic education should be put in place to empower children and promote their rights. Sound guidance and counselling services should be proffered to assist the affected children.

**KEY WORDS:** child; child marriages; child rights, constitution, education.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Child marriages continue to be a social crisis occurring on an alarming scale globally (UNICEF 2007) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This practice remains a chronic violation of human rights, including children's rights. In Zimbabwe child marriages started to be prevalent in the pre-colonial age, particularly in times of famine. Young girls were forced into marriages to alleviate hunger in their families. Parents benefitted from the lobola given from wealthy husbands. For the past decades the phenomenon of child marriages has resurfaced, this time with more vigour possibly because of the economic situation in the country. In the African perspective, the African Charter was put in place to assist victims of child marriage and other violations of children's rights. It is against such background of child marriages, that the assembly of heads of states and governments in Africa, - the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) (now African Union) adopted in 1990 the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Section 26 of the new constitution of Zimbabwe clearly stipulates that no children shall be pledged in marriage (Government of Zimbabwe 2013). Child marriage, which is a marriage of one or both spouses under the age of 18, is legally prohibited under many national law and international human rights treaties in Africa. (USAID 2012:3). However, the practice seems to persist in Mashonaland Central province of Zimbabwe, without proper restrictions from the government and other duty-bearers. The paper therefore, seeks to establish the causes of child marriages; to analyze the gender and age of children most affected by child marriages; and to analyze the current mechanisms in place to protect children against child marriages in the two districts of Bindura and Mount Darwin. Although researches have been carried out regarding child marriage no clear solution has been proffered to abate the menace.

### 1.1 Statement of the child marriages problem

Child marriages are a social problem occurring on an alarming rate at a global scale. Zimbabwe has not been spared from the problem, particularly in Mashonaland Central province where the practice has become more prevalent. Many girls in the districts of Bindura and Mount Darwin in the province are marrying at a tender age before they attain the majority aged of 18 years. This has resulted in some girls getting married to older men and at the same time failing to accomplish their education. If no meaningful interventions are adopted to end child marriages in the two districts, the problem is likely to grow and cascade to other provinces in Zimbabwe. At the continental level, the prevalence of child marriages in Africa led to the adoption of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child, as an intervention. Therefore, this study argues that the Government of Zimbabwe and other organisations need to act to resolve the issue. Although the Zimbabwean new constitution clearly stipulates that no children shall be pledged in marriage (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013), the phenomenon continues to be prevalent with Mashonaland Central province being the most affected with 50% of child marriages (USAID 2012).

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This section discusses the problem of child marriages through analysing literature from published sources. The section highlights the background of child marriages against the rights of children, as well as the enforcement mechanisms including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Lastly, the section discusses the problems associated with child marriages in human societies.

### 2.1 A brief background of Child marriages

The term ‘child marriage’ is used to describe a legal or customary union between two people, of which one or both spouses are below the age of 18 years. While boys can be subjected to child marriage, the practice often affects girls in greater numbers and with graver consequences. This is the situation in Bindura and Mount Darwin districts, where girls have been subjected the most. Child marriage is often referred to as ‘early’ and /or ‘forced’ marriage since children, given their immature age, can hardly to give free, prior and informed consent to ‘their marriage partners’ (UN 2012). Many girls, for example, may have little understanding of or exposure to other life options. Therefore, efforts have been made to come up with appropriate measures to deal with child marriage and improve children’s rights in human societies. Early agitation for the rights of the child dates to the General Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924, which was followed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child of 1959 and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 1386 (XIX) (USAID 2012). However, both declarations were not legally binding on all states. It was not until 1989 when the first legally binding instrument of children’s rights and their protection was adopted.

In 1945, the UN reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights in the equal rights of men and women, as well as promoted and encouraged the respect for human rights and for the fundamental freedoms without distinction as to sex (USAID 2012). As such, child marriage is a human rights violation of both girls and boys, and a practice that undermines efforts to promote sustainable development. However, in the last decade, child marriages have affected 58 million girls globally, many of whom were married against their will and in violation of international laws and conventions (USAID 2012). Such large numbers cannot be ignored in Zimbabwe, considering that the practice is now common in Mashonaland Central province. This study therefore, contends that child marriages stifle boys’ and girls’ abilities to succeed and grow into empowered adults who can better themselves, their families and their communities (USAID 2012). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) seeks to ensure that children are not robbed of their human rights such as education and freedom of choice, so that they can live to realise their full potential. Once children are out of school, child marriages are often seen as the major economic pathway forward for the desperate girl child, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty amongst girls. Child marriage also is complex, as it is linked with human trafficking. Human trafficking and child marriage intersect when marriage is used in conjunction with force, fraud, coercion, or abuse of power and to subject children to conditions of slavery, often in the form of domestic or sexual servitude (USAID 2012). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) similarly promoted the dignity and worth of every person and thus advanced equal rights of men and women. The UDHR specified sex as being amongst the impermissible grounds of differentiation and provided an equal protection clause (USAID 2012). Even though the UDHR does not have legal effect on all states, it is morally persuasive and is considered part of customary international law and caters for the rights of children.

Provisions for equality of the sexes in the enjoyment of human rights are provided for in the major human rights covenants of the United Nations. Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) provides for the prohibition of child marriages (USAID 2012). While child marriage is not referred to directly in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1989, this phenomenon is connected to other children’s rights – such as the right to express views freely, and the right to be protected from harmful

traditional practices. The CRC prohibits states parties from permitting persons who have not attained majority age to engage into marriage prematurely. In the context of this Convention, a child means “every human below the age of 18 years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (USAID 2012). The CRC committee on the Rights of child considers that the minimum age for marriage must be 18 years for both men and women. However, in Mashonaland Central province this seems to be the opposite as girls are getting married before attaining the age of 18 years. Further, the principle of “best interests of the child” provided for in the CRC provides a basis for evaluating the laws and practices of states with respect to the protection of children (USAID 2012). Empirical evidence reveals that girls are often exposed to violence, divorce, abandonment and poverty. According to the “best interests of the child” principle, states must take legal action to abolish child marriages (Guday 2005:21).

To pursue the best interests of children, parents and governments are responsible for children’s health, education, development and overall wellbeing to the best of their capacities. Child marriages can harm girls’ health, particularly their sexual and reproductive health, which is manifested in maternal mortality and morbidity due to early pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). States are obliged under the CRC “to take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children” (Guday 2005:21). Inaction on the part of the states to eliminate child marriages also violates the principal life, survival and development, and girls’ right to the highest attainable standard of health under the CRC and the CEDAW. Sexual and reproductive health problems linked to child marriages are also a result of girls’ lack of information and education on sexual and reproductive health issues. This is against the CEDAW’s entitlements, that girls shall have access to the necessary information and education. When they grow up it enables them eventually to decide freely and responsibly on issues pertaining to marriage and having children.

### **2.3 The Convention as a tool for dealing with child marriages**

Before the adoption of the African children’s charter, the most visible instrument meticulously protecting children’s rights, and legally binding on African states was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The CRC was the first international human rights treaty to adopt a comprehensive approach on the protection of children and has in fact, been hailed as a watershed in the history of children. The Convention covers a wide range of issues and establishes legally binding obligations through laying down international standards, which states must meet both within their domestic legislations and policies affecting children. According to the CRC, a child is defined as every human being below the age of 18 years (Njungwe 2009). This implies that children, because of their age, they can hardly make serious decisions such as getting married and managing affairs of the family.

The Convention also covers civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights which also seemingly have a bearing on child marriages. It contains a broad non-discrimination clause which provides that the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions affecting children; protects the right and responsibilities of parents and legal guardians over the child; guarantees the right to life amongst others (Njungwe 2009). The body charged with overseeing the implementation of the CRC is the Committee on the Rights of the Child. This body has authority to examine states’ periodic reports, to work hand in hand with other UN agencies involved in children’s rights, and to make suggestions and recommendations both to the UN General Assembly and states’ parties with respect to the improvement of issues relating to children’s rights (Njungwe 2009).

The Declaration on the Rights and Welfare of the Child makes it clear that the welfare of the African child is inextricably bound up with that of the child’s parents and other members of the family. Apparently, this does not only show the significance of the family movement in an African society, but also exemplifies the traditional family role of an African mother, whose main task is that of child nurturing. However, today it is debatable whether child welfare can be more exclusively linked to mothers rather than fathers. However, women seem to be more involved. If children have been subjected to marriages, their rights and those of their siblings would not be realised (Njungwe 2009). This is the situation prevailing in Mashonaland Central province where children engage in marriages thereby being deprived of their many rights – including the right to education.

### **2.3 Reasons for the continued practice of child marriage in Africa and Zimbabwe**

Different answers have been put forward as the reasons for the continued practice of child marriages across Africa in general, and in Zimbabwe in particular. One of the common reasons is that the practice has been pushed further by socio-economic issues. It is argued that in African societies, girls are either seen as an economic burden that should be disposed of or are valued as capital that should be exchanged with goods, money and livestock. Therefore, child marriage is often regarded as necessary as it improves an African family’s economic status. In addition, the marriage practice is seen as directly linked to family honour and improvement of family status resulting from bride -price and dowry payments. In communities where child

marriage is prevalent, there is strong social pressure on families to either conform or face ridicule, disapprove of family shame (Mikhail 2002). Local perceptions regarding an ideal age of marriage are tied to economic factors such as dowries, and bride price. In Africa and indeed in Zimbabwe, the institution of dowry and bride price complicates the situation. In poor rural areas like Bindura and Mount Darwin districts in Mashonaland Central province where child marriage is prevalent, the bride-price and dowry are of great importance. These have turned into a one-way transaction, a clear-cut payment. In this practice, exchanged payments are frequently received by a third party who is the girl's close relative, and not the girl herself. The third party is usually the girl's parents or any close relative acting in the capacity of the parent. Ironically, the dowry received on the marriage of the daughter is quite often used to pay for the son's future bride (Mikhail 2002).

Child marriage have also been conducted for religious reasons in most African communities. In Zimbabwe, the Johanne Marange Apostolic sect is one religious institution that has contributed to increase in child marriage. This sect is one of the largest religious groups with an estimated membership of 33, 9% of total Zimbabwe population (Zimstat 2011). However, the figure of this sect is believed to be higher than 33.9% with some studies indicating that it stands at 38%, showing that the sect is very influential in society, commanding a following of more than a third of the country's population (Hodzi 2014). Most child marriages that take place in the religious sects are often veiled or hidden from society. It is believed that girls as young as 10 years, and sometimes new born babies are married off to older men under the pretext that it is done according God's will (Guday 2005:22). There is gross indoctrination of this belief and girls who are born into this sect are at a higher risk of being married off at an early age. Usually, the girls' first sexual experience in these marriages is rape, which may sometimes go for years before the girl can fully submit and give in to the *status quo* (Hodzi 2014).

The perpetuation of child marriage in some African communities is done to fulfil demands of cultural practices (Heinonen 2002). In Zimbabwe, the cultural practice of *kuzvarira* (where a child can be married off before they are even born) is still thriving in Mashonaland Central province. Marrying off girls through *kuzvarira* is believed to appease spirits or to settle long standing disputes between families in what is commonly known as *kuripangozi*. Another detrimental cultural practice that ferments child marriage is *chiramu* (a traditional practice whereby a husband has marriage rights over his wife's younger sister despite her age). Thus, at the heart of the reasons for these 'unions' are issues of sexuality, power and patriarchy (Hartmann 1981).

However, it is important to note that customs surrounding child marriage, including the desirable age and the way in which a spouse is selected, depend on a society's view (Emirie 2005). Early marriages and other traditional practices such as female genital mutilation is part of a complex social relationship related to family formation and sustainability of ethnic groups. One of the common socio-cultural reason for child marriage is to forge links between families. This is done to ensure that the girl is properly married while she is still a virgin and too young to act independently. In this context, early marriage may even occur where a family has made a pledge to marry off their daughter to a benefactor. Hence, the age of betrothal for girls in child marriages might be arranged either before birth or after puberty (Heinonen 2002). It should be noted that in early arranged marriage, the girl's consent is usually absent. According to Heinonen (2002), justifications for child marriage include respect for traditions that dictate that girls should marry early, honouring of the pledges to a family or a benefactor, strengthening of community ties and marrying off girls to the husband of her deceased sister (Heinonen 2002).

However, it should be noted that whilst child marriage continues to be a social problem in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, the duty bearers have some good laws and policies that can help end this phenomenon. It seems there has been little implementation of laws and policies, hence child marriages have become part of people's customs.

## 2.5 Child marriage as an obstacle to children's social development

First and foremost, child marriage can have life threatening health consequences for most girls. In Africa most, young brides have limited access to contraceptive and reproductive health services and related information. They are exposed to early and frequent sexual relations, repeated pregnancies and childbirth before they are physically mature and psychologically ready (Heinonen 2002). Under pressure to become mothers soon after marriage, many girls fall pregnant before their bodies are mature enough to safely carry or deliver babies. Boys also become fathers before they are mature enough to make family decisions, and before they are financially stable to cater for their families. Complications in pregnancy can put the girl child at risk of injury and even death, as girls who give birth whilst under the age of 15 years are five times more likely to die in childbirth than young women in their early 20s (Heinonen 2002). Research on human rights shows that the greatest obstacles to girls' education and development, as identified in many governments' reports to human rights monitoring bodies, include child marriages, pregnancy and performing domestic chores whilst still very young. Apparently,

early marriage disrupts girls' education and personal development and employment opportunities. This violates girls' rights to education, which includes the rights to vocational training, and employment as enshrined in the CEDAW and the CRC (Emerie 2005). This is the situation obtaining Bindura and Mt Darwin districts as many girls and boys who engage in early marriage end up in poverty, thereby using unorthodox means to earn a living such as theft, illegal gold mining and alcoholism.

Globally, it has been established that over 60% of brides in developing countries have had no formal education because of child marriages (Emerie 2005). These brides carry the burden of single-handedly looking after their children when abandoned by the husbands. The CRC endorses the principles of the "best interest of the child" and the "evolving capacity" of the adolescent. Sadly, 31 % of girls in Zimbabwe marry before they reach the age of 18 years and about 15% of these are married before they reach 15 years (Heinon 2002). As such, child marriage puts girls at risk of sexual, physical and psychological violence as they are likely to be abused by husbands. In addition, child brides are rarely able to assert their choices, such as to use family planning methods or to practice safer sexual relations. In the end, married girls can be particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases because of their lack of capacity to make proper sexual decisions. Because of child marriage, millions of girls miss the skills, knowledge and employment prospects that would enable them to lift their families out of poverty and contribute to their countries' economic development and prosperity (Emerie 2005). If these Sustainable Development Goals are realised the socio-economic life of young people in Mashonaland central would be enhanced and will go a long way in alleviating poverty in the province.

In addition, very few girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are informed of where they are heading to when they are brought into marriages. Those with the idea of the consequences of child marriages are usually reluctant to get involved. In Mashonaland Central province many girls are involved in marriages because they lack information about the negative effects of child marriages. In most marriages, girls are not given the opportunity to make decisions that would affect their lives, as such decisions are made by their parents (Emerie 2005). Usually the lack of a child's decision in consent is justified through a general belief that parents know best in decision making. But this can be justified where parents have excellent communication and friendly relationships with their daughters. In such situations, parents and other responsible people can offer substantial advice to them. More importantly such advice which can contribute to a child's social development, is appropriate around the ages of 15 to 16 years, when most girls are neither physically nor psychologically mature for marriage and child bearing. (Mikhail 2002).

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section deals with the research methodology. It presents the mixed method approach which uses both qualitative and quantitative research. In addition, the section discusses the research design, the targeted population, sampling and data collection procedures.

#### 3.1 Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research involves methods of data collection and analysis that are non-quantitative (Lofland and Lofland 1984:31). A qualitative research was considered as an approach which facilitated exploration of respondents' experience, attitudes, views, opinions, beliefs and values on the matter under investigation (Leedy and Ormrod 2010). This was used since child marriage is based on human experience.

#### 3.2 Quantitative Approach

The researcher also used quantitative research as a combination to the qualitative approach explained in subsection 3.1 above. Quantitative research involves the generation of data into quantitative form, which can be subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid fashion (Ahmed 2014). Quantitative data is that data which when collected can be measured numerically (Baker 2013). This method protects the data from bias and quantitative research is easy to measure and the results can be clearly shown through objective data (Creswell 2009). This approach is effective because the results are valid, reliable and generalised to larger populations.

#### 3.3 Description of the study area

Mashonaland Central province is one of Zimbabwe's ten administrative provinces (Figure 1). The province covers the northern mainland of the country and it stretches into the Zambezi valley and the border with Mozambican to the east. It is dominated by the Shona cultural practices and Shona speaking people.



Figure 1: A map of Mashonaland Central province showing Bindura and Mount Darwin districts

Source:OCHA (2009).

As can be observed, the province of Mashonaland Central includes towns such as Mount Darwin, Mazowe, Guruve, Muzarabani, Centenary and Shamva (Figure 1). Bindura district is situated in the Mazowe Valley approximately, 88 km North East of Harare. The district is dependent on mining and farming for livelihoods, with nickel, copper and cobalt being the major minerals mined. Much of the farming is concentrated on growing cotton and maize. Mt. Darwin district has an estimated population of about 199,105 people (Zimstat 2012). The district consists of rural communities of Kaitano, Mavhuradonha and Mukumburawhich rely on subsistence farming and cotton growing for survival.

### 3.4 Research approach and design

This mixed study employed phenomenological research design, which was used to study the lived experiences of people involved in child marriages. The phenomenology was considered effective to study the lived experience of victims of child marriage in terms of their social, emotional, physical and psychological experiences. According Clark (2012), phenomenology describes the meaning for several individual of their lived experience of a concept or phenomenon. This design was chosen as it helps to understand the socio-economic impact of children who engage in child marriage.

### 3.5 Population and sampling

Tuckman (1994) defines research population as the group from which the researcher is interested in gaining information and drawing conclusions. Population may also refer to the aggregate or totality of individuals from which the sample is chosen (Sidhu 1996). As such, the researchers used a sample of 66 residents drawn from Bindura and Madziva in Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe. The sample included the victims of child marriage, traditional leaders and other observers in the community who have witnessed such abuse. Sampling allows the researchers to recruit participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation (www.statisticssolutions.com). Shumbayaonda (2006) suggests that the sample size for surveys should be more than thirty percent of the total population, hence the sample was drawn from a population of 220 people aged between 18 and 40 years. The researchers selected 66 people from a possible population of 220 from Bindura and Mount Darwin using simple random sampling from the people affected and interested observers in the community who have witnessed some of the abuses.

### 3.6 Data collection procedure

In as far as data collection is concerned, the researchers used self-administration to conduct both the interviews and questionnaires to village heads and girls who are victims of children marriages respectively, in Bindura and Mount Darwin. Face to face interviews were used for the interviewees who were easily accessible. It also gave the researchers an opportunity to interact with people so that they can express their feelings and thoughts and make a connection with the information that is required. Questionnaires were also used because they are more reliable and allow accuracy through the comparability of information across interviewees. The questions were closed ended and few are open because most people tend to leave some of the questions that require more writing and thinking (Munzira 2017). The questions were short to ensure that the respondents easily understood them.

### 3.7 Data analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative data collected from the village heads and victims of child marriage were analysed to transform into findings. Data from the victims of child marriage, traditional leaders and interested community observers were then quantitatively analysed, processed and summarised into tables. Analysis of qualitative involves interpretation and an attempt in understanding the subjects as they construct it (Hooper 1992). This was done through the process of organising the data from the interviews and questionnaires in a way that would increase a researcher's understanding and for better presentation of the findings. In this study the researchers translated interviews that were conducted in Shona language of the respondents, into English language.

### 3.8 Limitations of the study

There were financial constraints to effectively cover the two districts studied in Mashonaland Central province. Therefore, the research was restricted mainly to places close to Bindura urban centre and Mt Darwin, another limitation was that victims of child marriage did not easily open about their experiences. The researchers assured participants that the information gathered from them would be confidential, and that the names of the participants would not be disclosed.

### 3.4 Ethical considerations

The researchers considered issues of voluntary participation, informed consent and anonymity as part of the ethical considerations. Trochim (2006) posits that voluntary participation, informed consent and anonymity are key issues in the protection of the rights of the research participants. Therefore, privacy and confidentiality of the participants was guaranteed by the researchers since this is a sensitive issue. Names of the participants were deliberately left out to protect their identities. Therefore, where names are mentioned in this study, pseudonyms have been used to preserve anonymity and privacy of participants. The researchers also ensured that there was no dishonesty, falsification or misrepresentation of research findings.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings on child marriages, focusing on Bindura and Mount Darwin districts in Mashonaland central province. The findings are presented, discussed and compared with results from previous studies.

### 4.1 Causes of child marriages in Mashonaland Central province

Traditional leaders (chiefs and headmen) and victims of child marriage were interviewed in Bindura and Mount Darwin districts. The respondents mentioned religious beliefs, poverty, economic hardships and peer group pressure as the major causes of child marriages (Table 1). Table 1 illustrates these major causes through scores allocated to each cause as per the respondents' views.

Table 1: Causes of child marriages

N=66

Cause	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Religious beliefs	18	27
Poverty	16	24
Economic hardships	15	23
Peer group pressure	17	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: authors' construction

The above table (Table 1) shows that according to the respondents, religious beliefs (27%), poverty (24%), economic hardships (23%) and peer group pressure (26%) are the main causes of child marriages in Bindura and Mount Darwin districts of Mashonaland Central province. Religious beliefs (27%) were ranked by the respondents as the main cause, whilst economic hardships were regarded as the lowest cause of child marriages. According to the respondents, gross indoctrination of young girls in religion by the Apostolic sect of Johanne Marange led to them being married at a tender age. The girls who belong to the sect are taught that respect and loyalty to their parents are some of the most important values from the Bible, hence the girls should honour decisions made on their behalf by their parents. If they are asked to marry older men, even those in polygamous marriages, the girls are supposed to do so without raising any questions. The implication on this is that girls enter marriages unwillingly and without full knowledge about marriage.

Poverty (24%) is ranked as the second major cause of child marriage. Sixteen (24%) respondents (Table 1), indicated that in families with high levels of poverty some parents were marrying off their daughters to increase family income through money received as bride price. This practice was said to be rampant even in Bindura urban, with townships such as Aerodrome and New progress embracing it. The implication here is that parents use their daughters as a marriage tool to improve the parents' failed economic status. In addition, girls seem to have been taken as of lesser value in Bindura and Mount Darwin districts. The findings of poverty as a cause to child marriage, agree with a study carried out in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, India and Malaysia which revealed that poverty was one of the major causes (Berhane-Selaise 1993).

Pointing to peer group pressure (26%) as another cause of child marriages, some youths in Bindura urban centre mentioned that the proliferation of television viewing, internet misapplication of pornography material, and social media on mobile phones were having negative impact on the attitudes, leading to early marriages. The youths narrated that young people were influenced by friends in gross misuse of the new technology. This in turn stimulated children below 18 years into sexual tendencies that resulted in child marriages. According to the traditional leaders, children always try to emulate and experiment what they see from televisions and from the internet.

#### 4.2 The Gender and Age group most affected by child marriages

This part presents the quantitative data of the study and focuses on the statistics on gender and age groups mostly affected by child marriages in Bindura and Mount Darwin districts (Table 2).

Table 2: Gender of child marriage victims

N=50

Gender	Children marrying at 10 – 13 years	Children marrying at 14 – 17 years	Total	Percentage
Male (boys)	00	05	05	10
Female (girls)	07	38	45	90
<b>Totals</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: authors' construction

Table 2 above shows the gender and ages of victims of child marriages in Bindura and Mount Darwin districts. Of the 50 respondents who are victims of child marriages, 45 (90%) are girls, whilst 5 (10%) are boys (Table 2). The high figure (90%) of girls involved in child marriage is indicative that girls are more vulnerable than boys in human societies. The figure of 10% for boys involved in child marriages indicates that when boys marry there is no significant economic gain to the family than when girls get married. The marriage of girls improves a family's income when parents receive bride price and dowry from the bridegroom. As such, the results indicate that boys' marriage contribute little to the African traditional families compared to the marriage of girls. A total of 7 out of 50 children got married when they were between the ages of 10 and 13 years. Of those 7 children who got married between 10 and 13 years, all of them were girls whilst there were no boys. A total of 43 children got married when they were between 14 and 17 years, of which 38 of them were girls and 5 were boys (Table 2).

#### 4.3. Religious and other mechanisms for addressing the problem of child marriage

Many African initiated churches exist in the studied area of Bindura and Mount Darwin districts. According to the traditional leaders interviewed, such churches include Johanne Masowe Apostolic Faith, Johanne Marange Apostolic Faith, Johanne Masowe of vadzidziva Jesu, Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Forward in Faith (ZAOGA FIF), Prophetic Healing and Deliverance Ministries (PHD), and United Family International Church (UFIC). In



addition to these African initiated churches in the studied area, there are also mainline churches such as the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Methodist Church, Church of Christ, and Apostolic Faith Mission. It was established from the victims of child marriages that the churches had preached against child marriages. However, the victims further narrated that efforts by the churches were not enough as only the church attendees accessed information, hence the increase in child marriages. These results complement a study carried out by The Herald (2019), which stated that religious leaders can be a determining factor in ending child marriages.

Apart from using religion to address child marriages in Bindura and Mount Darwin districts, legislation was also being used by the government as a deterrent measure. The government of Zimbabwe uses the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, Chapter 9:23, and the Children Adoption Act, as some of the pieces of legislation that protect the sexual abuse of children. However, despite the enforcement of the available legislation and the role of churches, the problem of child marriages seems to be still increasing. This suggests that there is no coordination between the government, parents and other organisations in the fight against child marriages.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

From the findings it is apparent that child marriage is a traditional practice that violates the rights of boys and girls and undermines efforts to achieve sustainable development. The rights of many children who are already married in the country have been overlooked. The government, Non-Governmental Organisations and religious groups have lacked in effectively dealing with child marriages.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The major recommendation of the study is that the government should enter into partnership with other organizations such as traditional leaders, law makers in the province to deal with child marriage. Also, income generating projects and civic education should be put in place to empower children and promote their rights. Sound guidance and counselling services should be proffered to assist the affected children. In addition, working in partnership with parents as child marriage helps transform attitudes and identify viable alternatives that advance the interests of individual children and the wellbeing of the entire family, which is critical to ensure that interventions have positive sustainable results.

### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Authors' contributions

P.G. drafted the original manuscript, acquired and analysed the data and made interpretations. C.D. guided with methodology and critically revised the manuscript. H.M. edited the manuscript and approved it for publication.

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