

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGES IN MALAWI

Abstract

Globally, child marriage has been a human right issues affecting their mental, physical and economic development, Malawi included. Despite numerous efforts to reduce the problem, the practice still continuous. The study examines youth involvement in the fight against child marriage in selected districts of Malawi. The study used qualitative study from 96 respondents purposefully sampled from two child marriage prevalence districts of Mchinji and Dedza to address the objective. Content analysis determined themes and sub themes that informed the study results. The gender norms and values, early pregnancies, harmful cultural and religious practices, weak enforcement of the law and poverty were key drivers of child marriage in Malawi. Strong cultural and religious beliefs weaken youth fight against child marriages, hence, its persistence in Malawi. Therefore, as the youth remains the fundamental players in the fight against child marriage, strong orientation and educative campaigns using multi-media and multi-stakeholders approaches targeting hard to understand cultures and religion is key if and only if the country to increase the well fare of the children and completely hand the human right challenge of child marriage

Key Words: child, poverty, child violence, human right, early marriage, Malawi

Introduction

Child marriage is an issue that has, is and continues to be discussed in various forums, internationally and locally, as it affects the very population on which the global future is dependent upon (Organization, Unicef, *et al*, 2010). It is one such practice that has contributed to other social and health problems like gender-based violence, increased incidence of new HIV infections and related deaths in the youth, among other populations. Child marriage is defined as a legal or customary union before the age of 18, it affects the children's well-being and violates enjoyment of their rights (Brides, 2016). Maswikwa, Richter, Kaufman, & Nandi, (2015) reiterates that, as a harmful practice, it undermines a child's right to autonomy, to live an intimidation and violence free life and ably attain an education. When a child is forced into a marital union his or her fundamental rights are impinged and they are robbed of their childhood and youthful being as they begin to take up roles and responsibilities for which they are not ready to carry out. It is evident that across the globe the practice has and continues to have adverse impacts on the victimised populations ranging from physical, psychological, and emotional. In a majority of cases it's the girl child that is mostly victimised(UNICEF *et al*, 2017).

In the African context, the increasing prevalence of child marriages could have disturbing consequences on future development, in combination with rapid rates of population growth. Africa

alone accounts for 15 of the 20 countries with highest rates of child marriage (UNICEF *et al*, 2017). It should also be noted that there is a faster decline in the rate of child marriages among the rich in comparison with the poor (UNICEF *et al*, 2017). As much as Southern Asia registers the highest numbers of child brides at tender ages but if headway is not made, Africa will have doubled its current statistics by 2050 (Brides, 2016).

Interestingly Sub-Saharan Africa registers about 39 percent of girls engaging into marriage before 18. Malawi rates highly on child marriages and is one of the highest in the region with over 50% of girls getting married before 18 years (UNICEF & others, 2017). In 2010, half of women aged 20 to 24 years were married before they were 18. In other case others were married off at the ages of 9 or 10. Saddening to note that approximately, one out of two girls in the country will be married by her eighteenth birthday, according to the United Nations (Organization *et al.*, 2010).

Malawi like other countries in the region committed to the Millennium Development Goals which ended in 2015. One of the goals chosen by Malawi was '*promoting gender equality and women empowerment*' of which a number of sectors including Ministry of Health took it on board but however the issues of child marriage were not directly addressed. This was highlighted in the MDG end line survey that issues around gender equality and child marriage were submerged and not much was achieved. This did influence the Malawi government's decision to have it feature highly as one of the priorities to achieving Sustainable Development Goal number 5 on Gender Equality. As Shawki, (2015) indicates that ending child marriages remains key because when child marriages are high it is an indicator that women are not empowered to make decisions regarding their bodies and sexuality.

All in all, globally, there are various cultural practices that are carried over from generation to generation and not all are beneficial to the populations in which the cultural practices are traditionally carried out. In Malawi, various programmes and projects have been directing a lot of resources towards minimizing and eliminating harmful cultural practices and one critical practice is early child marriages (UNICEF & others, 2017). As such, legal instruments have been developed in efforts to curb the practice supported on both international and local scenes. Despite this development, Malawi has been experiencing an increased number of child marriages among the youth. As such the study investigates the perceived drivers or influencers of child marriages in Malawi; the perceptions of the youth on child marriages and examine the roles of the youth in intervention aimed at promoting and or ending child marriages in Malawi.

Methodology

Study settings

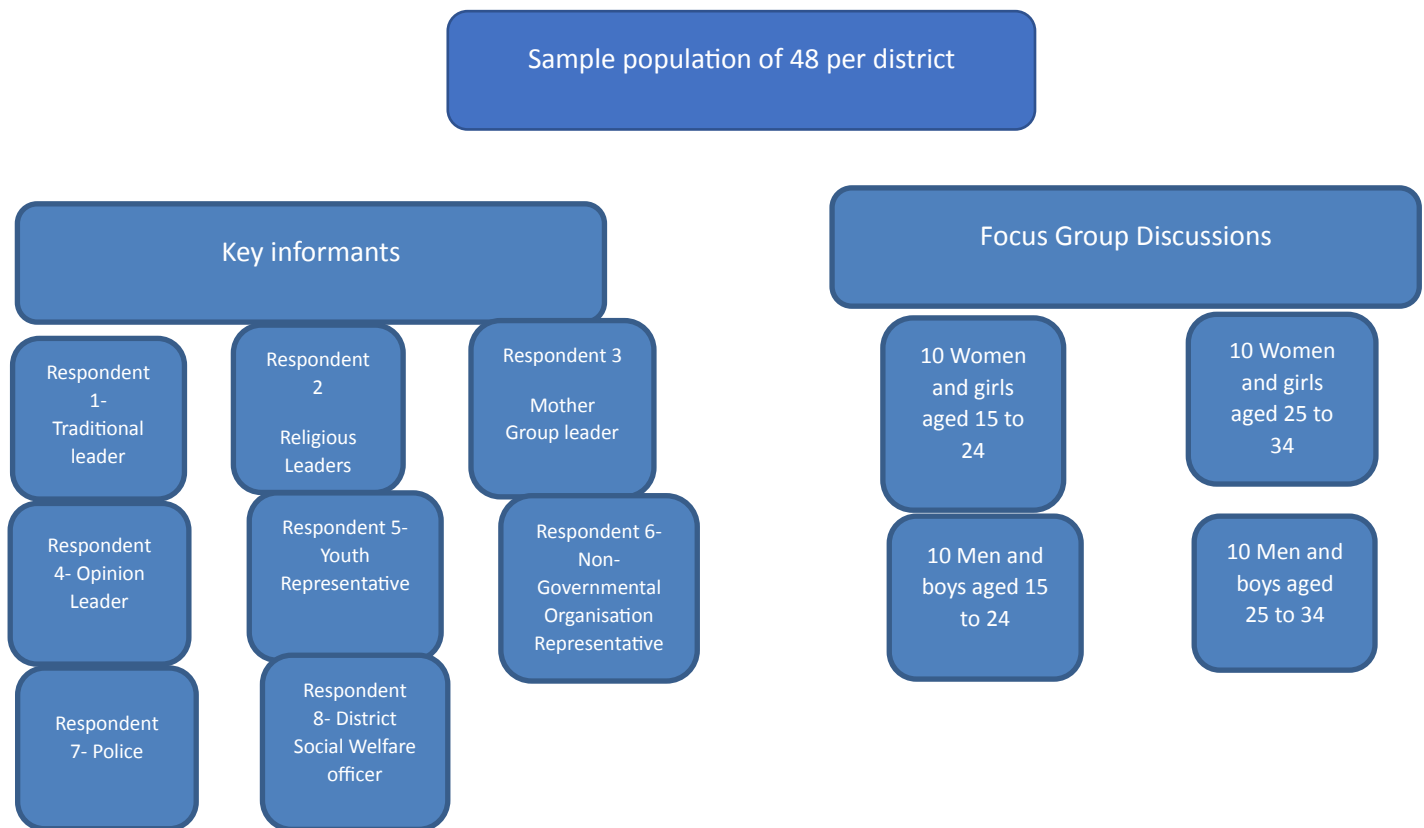
The study was carried out in Dedza and Mchinji districts. Dedza has a population of 624,445 with 330,310 males and 325,518 females. The youth comprise 196,163 of the total population in Dedza representing 31% of the total population. Mchinji has a population size of 456,558 with 227,373

males and 229,185 females with 187,891 being the youth which is 41% representation on the total district population. These districts have been selected on the basis of high prevalence of child marriages in Malawi, as reported in the 2015 Demographic Health Survey Report (National Statistical Office, 2017). Secondly for comparison reasons Dedza T/A Kachindamoto has registered success in curbing the practice and flagged highly on the international scenes as a best practice, unlike in Mchinji.

Sampling

The study collected data from primary data sources. The primary data was collected through employing of purposive sampling method to identify the required respondents from each proposed category. From a phenomenological perspective, the study used data saturation concept to determine its sample size. The data saturation concept assumes that within qualitative research, a phenomena only needs to appear once to be part of an analytical record (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, Ormston, *et al*, 2013). A total of 87 respondents participated in the study from both districts. Below is the distribution of the selection criteria illustrating the sampling approach used.

Figure 1: Selection Criteria



Data Collection

Focus Group Discussions

Participants to these interviews consisted of respondents aged up to 34 years; more specially the selection criteria involved men and boys in addition to young women and girls aged between 15 and 34 years. An average of 10 people per group participated in the discussions - men and boys only group aged 15 to 24; men and boys only group aged 25 to 34; women and girls only group aged 15 to 24 and women and girls only group aged 25 to 34 years. Each district had 4 groups. The discussions were moderated by the researcher so as to probe more information and enumerators documented the responses therein.

Data Analysis Technique

According to Johnson & Christensen, (2008) has defined data analysis as a process of bringing direction and sense to collected data, which is further converted into results. The study applied qualitative methods to collect the data which was sorted and coded through content analysis. The researcher examined the raw data which was classified into coded common themes and after their identification those that are similar were categorised to identify higher order categories. Relationships of the identified categories were analysed using the coding made and conclusions made their in. The stages that were tracked during the analysis were adapted from Tesch, (1990) which were as follows:

- Reviewing of each interview to get an understanding of it prior to analysis.
- After reviewing, an isolation was made by the researcher on the key transcripts in relation to the study objectives.
- Coding of transcripts according to main themes and categories.
- Findings written down to assess the relationships between the themes and categories.
- Identification of quotes to substantiate theme and categories
- Data was then analysed based on the themes and categories creating an in-depth understanding of the research.
- The material was then compared with the transcribed data for proofing on comprehensiveness and understanding.

The software that was adopted to analyses data was Atlas ti-7.0.

Objectives	Theme
To document the perceived underlying drivers or influencers of child marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early pregnancies• Harmful cultural practices• Levels of Education• Weak enforcement of the law• Poverty

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious norms
To assess the perceptions of the youth with regards to child marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth as significant players in ending child marriage
To document the roles the youth consider they have in promoting or ending child marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership roles • Participation in programmes • Youth as mediators for minimising the effects of child marriage on victims.

Ethical Consideration

An ethical clearance was sought from Lilongwe University Ethical Review Committee and attested and approved the research protocol. However, informed consent was sought from the respondents for each round of the Focus Group Discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Characteristics of Respondents

Population of respondents by District

The study involved 87 people, 43 from Mchinji and the other 44 from Dedza. The study had 4 focus group discussions in each district as follows: men only group (of 9 people) aged 35 years above; boys only group (of 9 people) aged between 18 and 25; women only group (of 9 people) aged 35 above and girls only group (of 9 people) aged between 18 and 25. The groups were purposively selected to take part in the discussions in each district, giving a total of 4 groups of 9 each per group per district. The study also engaged 7 key informants from Mchinji and 8 from Dedza district.

Both Mchinji and Dedza are situated in the central region of Malawi along the borders of Zambia and Mozambique respectively. All respondents were from rural areas except for representatives of Social Welfare Offices and Non-Governmental Organizations.

Underlying Drivers of Child Marriages

Validity of marriages in Malawi are based on customary laws. There was a consensus among the participants of Focused Group Discussions that the union of a man and a woman to form a family with permission from families of the two is considered to be a valid marriage. A chief defines marriage,

“A marriage can be defined as a union between a man and a woman after the man has proposed the woman. It is institutionalized by a religious leader with approval from both the parents and a

chief. Without approval from the church and community leader, that marriage is invalid.” (Mchinji Respondent 1)

As defined by the chief, in Malawi, marriage proposal in gendered process, it is understood that only a man proposes to a woman, not the other way round. Dedza and Mchinji are dominantly patriarchy societies where men, fathers and uncles have the power to make or break marriages. This agree with Mwambene, (2005) who states that in Malawi marriage validity is dependent on approval of the family elders or custodians who are referred to as ‘*ankhoswe*’ and this will be binding by customary law. The latter is more flexible in institutionalizing marriages, a marriage of two people who have agreed get married without approval of the church or/and the community leadership can be considered valid in some cases.

An old lady exclaims,

‘...if they are adult and they agree to live together, that is a valid marriage. As a community we cannot force them to follow the customs of our tradition, they are adults.’ (Dedza Respondent 1)

Age for Marriage

The study revealed that communities are aware that 18 years is the age established by the law as the minimum age for marriage. Child protection workers referred to programmes implemented by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare through the District Social Welfare Offices and Non-Governmental Organizations to have popularized the age limit. A woman portrays,

“only girls and boys at the age of 18 and above are eligible to get married otherwise they need time get matured physically and mentally. Especially girls at the age of 14, 16 even 17 have very weak bodies. When they get married at this tender age, they may suffer from fistula after giving birth.” (Dedza Respondent 2)

Some even consider people at the age of 18 as not matured enough as highlighted in the words of one Village Head in Mchinji.

“I consider young men and women at the age of 21 and above as matured enough to get married. The Law says its 18 but I think 21 is more appropriate.” (Mchinji Respondent 2)

Thus, it was clear to the respondents that any marriage that involves a minor is a child marriage. Some highlighted reasons why they felt that people below the age of 18 are not eligible for marriage. A religious leader explains,

“.... there is a need for age limit. These days some girls gain wait at a tender age. When a girl reaches puberty early, she might be forced to think that she is ready for marriage. It is very sad that they think in that manner. They need to be educated first before committing to marriage.” (Dedza Respondent 3)

The findings fall in line with the constitution which was amended in February, 2017 and the President assented in April, 2017. Previously the constitution stipulated that anyone above 18 is eligible for marriage and those above 16 can get married with a consent from their family.

Factors influencing Child Marriages

Early Pregnancies

Conceiving before marriage means getting married to people of Dedza and Mchinji. Getting pregnant outside wedlock is still considered to be immoral. When it happens, women and girls become a laughing stock in their communities. As a result, girls are forced to get married at a young age.

“...the main factor that causes child marriages here in Mchinji is the prevalence of unexpected pregnancies. Most girls don’t understand that if you do it once you might get pregnant. This knowledge is very useful to them. If they were able to access sexual and health reproductive services, the problem of child marriages could have reduced.” Operational Manager of CISE. (Mchinji Respondent 3)

In other cases, impregnated girls are dragged into marriage so that they can be supported by their spouses. A Children’s Corner teacher comments:

“...when boys and girls go to school, they don’t have intentions of getting married. All they want is manage their relationship while they are schooling. Sometimes things happen and they impregnate each other. When this happen, the girl alongside with his boyfriend is expelled from school. Parents then persuade them to get married.” (Mchinji Respondent 4)

This is in tandem with a report in Mutasa district that one of the main factors that encourages child marriages are early pregnancies. As the case of Zimbabwe when a man/ boy impregnates a girl, culture demands that he marries her regardless of her age(Kanjanda & Chiparange, 2016)

Cultural Harmful Practices

Harmful cultural practices are declining; traditional leaders are leading the fight against practices that fuel inclination of child marriages. Traditional Authority Kachindamoto for one has become a role model in Dedza and Malawi as a whole for nullifying child marriages. A Children’s Corner Teacher highlights,

“I cannot blame culture nor traditional leaders, look at TA Kachindamoto, that woman is doing a great job. The Court in her area receives more cases on Child Marriages, which means that people are aware that as a nation we can no longer tolerate child marriages any more. That woman is doing great. Media houses are also interested in her stories too” (Dedza Respondent 4)

All focused group discussion interviewees said there were no significant links between culture and child marriages. Cultural practices such as Nsondo in the Northern part of Dedza are well monitored by the chiefs through their by-laws and Child Protection Committees.

However, in some pockets of Mchinji, some harmful customs are still practiced secretly. For instance, *Bulangeti wa Mfumu* is still practiced. It is a Chewa custom where girls are offered to sleep with a guest chief in a village. The Ministry of Labour, Youth and Manpower Development in Malawi in a cultural practices study they carried out also found that secretly some harmful cultural practices such as *Bulangeti wa Mfumu* are still practiced underground, regardless of the by-laws instituted by traditional leaders in their areas (Government, 2015). This could contribute to early sexual debut which influences girls to get married before the age of 18.

Levels of Education

It was revealed that levels of education determine the age at which a person gets married. Most child marriages were as a result of early pregnancies. Boys who dropped out of school are likely to impregnate school-going girls. In this context, the family of the girl demands that the boy should support the girl in return they get married. This is evident in the testimony of a man who said,

“...here in chikwasa village, a 20 year old boy who had dropped out school some years back impregnated a 15 year old girl. They had no option but get married. At the time of giving birth, Kaphuka Health Centre could not assist her. She was referred to Dedza Hospital where she gave birth through caesarean section. (Dedza Respondent 5)

The level of education differentiates awareness levels of individuals. All interviewees in the focus group discussions who had some secondary school educations were more aware of interventions and programmes that were being implemented in the community on the fight against child marriages than those who had at most primary education. The former had also knowledge of legal frameworks which criminalizes child marriages.

Weak Enforcement of the Law

The availability of legal instruments that fight child marriages has not yielded the desired results. Newly enacted and reviewed laws have not yet been fully disseminated to the masses. A church leader testifies,

‘...I cannot give you a specific example of laws and policies in this regard. What I know is that it’s an offence for a man to get married to a minor...’ (Mchinji Respondent 5)

Regarding enforcement of the laws, the institutional capacity of the Traditional leader, the police, social workers and courts is very weak. It was explained that,

“Us as parents are suffering from this nonsense our kids are doing these days. We try to nullify the marriages. When we fail, we report to the Village Headman to nullify the marriage but when the children are very delinquent, all these efforts fail” (Dedza Respondent 6)

This proves that although chiefs have established by laws, enforcement is still a challenge. True to this finding, Malawi has a mandate internationally and regionally to address child marriages which is evident through the various treaties it has ratified including the CEDAW, CRC and the Maputo protocol. Locally are the marriage, divorce and family relations act and child protection act. However, these frameworks cannot yield intended result of stopping child marriage without an effective monitoring system (Brides, 2016). There is no clarity amongst stakeholders on who bears the primary responsibility of coordinating and monitoring how the message is being sent across because people can only act if they are knowledgeable.

Poverty

Poverty was explained to be the main cause of child marriages. This is because girls who lack financial support from their parents or guardians feel that the only way to get their needs is by getting married. Similarly, boys who receive no support from their parents assume responsibility of taking care of themselves and sometimes their siblings at a tender age. Hence, they feel matured enough to get married even before reaching 18. One girl holds,

“... one reason that girls marry at a very young age is lack of parental support. We need clothes, books and other materials. All these require money. If parents don't provide for their children, they are likely to get married before completing school. If you go around the village and ask girls why they dropped out of school for marriage you hear them say poverty gave them no option to continue with school” (Mchinji Respondent 6)

Another girl comments,

“.. it is very hard to go to school with an empty stomach and a torn uniform. When you ask your parents to support you, they tell you to get married if you want adequate support. Girls get tired of this kind of talk, they get married” (Mchinji Respondent 7)

A chief adds,

“Poverty is the main cause of child marriages. Children, mainly girls get married if they are not receiving adequate support from their parents and relatives.” (Mchinji Respondent 8)

Religious Norms

The research found that religions play a role in promoting child marriages. Marriages are institutionalized by the clergy. Some of them do not check the age of bride and bridegroom hence they end up presiding over a wedding of minors. A youth club chair highlights,

“Religious leaders have a huge role to play in the fight against child marriages. Sometimes you go to churches and to your surprise find that the bride is below the age of 18. They should be asking for a health passport to find out the age of the bride and bridegroom before institutionalizing the marriage. Most churches do check while others do not.” (Dedza Respondent 7)

With lack of national identification cards, some children tend to give false information regarding their age. A village head testifies,

‘...I don’t know why, but these days children grow faster. A 14-year-old of today is different from that of our time. When you ask them their age, they lie. We can’t blame churches on this, they do ask the children their age but if they lie what can they do’ (Dedza Respondent 8)

Dedza is predominantly catholic, which has very strong community structures and whose priests undergo trainings that have some references of marriage related laws. Therefore, religion plays an instrumental role in ending child marriages in Dedza than Mchinji, whose majority are followers of Seventh Day Adventist and CCAP.

Roles of the Youth in Promoting or Ending Child Marriages

Youth Perception in Playing a Role on Promoting or Ending Child Marriages

Youth regard themselves as significant on either on promoting or ending child marriages as the Operations Manager of CISE recalls,

“Youth consider themselves instrumental in the fight against child marriages. They say, nothing for us without us”

Most victims of child marriages are youth, this makes them consider themselves instrumental in interventions against child marriages. Through Youth Clubs, Children’s Corners, local Child Protection Committees and Community Based Organizations, youth take lead in awareness campaigns against child marriages. It is evident in the testimonies given by participants of Focused Group Discussions. A youth club chair explains,

‘.....look at the participants, most of them are in their twenties. That signifies how they value child marriage issues. We have young people in our Village Development Committee, Child Protection Committees and Community Victim Support Unit. Some of them assumed leadership position in these important committee. They want to be part of this fight, but we let them down sometime....’ (Mchinji Respondent 9)

Another man comments,

“.... In their youth clubs, they advise each other on these issues” (Mchinji Respondent 10)

A chief adds,

“Yes, youth are very crucial in the fight against child marriages, they are the future generation. So, they need to be pressured to act. This can bring sanity in our areas.” (Mchinji Respondent 11)

Easley (2012) also found that when young people recognise that they too can make meaningful contributions to community related issues, they too can become change assets in their communities.

Leadership Roles

Besides considering themselves instrumental in the fight against child marriages, it was revealed that they have weak representation in decision making platforms such as Village Development Committees, Area Development Committees and District Councils. Of the youth engaged in the focus group discussions, it was revealed that no youth representatives were part of the development committees and this was confirmed with the key informants. This still indicates that the implementation of the National Youth Policy for Malawi is far from realisation, as one of the critical pillars is for the youth to contribute towards district decisions through their engagement as leaders in the district decision making structures such as the Village Development Committees, Area Development Committees and District Council (Government, 2013). However, the youth have their platforms such as Children Corners and Youth Clubs that could influence the decisions made at afore-mentioned structures. A group village head exclaims,

“Youth are involved in campaigns against child marriages but the outcome is very minimal since they are not involved in the formulation and review of our by-laws” (Dedza Respondent 9)

Thus, although youth assume leadership roles in ending child marriages, there are disjointed efforts to end the practice which makes them feel left out. A youthful VDC Chair complains,

“..as a member of a youth club, I feel we have done a lot on the issue. Its high time the leadership recognised our efforts and incorporate us in the leadership structures” (Dedza Respondent 10)

Participation in Programmes

The research revealed that the question of participation triggers different answers depending on institutions. Most programmes treat the youth as beneficiaries, thus they do not actively engage the youth except for a few organizations. A youth club chair explains,

“We have programmes in the area that directly support mother groups and girls in schools. They support the girls in terms of school fees, uniforms and note books. We were never told of their objectives. They did not consult us. FAWEMA, CAMPHED, AGLIT and I think UNFPA has various programs related to child marriages.” (Mchinji Respondent 12)

However, there are emerging programmes and NGOs in Mchinji which successfully engage the youth in programmes on child marriages. For instance, the Activista Programme by Action Aid meaningfully engages the youth. Activista Programme is a programme that was established with

the aim of empowering youth to end social issues that affect them. They use young peer community educators who are based in the community. This young people know the issues of their peers thus they are in a better position to address them. Similarly, CISE through its community parenting approach has attracted more youth to its programs.

In Dedza, apart from programmes implemented by Dedza District Social Welfare Office, there are no other programmes that were mentioned to actively engage the youth.

Results from Interventions on Child Marriages

Most of the systematic interventions on child marriages are relatively new to show any long-lasting impacts. However, some of them are yielding results. The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare through District Social Welfare Offices and also in liaison with other Civil Society Organisations, has achieved some milestones in fighting the practice for the past three years, 2014, 2015 and 2016. The results came at the time the Ministry started engaging chiefs who are the custodians of culture meaningfully. The leaders have been engaged by government to develop action plans against child marriage and been oriented with different aspects of the law. The research data in this study supports a recent report that indicates that, Senior Chief Theresa Kachindamoto of Dedza has stood out as an activist of the end child marriage campaign by implementing by laws that discourage the practice in her community (Muriaas et al., n.d.).

Establishment of Mother Groups by projects such as Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) strengthened community structures that police issues on violation of human rights such as child marriages. A Mother in Dedza recalls,

“... I have a daughter who was impregnated at the age of 15 by 23-year-old form 1 student. My girl was in standard 7 then. When our two families met to discuss the matter, the family of the boy wanted to take my daughter through marriage so that she could be provided with adequate support. I reported the case to mother group. With assistance from Village Head and YONECO, we stopped them.” (Dedza Respondent 11)

Respondents from both Dedza and Mchinji agreed that the programmes on child marriages some short-term impacts. They pointed out that while people are aware that age for marriage is 18 and child marriage was criminalized by the law, youth themselves have not understood how to avoid marriage before 18.

Effects of Child Marriages on the Victims

Physical Effects

When girls get married at a tender age, they face complications in giving birth. Some of them suffer from fistula. A woman complains,

“...girls who get married before the age of 18 have tender bones. They are not matured enough to face the process. When they give birth to children, they suffer from long time diseases. I think they call fistula. It is really very sad; our children are suffering.” (Dedza Respondent 12)

Another one adds,

“... some die in the process of giving birth. Imagine. They don't listen to their parents when they advise them.” (Dedza Respondent 13)

Apart from fistula, FGDs' participants outlined other post maternal diseases that affect the young girls. This include loss of blood, cervical cancer and anaemia.

Further, it was revealed that most victims of domestic violence are girls under 18 who were forced into marriage due to early pregnancies. A girl might not be willing to get married before reaching 18, but due to early pregnancy, she is forced to get married to the father of the expected child. These young men are mostly unemployed or poor farmers who cannot provide for the wife. As a result, the spouses quarrel and fight a lot. A village chief holds,

‘...they get married before maturity hence they fight a lot. Imagine a boy at the age of 17 getting married, how can such a kid understand how to take care of a family’ (Mchinji Respondent 13)

A woman comments,

“they even don't know how to earn a living. What they do is drink and expect the girl to search for food. As a result, they end up fighting. What do you do when you don't have food but you are all hungry? Fight.” (Mchinji Respondent 14)

Social Effects

Poverty: Boys and girls who marry early rarely survive the poverty cycle. Instead, those who were well to do become worse off. The research revealed that most children involved in child marriages are semi-literate or illiterate. This makes it extremely difficult to get jobs or run a successful business. Additionally, poverty spills over to parents or guardians when a couple of minors leaves the responsibility of feeding their household members to relatives. A member of children's corner explains that,

“...it is sad to see you girls or boys get married at a young age. They drive themselves into poverty. Sometimes these girls get abused by their spouses. They also burden their parents. You find that a married couple is begging for food from either their parents or close relatives. We feel sad when it happens in our community” (Dedza Respondent 14)

A parent affirms,

“...we are suffering on their behalf, we struggled in raising them and now they get married, bear kids and give us the responsibility of taking care of the kids. It is unfair” (Dedza Respondent 15)

A young man narrates,

“... there is couple around the bridge who got married a year ago, the boy was around 21 years and married a standard 5 girl. She dropped out of school after getting married. The boy was in form 2 at the time. They are now living in destitution.” (Mchinji Respondent 15)

Similarly in a research on effects of early child marriage in Mutasa district in Zimbabwe conducted by Kanjanda & Chiparange, (2016) they discovered that in addition to poverty as being a long term social effect of child marriage, there are manifestations of sorrow , anguish and therefore slavery in the marriage relationship.

Population rise: The communities gradually are realizing that one of the major drivers of population boom is the prevalence of child marriages. Girls who get married before 18 years have the potential of bearing at least 10 children. A Community Based Organization’ Secretary remarks,

“.. apart from fistula and poverty, population rise is our main fear. We have been dividing the same land we inherited from our fore fathers yet our children are giving birth to other children. How can we handle issues of hunger and poverty in this context?” (Dedza Respondent 16)

Some respondents indicated that areas where child marriages is very common, population is very high.

Emotional Effects

It was found that there were no significant effects on children who chose to get married before attaining 18 years. This was attributed to rough life that prevail in rural areas. However, children who were forced to get married go through trauma due to unpreparedness and abuse from their spouses.

Multi-stakeholders and Best Practices

Multi-stakeholders and best practices on youth engagement

Case of CISE, Mchinji

CISE is a Mchinji based local NGO whose mandate is to empower youth to participate in decision making. Its programmes include girls’ education, sexual reproductive health and child protection. Key stakeholders who were involved in the study commended the NGO for successfully engaging the youth on ending child marriages. This approach is in agreement with what should be the case as per the Malawi Government promotes engagement of the youth through consultations in the development of programmes as their voice is critical for development(Government, 2013). Unique in its people centred approach, CISE uses community parenting strategy in communities to iron out a variety of issues affecting young people. Community parenting let parents, children and the wider community to interact and reach a consensus or an understanding on issues such as child

marriages and education. The NGO has a community outreach team that facilitates the community parenting sessions.

CISE undertook a study and found out that limited interaction between parents and children on sexual reproductive health; exposure of the youth to explicit content such as pornographic videos and adverts such as adverts for condoms are the Main drivers of early pregnancies and child marriages. CISE Operations Manager comments,

“...the main cause of child marriages is lack of knowledge and enticing media adverts on TVs not forgetting phones. When they access this content, they don't know what to do with it hence they go and try without understanding the consequences. If parents had time with their children to discuss sexual reproductive health, we could have seen less of these marriages.”

CISE is also given credit by other stakeholders including Mchinji District Social Welfare Office for collaborating with other in planning and implementation of programmes. It has created a network of stakeholders who provide services to victims and potential victims of child marriages. He continues,

“...When we realised that we do not offer all necessary services to victims of child marriages and abuse, we built networks and we refer our clients to these service providers”

CISE works in collaboration with DHO, DSWO and Salvation Army. Further, it places youth at the centre of their programmes. As explained by the Operations Manager that,

‘... youth are experts in their issues. At all cost they should be engaged in these programmes’

Their Suggestions

There were a number of suggestions from the focus group discussions, village heads, government officials and NGO officials. Their recommendations have been summarized as follows:

- Entrepreneurship training that would mould youths into becoming entrepreneurs is required.
- Youth engagement in district committees such as area development committees, village development committees and district executive committees.
- Income generating projects for youth such as poultry and cash crop farming.
- Increased access to credit facilities for the youth to decrease dependence on relatives and community.
- Vocational training programmes for the community that deliberately include and prioritise the youth.
- The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare to simplify and disseminate laws on child marriages.

- NGOs such as CAMPHED to start supporting the education of boys as well, rather supporting girls only. As this in the long run result in a backlash where the boys will be left behind on the education pillars.

Policy Implications

The study therefore made the following policy implications based on the key discussions presented above:

- Dissemination of the simplified gender related laws that have a niche on child marriages to the youth in both districts.
- More programmes should be implemented in both districts of Dedza and Mchinji that discourage harmful cultural practices that encourage child marriages, with an aim of increasing awareness.
- Government with other stakeholder in education should promote education campaigns for in and out of school youth and ensure that boys are not be left behind in the campaigns.
- Malawi Government through the Ministries of Gender and Judiciary to reinforce effective coordination and monitoring of dissemination and implementation of the gender related laws especially those that focus on child marriage in the districts.
- Coordinated efforts should be made by Malawi government and concerned stakeholders to deliberately include the youth in district leadership bodies such as the VDCs, ADCs and district councils. These synergies should ensure that the issues discussed in other structures such as the children's orders and youth clubs should find their way to the decision-making structures.
- The district and community structures should ensure that the youth form part and parcel of the teams to be consulted prior to any program designing and through its implementation and evaluation. This will promote ownership of the youth even in programmes related to ending child marriage.
 - Therefore, as the youth remains the fundamental players in the fight against child marriage, strong orientation and educative campaigns using multi-media and multi-stakeholders approaches targeting hard to understand cultures and religion is key if and only if the country to increase the well fare of the children and completely hand the human right challenge of child marriage

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