

## **Causes of Child Marriages in Zimbabwe: A Case of Mashonaland Province in Zimbabwe**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Increasing concerns on the welfare of a girl child world wide is observed and yet there are significant matters still to be discussed. In addition to all the causes raised by other researchers one of the objectives of this study is to focus on the impact of the legal systems that are already in place on child marriage. This is elucidated by a sample of thirty (30) participants in one of the districts within Mashonaland Province of Zimbabwe. This study examines the reasons why child marriage is on the rise in this province and what the law, parents, teachers and the children themselves say about it which seems to be a dearth study in this issue. The study also focuses on the solutions to this disturbing issue. The researchers employed descriptive survey as a way of collecting evidence, analysing and reporting on the findings (Chiromo, 2009) and triangulation which refers to the use of multiple sources of data ( Palmer and Quinn, 2003 in Chinomona and Tam, 2013 ). Various independent sources of evidence including interviews, focus group discussion and document analysis provided the data. Data collection and analysis were done at the same time for accuracy's sake. The results indicate that the major causes of child marriage in this province in particular are religious beliefs and practices as also indicated in the research by Masinire (2015). In addition to that the following were also highlighted as other factors that contribute to child marriage: lack of serious sex education in schools due to cultural beliefs and practices, socio-economic background of learners, early socialisation, parental expectations and level of education and also lack of adequate knowledge on the children's rights and other legal systems that support them. Shortcomings of these policies are discussed and recommendations are given before paving way forward for other researchers.*

**Key Terms:** Child; Child marriage; Human rights; Child rights

**Introduction**

Despite all the campaigns done in Zimbabwe through different platforms such as Girl Child Network, Gender Policies, Child Line, UNICEF and even the Constitution of Zimbabwe on girl child empowerment, child marriage is still on the increase in Zimbabwe ( Masinire, 2015 ; Mashangwa, 2015, Gwesela; 2013; Mufandaedza, 2013 ) especially in Mashonaland province as indicated below.

Mashonaland central Province	50%
Mashonaland West Province	42%
Mashonaland East Province	36%
Midlands Province	31%
Manicaland Province	30%
Matabeleland North Province	27%
Matabeleland South Province	18%
Bulawayo Province	10%
Harare Province	19%

Source : The Chronicle 2 January 2016

The above prevalence rate in Mashonaland Province triggered the investigation on the causes of child marriage( which is also known as early marriage) by the current researchers since Zimbabwe's overall child marriage rate stands at 30% while global rate is at 29% (Mashangwa, 2016 ). Several studies revealed that accurate data on the true extent of child marriage is difficult to obtain since many of such marriages are unregistered and the ages of girls are falsified ( UNIFPA, 2006). These disturbing figures call for more research on the causes especially on how these issues are handled legally hence the aim of this study to contribute new ideas to the existing body of knowledge on child marriage.

Every child, a boy or a girl under the age of 18 years is a child (Constitution section 81(1); CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women) defines a child as any boy or girl who is under the age of 18. Any boy or girl under the age of 16 is a child (Children's Act section 2; Children Abduction Act section 2). In the Children's Act women activists have been calling for the removal of definitions of a minor, young person and child and maintain just one which defines

a child as anyone under the age of 18 (Chikwinya, 2016). Therefore child marriage or early marriage is any marriage carried out below the age of 18, before the girl is physically, physiologically and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibility of marriage and childbearing (IPPF, 2006).

Literature reveals that in other Provinces such as Midlands, Kwekwe district in particular girls that are receiving educational support through PLAN Zimbabwe and the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) decided to leave school for marriages because of prevalence of cash amongst illegal gold poachers ( Nicholas, 2013 ). Parents are being blamed for the increase in child marriages because of poor parenting styles which include grooming and counselling of children ( Gwesela, 2013; Mufandaedza, 2013 ). The next question will be, is child marriage a crime and if so what is done to perpetrators according to Zimbabwean law hence the need to search for answers which is the focus of this study. The rest of the paper presents theoretical framework, methodology, data analysis and discussions. The last part gives the recommendations to the presented problem and for future research.

### **Human rights framework**

Human rights standards and norms also require that the rights of particularly vulnerable groups be respected, protected and fulfilled and several studies recognise that child marriage limits girls' rights to education (International Centre for Research on Women, 2005). Denial of education and health leads to denial of other rights such as right to work and right to life among other rights. The right to exercise choice in relation to a spouse has also long been recognised in human rights law but there are many serious loopholes and inconsistencies in national laws on minimum age of marriage that undermine these rights for example a rapist being allowed to marry underage girls they have abused. Many religious and customary norms do not adequately protect girls and parental consent is not protective as well if not regulated to ensure that the principle of the best interests of the child is applied (ibid).

Article 16(1) of the ACRWC states that:

*States Parties to the present Charter shall take specific legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and especially physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect or maltreatment including sexual abuse, while in the care of a parent, legal guardian or school authority or any other person who has care of the child.*

Article 4(2) of the Maputo Protocol on the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the rights of women in Africa requires states parties to take appropriate measures to ensure the prevention, punishment, and eradication of all forms of violence against women and to punish perpetrators of violence against women ( CEDAW, 2005). The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Article 16 (1) provides that men and women of full age have the right to marry and found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. It further provides, in 16(2), that marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending parties. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), Article XXI provides that 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. This aspect is not very clear in the Zimbabwean constitution which makes it difficult to counter child marriage.

The ICCPR Human Rights Committee's General Comment 28 elaborates on the obligation of the State in terms of equality of rights between men and women. It states that inequality in the enjoyment of rights by women is deeply embedded in tradition, history, and culture including religious attitudes. States parties should ensure that traditional, historical, religious and cultural attitudes are not used to justify violations of women's right to equality before the law and to equal enjoyment of all Covenant rights (CEDAW, 2005). Law reform has the potential to review local traditions and customs in light of international standards. Article 2(f) and 5(a) of CEDAW (2005) are premised on the notion that where cultural constraints on gender hinder the achievement of women's equality, it is the cultural practice that must give way.

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights for children also stipulates that people under the age of 18 need special protection and care that adults do not need. Four main principles are specified in the document; non- discrimination ( Article 2 ) that is, no child should be treated on any basis; devotion to the best interests of the child ( Article 3 ) meaning adults should consider children's interests when making any decisions; the right to life, survival and development (Article 6) and respect for the views of the child ( Article 12 ) that is adults should take into account children's views on matters that affect them and the matters should be within their maturity level of understanding.

Although the CRC does not specifically address child marriage it provides a number of norms and protective measures for children which collectively provide an enabling framework for tackling child marriage. These rights for children are specified even in the Zimbabwean Constitution. Section 81(2) stipulates that a child's best interests are paramount in every matter concerning the child. Children are entitled to adequate protection by the courts, in particular by the High Court as their upper guardian (Constitution section 81(3). States must adopt all policies measures to ensure that children are not required or permitted to perform work or services that (i) are inappropriate for the child's age or (ii) place at risk the child's well- being, education, physical or mental health or spiritual, moral or social development (Constitution section 19(3)(b). The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act Chapter 9:23 prohibits marital rape primarily to protect women against HIV. All this confirms that child marriage falls within the protective measures outlined in the CRC, thus providing valuable opportunities to use the Convention's monitoring bodies to ensure adequate protection of girls and young women and to delay the age of marriage. However the above highlighted rights are violated when children are married before they become adults. In this study it shows that children are never consulted on marriage issues and hence the need to seek for children's views, which seems to be a dearth study on the issue of child marriage.

### **Literature review**

Despite the existence of numerous international and regional human rights laws and conventions against child marriage it still remains a widely ignored violation of the health and development rights of girls and young women (UNICEF, 2005). Although child marriage is said to be declining in many parts of the world, the total number of girls at risk or affected is very significant and cannot be ignored. It was estimated in 2004 that within the next decade more than hundred million girls in the developing world would be married before attaining the age of eighteen (UNICEF, 2005). It is clear therefore that national policies and mechanisms to implement international declarations are not being taken seriously or implemented to the word by most poorer countries ( Sibanda, 2011) Zimbabwe included.

Child marriage is most common in South Asia where over 48% of 15-24 year old girls were married before they reached the age of eighteen and in Africa studies revealed 42% (UNICEF, 2005). Niger also was found to be one country which has high proportions (60%) of girls aged 15-19 currently in unions and mostly in rural areas with no education and also have co-wives (ibid). A civic organisation focusing on sheltering, educating and empowering female victims revealed that approximately 8 000 girls have been forced into early marriage or were held as sex slaves since 2008 (Girl Child Network in Sibanda, 2011). The above findings are really disturbing and devastating impact of child marriage continues to be ignored in the developing world and these children are denied their rights to education, health and economic opportunities by being burdened with adult roles and responsibilities hence the need to stop child marriages through such studies as this one.

At regional and international levels Zimbabwe ascribes to a number of instruments intended to improve the promotion and protection of the rights of women and ensure the attainment of gender equality and it ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa in 2008 ( Zimbabwe's CEDAW, 1996). In 2008 Zimbabwe also signs the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development of 1997 which commits member states to undertake measures to incorporate gender issues in their programmes (ibid). By ratifying or acceding to

international conventions the state parties accept the legal duty to abide by the conventions and thereby become obliged to take steps to protect the exercise and enjoyment of human rights to investigate violations and to provide effective remedies to victims (Sagade, 2005 in Sibanda,2011). The Zimbabwean constitution was amended in 2005 to include among other things, prohibition of discrimination on the ground of sex or marital status as well as providing for the implementation of affirmative action programmes.

What is worrying is that as a country we have a Constitution that protects children against child marriages, but what is lacking is enforcement. We are among the 41 countries in the world with an unacceptable rate of child marriages where girls enter into marriage below the age of 18(Mashangwa, 2015), this is really sad. On the other hand, Justice for Children Trust Programme Director and child activist Caleb Mutandwa in Masinire (2016) says what is needed now is to align laws such as the Customary Marriage Act and the Domestic Violence Act with the new Constitution to fully protect girls against child marriages. He added that in Zimbabwe we now have a new Constitution and nothing has really taken effect to the extent that several laws including those that deal with children's rights have not been aligned with it (Constitution). For example, customary marriage laws still do not prescribe the marriage age of a girl or boy and the age of sexual consent for girls. That is one thing that is still missing in our laws and needs to be advocated for because the affected people have no voice and have no power to change the status quo and are vulnerable such that they will always languish in agony if nothing is done (Masinire, 2016). States must do away with child marriages, girls who end up as brides at a tender age are coerced into having children while they are children themselves ( ibid ). Child marriage jeopardizes girls' rights and stands in the way of girls' educated, healthy and productive lives. Students' achievement, particularly for at-risk students is affected by the values and beliefs of the family and community (UNICEF, 2005).

Authorities should intervene urgently because it is unlawful to marry a minor or allow a minor to be married off (Zimbabwe Women's Lawyers Association Director, Emilia Muchawa in Sibanda, 2011 ) but is it really unlawful? Children should be given their time to fully develop but if they are to be married this restricts them from fully developing and realizing their full potential in life. Marrying minors also exposed them to various diseases (Sibanda, 2011). Not only does child marriage has physical damage on the child but also psychologically after being exposed to sexual activities before she is ready for it and that is rape and these effects are long lasting thus committing a child to a life sentence of misery and suffering ( ibid ).

### **Marriage and the law**

Zimbabwean government must expedite the realignment of family laws in the first quarter of this year to ensure the rights of women and children enshrined in Constitution are protected (Chikwinya, 2016). There were a lot of gaps and discrepancies in family laws between the old and new Constitution that need to addressed to ensure women and girls were not wantonly abused under the guise of the law and Zimbabwe has got one of the most progressive Constitutions in Southern Africa that addresses the rights of women and has been touted as a women's constitution (ibid). Sadly all these achievements are being diluted by some perpetrators who take advantage of these grey areas of the laws.

Every person who has the age of 18 has the right to find a family (Zimbabwe Constitution 2013 section 78(1). This provision is vague and unequivocal for it does not define the legal age of marriage but just protects the right of a person above 18 to marry. This is a challenge considering that the constitution is the supreme law of the land (section 2) and yet it does not contain a definite legal age of marriage. Most countries have laws on the minimum age of marriage but they are largely ineffective, not enforced or operate alongside customary and religious laws of which must not be used as an excuse to protect young women (Thomas in UNIFPA, 2006).

There are three types of marriages in Zimbabwe. Civil marriage ( Marriage Act 5.11) sets the legal age of marriage at 16 and permits marriage below 16 on consent by the Chief Justice or Minister of Legal and Parliamentary Affairs and yet the Legal age of majority is at 18 years-why the difference. The second type of marriage is the registered customary marriage (5.07) which is governed by the



Customary Law and Local Courts Act. Early and forced marriages under customary law are widespread, 23% girls between 15 and 19 years were married but now divorced or widowed ( UN, 2004 in UNICEF, 2005). Registered customary law is silent on the legal age of marriage creating a fertile ground for child abuse and the proliferation of child marriages (Chikwinya, 2016). Account to this marriage law the only requirement for a valid marriage IS the consent of both parties, the consent of the guardian of the woman and a recognised marriage officer. Thus in other words it is up to the guardian of the girl to decide her age of marriage. This has subjected many girls to different child marriage practices in Zimbabwe although Criminal Law (Codification and Reform Act) 9.23 prohibits the intimidation and compulsion of female persons to enter into marriages against their will. The third type of marriage is the unregistered customary unions which are not given full recognition. Majority of Zimbabweans are in this type of marriages which are referred to as unions and are not governed by any statute or legal piece of work. Upon falling pregnant most minors resort to eloping and cohabiting with their partners and live as husbands and wives. This type of marriage realises many divorce cases since there is nothing that binds them. Women in unregistered marriages face challenges because courts refuse to grant them a divorce because the marriages are not recognised (Chikwinya, 2016).

Child marriage or early marriage is most common among the Johanne Marange Apostolic sect which is believed to constitute 1.2 million of the country's population and believes in polygamy (Sibanda, 2011). The current study revealed that this sect occupies most districts in Mashonaland and the followers believe that marriages are approved by the 'holy spirit' therefore cannot be disputed by anyone. Girls in this church are married off to older people at very tender ages with minimum education which cannot empower them adequately. In a Parliamentary Portfolio Committee meeting, one chief from Manicaland province of Zimbabwe and a member of the above sect was quoted as having said there is nothing wrong with marrying off underage girls (Sibanda, 2011).

Culture, customs and traditions are never static in any society (Haralambos and Holborn, 2013), they are affected by many systems. The transformative nature of culture indeed suggests that values and norms of human rights can be internalised in different societies in the same manner as have other values been internalised over a period of time to become what are described as 'traditional cultural practices' (Sibanda, 2011). It is the focus of this paper to examine the causes of child marriage and come up with suggestions that help to empower girls for future development and conscientise the communities on the dangers of child marriage so as to review their beliefs and practices, especially law enforcers such as chiefs.

After the issue was argued for by lawyer Tendai Biti before the Bench of the Constitutional Court for over a year finally the Zimbabwe Constitutional Court outlaws child marriage. No person, male or female in Zimbabwe may enter into any marriage including an unregistered customary law union or any other union, including one arising out of religion or religious rite, before attaining the age of eighteen (18) (Constitutional Watch 4/2016). It has taken this particular court over a year to pass this Act. This progressive decision is a mark that the Zimbabwe Constitutional Court is building up a body of constitutional jurisprudence which will also be quoted in other jurisdictions and should assist the Africa-wide campaign against child marriage (ibid). It declares that section 22(1) of the Marriage Act (Chapter 5:11) is now unconstitutional. Yes on paper it has been passed but still it will take time to be accepted and implemented by those who practise child marriage. Regardless of laws and policies, they need to be conscientised on the issue for there is still a lot that needs to be done in order for this practice to be completely eradicated world-wide especially in developing countries because of poverty and religious and cultural practices.

### **Effects of child marriages**

Ending child marriage is now of greater urgency for global policy action because child brides are increasingly vulnerable to HIV infection ( UNIFPA, 2006 ). Child marriage is culturally packaged as a social necessity but in many cases this amounts to socially licensed sexual abuse and exploitation of children and the fact that the arrangement is socially accepted does not diminish the reality that a girl is deliberately exposed to sexual abuse and exploitation usually by her parents and family (ibid). The limited power in sexual decision making and reduced economic opportunities compound their

vulnerability to multiple health risks. Young girls cannot demand safe sex or take part in decision making in issues such as number of children, prevention methods of both diseases and pregnancies even on the welfare of children because of age or fear of violence from their spouses who often tend to be older than them ( Sibanda, 2011). Young women under age of twenty are likely to develop fistulas (an injury to woman's birth canal) due to prolonged obstructed labour and they experience high pregnancy related and infant deaths (UNIFPA, 2006).

Girls are mostly withdrawn from school at puberty losing out on education and children of young uneducated mothers are also less likely to attain high levels of education, perpetuating cycles of low literacy and limited livelihood opportunities, it deprives girls and their off-springs of intellectual and financial contributions (Barry, 2005). Girls who are denied education are also invariably denied exposure outside the home environment, resulting in low self confidence, further perpetuating women's powerlessness and vulnerability to poverty (ibid). In all societies, the family is the basic source of security and support and springboard for the physical, emotional, cognitive, moral, social and spiritual development of its children (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana 2002). Their overall development is compromised, leaving them socially isolated with little or no education, skills and opportunities for employment and self realisation which leaves them vulnerable to poverty (Sibanda, 2011) and thus keeping the thread of poverty up and unbroken within households. Child marriage has a negative effect on families and communities, for example the country's education and health sectors.

### **Research Methodology**

The data used for this study were collected from different districts of Mashonaland Province of Zimbabwe. In this study the researcher adopted the qualitative approach which help in clarifying hypotheses, beliefs, opinions, attitudes and motivations related to the topic (Chiromo, 2009).The sample included secondary students (both boys and girls), teachers and school heads from different schools and parents from different communities who were randomly selected. Interviews were carried out by the researchers with the teachers and parents. Focus group discussion is a qualitative method which helps to find out the 'why' and 'how' of human behaviour (Chiromo, 2009). Focus group discussions provide insight into how a group thinks about an issue, the range of ideas and opinions and the inconsistencies and variations that exist in a particular community in terms of beliefs and their experiences and practices (Chinomona & Tam, 2014). It is the focus of this study to get students' views on the issue of child marriage through this method. Teachers were randomly selected at schools to conduct focus group discussions using provided schedule since they were the ones familiar with the students. Results were collected on a specified date by the researcher.

### **Discussion of the findings**

The major purpose of this research was to examine the views of teachers, children and parents on the issue of child marriage and its effects on individuals and communities and the impact of Zimbabwean laws on child marriage. Also the study will investigate how effective sex education is in schools, which is an innovation that seems not to have received full evaluation. The Human Rights framework was employed to give a guideline on child rights in terms of marriage. Firstly looking at the views that were given by different participants on child marriage the study showed that most parents especially women are against this practice though the majority of them had early marriages also. Poverty was pointed out as the major reason why they were married early but they wish that their girls should finish school and work so as to change the parents' life.

Religious beliefs and practices also came out to be another main cause of the practice though one church leader denied it and defended it in a very serious mood by saying *zvinobvumiranwa pakati pemukuru iyeye nemusikana izvi saka hapana mhosva apa* (it is done after agreement between the two parties even if the man is older than the girl so there is no crime there). Some of these people seemed not to have any problem with child marriage and even its repacations. One reason highlighted by a form four boy was that:

*These young girls have no interest in their school work but getting married to the 'rich' elders of the churches so as to wear expensive material and eating good food during their church gatherings ... most of these girls at school do not want to be in relationships with us boys of their age because we do not have money.*

Although most of the girl were just quiet during discussions one girl confirmed the above by saying, *these boys are lying it is because old people have respect for us and after all it is up to an individual to fall in love with someone older, though I am not saying girls should be married to old men.*

Interesting to note in these findings was that girls were taught how to be good wives and mothers at a very early stage of their growth by older ladies in the church. Once a girl was eyed for a man in the church she was not given the chance to refuse or reason and they were not allowed to marry outside their church otherwise the girl would be disowned by the parents. Also during their early socialisation girls were taught how to be good future mothers and on the other hand children had no professional models to emulate within their families hence they tended to follow their parents' footsteps and thus maintaining their social class within the community.

One of the teachers also revealed that:

*Girls who dropped from school as early as form two normally were the ones who performed badly in their academic work and also had high rate of absenteeism (this was shown in the documents). On the other hand parents for such children did not participate even in school programmes such as consultation or general meetings where important issues were discussed hence schools found it very difficult to help children in their learning when parents were not cooperative.*

It reflected that most parents had very low education therefore could not assist or encourage their children on education issues. This is line with Haralambos and Holborn's (2013) observation that parents with low education seemed not to give much concern to their children's school work. The family is the main factor influencing the lives and outcomes of students (Okantey, 2008) and a child that comes from an educated home would like to follow the steps of her/his family hence puts effort in his/her studies (Gwirayi, 2010). Therefore there is great need to conscientise parents on the importance of education as a tool for development hence eradication of child marriage.

Important to note and quite disturbing about these findings was the fact that most teachers were not even teaching sex education effectively because of the attitude of both the learners and the community. Some of the teachers had this to say:

*Some of the learners absent themselves from school if the subject is shown on the following day's timetable because their parents do not want them to be taught about sex which is a taboo according to both their religious and cultural beliefs. This leaves us with no choice except to discuss with those who are present.*

This was confirmed by three girls in the discussion groups who said that their parents discourage them from attending HIV/AIDS lessons because it will not be examined at the end of the year. Also they said its because of their church beliefs, which they did not reveal.

It is in this subject that students are taught about the prevention of HIV/AIDS and early marriages being one of them (UNIFPA, 2006). Control in sexual decision making and reduced financial chances compound their vulnerability to numerous health risks. Young girls cannot insist on protected sex or take part in decision making matters such as number of children, prevention methods of both diseases and pregnancies (ibid). In addition another finding highlighted was that teachers need to be staff developed through workshops on how best they can teach sex education in schools. It seemed most of the teachers did not have the actual methods of explaining the sexual issues to students as highlighted by one teacher.



*The big problem is when this subject came it was like its not a serious subject since we did not receive any orientation on how to teach it... and even our heads do not want you to teach this subject when they come for assessment. They will tell you they want a proper subject which is examined... so most us we do not even teach... because of the weight it is being given. We also lack proper strategies on how to teach it.*

The research also revealed that there were social clubs in schools such as Girl Child Network (GCN) and Youth Alive among many others but to the researchers' disappointment only a few children enrolled in these clubs. Since it was optional, most of the children preferred to join other clubs such as chess, darts, music and many others which seem not to empower a girl child directly in terms of married life. One boy commented that:

*Club time is relaxing time and people should enjoy so joining clubs such as GCN and Youth Alive is not an option because serious issues of life are discussed there. After all, some students always laugh at those in such clubs giving them names such as 'career'. This is a very common practice because some of us we are called 'chess' because we are chess players.*

Most of the children both boys and girls and even parents seemed to be ignorant on the causes and effects of early marriage, except a few who indicated that it affects the development of their communities. One parent said tinoda vanasikana vedu vadzidze vagotichengeta kana tachmentera (we want our girls to be educated so that they can look after us in our old age). This showed that they were some parents who understood the importance of education for their children. A number of girls showed by raising their hands that early marriage is not a solution to poverty hence the need for the state to tighten penalties for perpetrators.

### **Implication of the study**

This research explored why child marriage is on the rise in Zimbabwe especially in Mashonaland Province and examines the extent to which children are protected legally. Children, parents and teachers' views were also investigated. Findings from this study may help the legal system to be very strict on perpetrators of child marriage since it is now a legal crime. Also the knowledge from this work may empower children on their rights when it comes to marriage issues and parents are helped to understand the effects of child marriage to both their children and the community. Children are encouraged to work hard in their school work if campaigns are done by people from different professions rather than hearing it from their teachers always.

### **Recommendations**

Following the technical consultation by the Forum on the Rights of Women and Girls on early and forced marriage held in Ouagadougou, October 2003, participants drew up a declaration, stating:

- *We call on governments and international development agencies to recognize the efforts being made by civil society organizations in addressing the concerns and situation of girls and women affected by child marriages by providing the necessary support and resources to respond to the challenges posed by child and forced marriages.*
- *That our governments and the African Union adopt a clear and unambiguous position on child and forced marriages and rectify the legislative loopholes between religious, customary and civil marriages, and sign the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and ensure that special measures are taken to help end this practice ( Sibanda, 2011).*

In addition to the above recommendations, the authors also suggest

- Review and amendment of different laws and policies that are concerned with women and girls especially section 78(1) of the Constitution so that it becomes clear and unequivocal.
- Harmonization of marriage laws and their alignment to the constitution.
- Registration of all marriages and births.

- Awareness campaigns should be intensified on child marriages and other women related issues especially among chiefs since they are law enforcers thus creating an enabling environment for social change.
- Sex education in schools should be treated like any other subject and taught effectively. Also there is need for frequent evaluation of this new innovation so that it really meets the needs of the community.

### Limitations and further research

Despite the usefulness of the results from this study, the research has its weaknesses. By and large the current research is conducted in one province out of ten provinces in Zimbabwe which might compromise the obtained results hence might not have enough evidence for generalization. Also causes of increase of child marriage need deeper investigation if we are to stop it worldwide. Finally the researchers should have also used a bigger sample since it is covering the whole province and also using teachers as leaders of focus group discussions can lead to biased result. Therefore the future research might use tape recorded material which might be more reliable than field notes on focus group discussions, which will help to contribute new knowledge to the already existing one on child marriages.

### Conclusion

The study showed that child marriages or early marriages especially in Mashonaland province of Zimbabwe are caused by religious and cultural beliefs and parental expectations together with their low education. Low academic performance and absenteeism from school caused by negative attitude towards sex education contribute to early marriage among secondary school girls. While the marriage laws have been aligned the study revealed that parents are still ignorant about many issues regarding child marriage hence the need for country wide campaigns and conscientisation on the effect of this practice both on individuals and community as a whole

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