

Basal Factors Leading to Child Marriage in Eastern and Western Provinces in Zambia and Efficacious Prophylactic Interfusions

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Abstract

Child marriage has long been a public health concern around the world, because it has the potential to deprive adolescent girls of their sexual reproductive health rights and limits their ability to reach their full potential in life. The prevalence of child marriage has been consistently higher in sub-Saharan Africa than elsewhere and Zambia is not an exception. In Eastern Province of Zambia, a province with a high child marriage rate (45.4% of women aged 20-24 were married by the age of 18 in 2018). The researcher is interested in learning from what happens in the Western Province, as this province has a significantly lower child marriage rate (22.6%), while having a higher poverty level than Eastern Province and a similar teenage pregnancy rate (1 in 3 girls aged 15-19 years). The study conducted a literature review, which combined both existing research data on key influencing drivers of child marriage and evidence on effective prevention and interlocking approaches that address these key drivers from regional, national and provincial levels. A mixture of 35 peer-reviewed scientific articles and 26 other documents and reports were collected via Google scholar & PubMed, reviewed and relevant information was synthesized. The purpose of this study is to obtain better insight into what factors are driving the variant child marriage rates between Eastern and Western Provinces and to provide an overview of what proven child marriage efficacious prophylactic interpolations exist. This will further inform, lobby and advocate for effective policy implementation by the Government Duty Bearers and like-minded institutions such as Non-state Actors and Non-Governmental Organizations.

Key words: *Child Marriage, Child Early & Forced Marriages, gender & social norms.*

Introduction

A child marriage refers to a marriage within statutory (penal code of juveniles Act). A definition of a child; that is a marriage between spouses either of whom is below the age of 16 years or where both spouses are below the age of 16 years (Nyirenda, 2016). A child marriage might also be called a forced marriage in that the person being married off is a child within the statutory definition of a child. A child is below 16 years.

The major drivers of child marriage have been conceptualized as follows: poverty and economic factors; lack of opportunity for girls beyond marriage; fear of pregnancy & girls' sexuality; social norms; and a lack of agencies among girls themselves (Lembani, 2021). Besides, tradition, religion and poverty continue to fuel the practice of child marriage, despite its strong association with adverse reproductive health outcomes and the disempowering effects it has on girls whose opportunities to get a formal education are diminished. Notwithstanding, literature has shown that girls who marry early are more likely to experience violence, abuse, and forced sexual relations because of unequal power relations. Young girls are also more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDs. Girls' education, health, and psychologic well-being of females, as well as the health of their offspring are all negatively impacted by child marriage. Most existing research seeking to explain why child marriage persists has focused on understanding how factors manifest at the individual and household levels. In recent years, there has also been a growing interest in understanding and changing drivers that sustain the practice at the community level and also having a comparison between Western and Eastern Provinces. However, few studies have explored how the drivers of child marriage manifest across both micro (individual and household) and macro (community) levels, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Understanding the intersection of drivers across levels and to what extent drivers work separately or jointly to sustain the practice is critical for designing and implementing effective policies and programs aimed at preventing child marriage. However, we are still learning about factors that influence early marital decision making, particularly about girls' beliefs and circumstances and about the social context in which they live.

Even though literature shows that the environment has a significant impact on marital and reproductive health behaviour of young individuals, mainly due to peer pressure and other social factors, no study has attempted to examine both individual and community level factors associated with child marriage in the two mentioned provinces in Zambia.

Generally, an earlier study conducted by Mulenga and others in Zambia revealed that residence, age at first sex, education level of women and their partners and family size had a significant influence on prevalence of child marriage, though the enquiry was not carried out specifically in comparison between Western and Eastern Provinces. There is a paucity of knowledge on how community-level factors influence Child & Early marriage in Zambia. In view of this, the study was conducted to bridge the knowledge gap that exists in the literature. Despite many efforts by government and stakeholders to address social and economic factors that predispose young girls to marry early, the prevalence of child marriage is still high in Zambia. In 2013, 31.4% of women aged 20–24 reported to have been married before age 18. The prevalence is significantly higher in rural areas than in urban areas in Zambia.

Statement of the Problem

Child marriage is still common today with serious effects for the health, development, education, labor force participation, and empowerment of millions of girls and women. It rates remain high due to the unique contextual interaction of social locations, places, cultures, belief systems, legal systems, emergencies, and livelihood issues. Although the causes of high rates of child marriage differ based on the setting, poverty and social norms are among the most prevalent explanations in the literature. More targeted research on the drivers and patterns of sustained high rates of child marriage persistence is urgently needed in different contexts.

Child marriage is defined as a marriage in which one or both parties to the marriage are children. In other ways, it is also synonymously called; *Child Early & Forced Marriage*. It is actually a violation of children's rights whether it happens to a girl or a boy. It represents perhaps the most prevalent form of sexual abuse and exploitation of children. It is a direct form of discrimination against the child, who as a result of the practice, is deprived of the basic rights to health, education, food security, development and equality, forcing the child to be exposed to harmful practices and dangerous cultural beliefs. The government and its cooperating partners have over the years attempted to address and eliminate this negative through the government efforts and policy measures that were put in place is also to meet up with the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2030 agenda.

However, there are still a lot of challenges as the cases of child marriage are still on the increase in most provinces of the country and also due to poor policy inconsistencies. Despite all the efforts of the government and Non- State Actors – NGOs made; Zambia still has the challenge of cases of child marriages even more to its root in the rural sector. Based on this backdrop, this study intends to explore and compare the basic determinants of child marriages in the rural setting of the Western Province in comparison with Eastern Province.

Objectives of the study

- To determine and compare the underlying basal factors leading to child marriages in Eastern (Chipata and Chadiza Districts) and Western Provinces (Mongu District) in Zambia and efficacious prophylactic interfusions therein.
- To contribute to greater understanding of the drivers of child marriage in each of these contexts in the country.

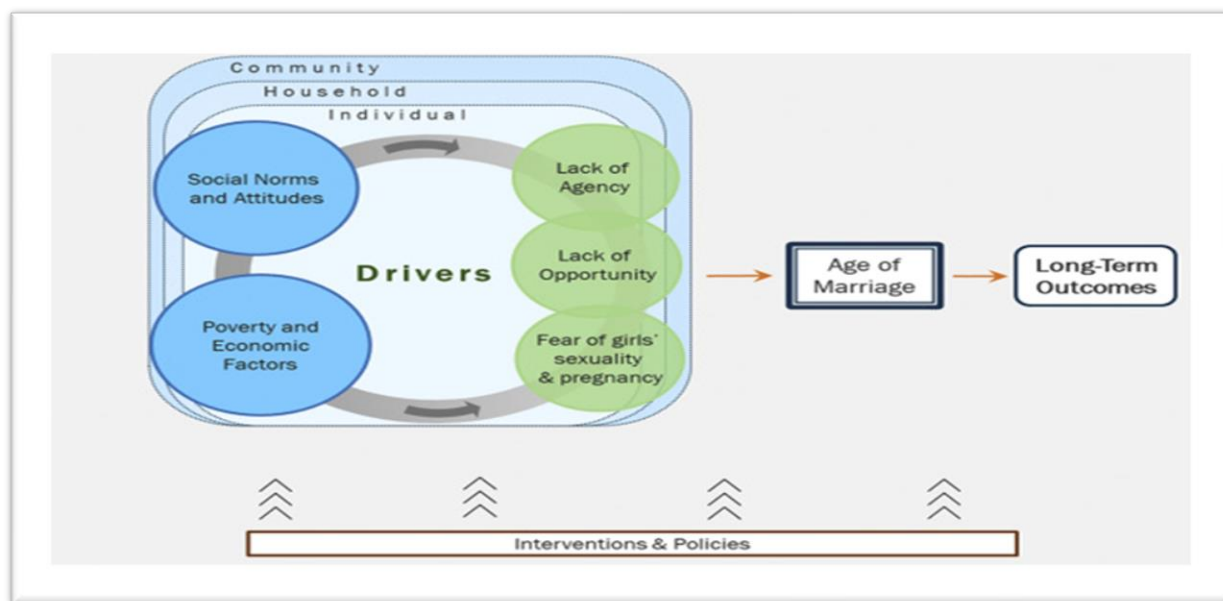
Brief Overview of the Research Conceptual Framework

Broadly speaking, a concept is an idea and a theory is an explanation for that idea. A conceptual framework is basically a set of ideas within which you locate your thinking and writing (Whitehead et al, 2012). The initial work to develop this streamlined conceptual framework was completed in 2020 after consultation with a consortium of organizations working to address child marriage, including researchers, advocates, practitioners, and donors. It was began by conducting a review of the empirical literature on potential drivers of child marriage, including a review of previous frameworks, some of which were developed by members of the consortium.

The concepts are also values, the same ones that guide one's thinking, research, scholarship and writing. Examples of conceptual frameworks are freedom, gender, colonization, liberation theory and the need for people to speak and act for themselves. Therefore, this study utilized the conceptual framework developed by Psaski et al. in 2021. It lays out five core drivers of child marriage for girls which vary and interact across contexts (as illustrated below). Social norms and attitudes, and poverty and economic factors are shown as core drivers that underlie lack of agency (or the ability of girls to define their goals and act on them), lack of opportunity (for continued schooling, labour force participation, or other valued roles), and fear of girls' sexuality and pregnancy. These drivers and interventions addressing them reflect community, household, and individual level factors.

Besides, child marriage has similarities across settings marriage before age 18 is illegal in many contexts and is often associated with low levels of education for girls, parents and guardians along with numerous negative health outcomes. Yet these experiences also diverge in important ways: in some settings child marriage may be driven largely by social norms, while in others poverty or unplanned pregnancy may be more important determinants.

Figure 2. Conceptual framework for drivers of child marriage (Psaki et al., 2021)



Brief Empirical Literature

According to Lembani (2019) employing qualitative research methods revealed that child marriages adversely impact on the well-being of children generally and the girl child in particular in numerous other ways. For instance, given that most girls get married to much older men early marriage renders them susceptible to physical, emotional and sexual abuse as well as early widowhood and this was evident in Chadiza, Katete and Chipata Districts of Eastern Province and this requires coordinated and collaborative interfusion by both social and economic sectors of the government as well as the private sector. Notwithstanding, Lembani (2020) further explored

theoretical nature of poverty coupled with low literacy levels in Eastern Province. The study argued that poverty coupled with low literacy levels is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon because the basal factors that affect it cut across the social, psychological. Economic and cultural spheres of existence and had a bearing on child marriage. The study suggests the knowledge of these factors that cause poverty coupled with child marriage in creating pro-poor strategies and hydra-headed method of addressing its effects increasingly and excellently even though there is need to have a comparison with other regions in Zambia.

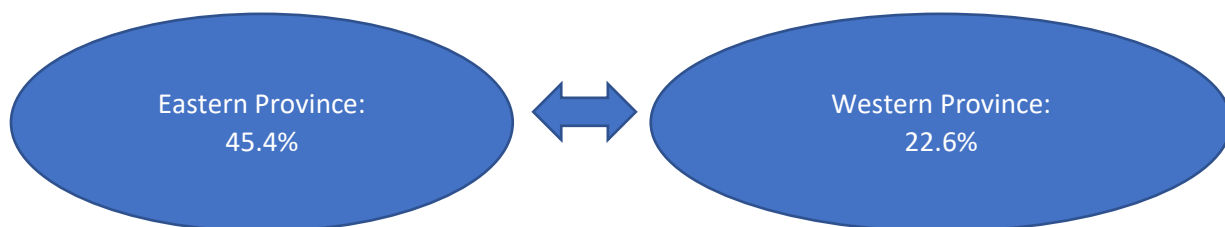
Makhalima (2020) analysed the determinants of child poverty in the Republic of South Africa using the 2018 General Household Survey data with a sample of 10 902 households. The study used a binary logistic regression model to measure the determinants of child poverty and its impact on child marriages. The regression results revealed that children living in large households, households headed by males, and where the head of household is married or widowed have a higher probability of being poor and easily get married off at a tender age, even so, this required vice versa a comparison and analysis across Southern African Countries. Lembani (2020) in liaison with Makhalima (2020) disclosed that closely linked with poverty, girls and their families may see marriage as the only viable pathway in settings where opportunities for continued schooling, labour force participation, or other valued roles are limited. Most immediately, growing evidence shows that access to schooling has the potential to delay marriage for girls.

Research Methodology

A methodology is the overall approach to a research programme, including research topic, research questions, conceptual frameworks, intents and purposes, data collection, values- orientation, interpretation and analysis and validation procedures (Whitehead, 2012). Therefore, a researcher consolidated a research team and conducted a literature review, which combined both existing research data on key influencing drivers of child marriage and evidence on effective prevention and interlocking approaches that address these key drivers from regional, national and provincial levels. A mixture of 35 peer-reviewed scientific articles and 26 other documents and reports (see reference list) were collected via Google scholar & PubMed, reviewed and relevant information was synthesized. This synthesis was shared with 66 stakeholders for a discussion, validation and complementation purposes through in total three participatory workshops taking place in August, 2023 in Eastern (Chipata and Chadiza) and Western (Mongu) Provinces. The research workshop study also served to identify priority knowledge gaps for further and future research.

Research Results and Discussions:

Influencing Factors of child marriage in Zambia and particularly in Eastern & Western Provinces.



Province	Poverty rate ¹	Contribution to GDP ²	Unemployment rate ³	Child Marriage rate
Eastern Province	70% (fourth highest rate in Zambia)	5%	7% (second lowest in Zambia)	45%
Western Province	82% (highest rate in Zambia)	3%	20% (second highest in Zambia)	23%

Figure 1. Child Marriage rate (among women 20-24 years) in Eastern and Western Provinces

It is revealed that the prevalence of poverty and economic factors recognized as the most significant drivers of child marriage in Zambia, including Eastern and Western Provinces. However, nation-wide evidence suggests that poverty and economic factors are the most significant drivers of child marriage in Zambia (Male & Wodon, 2016; Mann et al., 2015; Muthengi et al., 2022; Phiri et al., 2023). Stakeholders in both provinces confirmed that this also applies to Eastern and Western provinces Families are unable to bear the costs (or opportunity costs) of girls' education. They are also unable to cope with the stress of having limited skill-building and livelihood opportunities for their daughters to earn a sufficient income to lift themselves and the family out of poverty (Naudeau et al., 2015). Receiving a payment of bride price can further incentivize families to marry off their young daughters for financial relief (National Assembly of Zambia, 2022), which stakeholders acknowledged particularly in Eastern Province. Vulnerabilities such as orphanhood and HIV/AIDs further do contribute to child marriage as affected children may face financial hardship and seek marriage as a way to escape mistreatment (National Assembly of Zambia, 2022). The absence of waged employment, vocational training or income generating activities can push young women and young men towards engaging in sex and marriage (Mann, Quigley and Fischer, 2015).

Table 1. Western Province showing higher poverty levels, but lower child marriage rates
 Source: Field data.

The table 1 above depicts higher levels of poverty, Western Province has a substantially lower child marriage rate than Eastern Province. It is of significant importance to state that in spite of poverty and economic factors being recognized as significant drivers of child marriage in Zambia, the poorer Western Province has a lower child marriage rate than the Eastern Province. Qualitative data and several accounts from stakeholders in Eastern Province confirmed the association between poverty and child marriage in Eastern Province. Poverty and lack of opportunity contribute to young people's early sexual debut and transactional sex commonly happening in girls' and young women's relations with men, both leading to teenage pregnancy and related child marriage (Menon et al., 2018; Mweeba & Mann, 2020). While this vulnerability is often exploited, as later described under sexual and Gender-Based Violence (GBV), some girls also engage in unsafe sexual relationships for material benefits and reportedly manipulate (particularly wealthier)

¹ CSO, Ministry of National Development Planning, personal communication; Republic of Zambia, CSO, 2015 Living Conditions Monitoring Survey Report

² CSO, National Accounts: Provincial Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Charts, 2015.

³ CSO, Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2017 Labour Force Survey Report.

boys and men into marriage by having unprotected sex to get pregnant and thereby “catch the man” (Mann, Quigley and Fischer, 2015). For Western Province, research data on the link between poverty and child marriage is mostly absent. However, a situation analysis conducted by Caritas and Save the Children (2018) in Western Province indicated that some parents and child-headed families resort to child marriage to alleviate financial stress. The wide range of stakeholders in Western Province involved in the validation exercise, contradicted this view. They strongly suggested that this practise was not common and was unusual. Quite a few of these stakeholders acknowledged that child marriage is seen as something shameful. So even when their daughters experience teenage pregnancies, they prefer to keep their daughters with them, thereby also highlighting that families in Western Province value girls’ economic potential while staying with and contributing to the family in the communities.

According to Lembani (2020) study site, “Some girls will get into marriage as a source of survival. They know eventually they will find their meals and everything, so this is generating child marriage and teen pregnancies in Eastern Province of Zambia.”

Even so, in Chadiza District one stakeholder who had lived both in Eastern and Western Provinces strongly reinforced the notion that compared to Western Province, more girls and their parents in Eastern Province tended to view marriage as a major way or option for alleviating financial stress. In Eastern province, the percentage of adolescent girls who completed secondary school in 2020 was 20%, whereas in Western Province, it was 27%. These figures reflect a disparity in educational attainment between the two provinces. In Eastern Province, 29% of the population has no formal education, while in Western Province, this figure is 4% (Isbell & Dryding, 2019). Hence, low levels of education of adolescent girls and their parents in Eastern Province compared to Western Province are likely to contribute to the higher child marriage rates in Eastern Province.

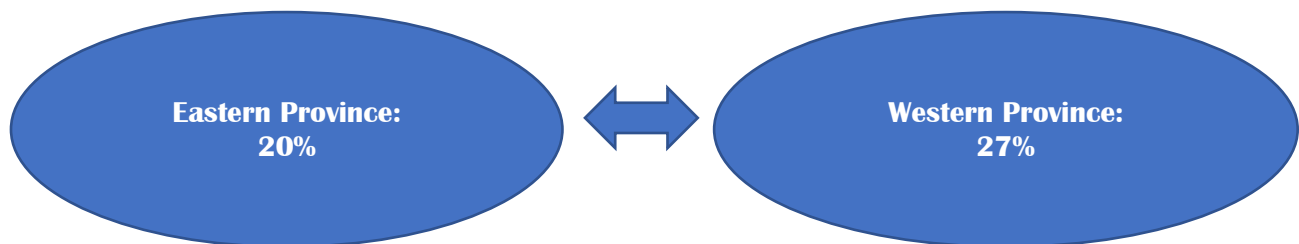


Figure 4. Percentage of adolescent girls who completed secondary school in Eastern and Western Provinces.

The higher child marriage rate in the Eastern Province could be partly explained by the difference in educational attainment, as education is a protective factor against child marriage (Koski et al., 2018 and Lembani, 2019). This was widely agreed by all stakeholders. Strong differences in terms of perceived value of education, both for girls and boys, were highlighted in conversations in both provinces. Historical factors likely have influenced the better access to education in Western province. During the period of the British South Africa Company administration, education was primarily provided by missionaries, except for the Barotse National School established in 1907. This school was specifically intended to provide education for the Lozi people in Barotseland,

which is now part of the Western Province (Sandlane, 1989). Value for education has since been well integrated within the traditional structures in Western province, ensuring that these values move from generation to generation. As one traditional leader involved in the workshop in Mongu put it: “So every family they make sure that they take their children to school before they marry them off because they are saying education is the equalizer.” In Eastern Province, on the other hand, income generating activities (for instance, boys engaging in cattle herding) have been acknowledged to be often prioritised over education.

Despite the difference in perceived value of education between provinces, also in Western Province, a situation analysis on child marriage by Caritas and Save the Children (2018) found evidence that a lack of knowledge and understanding on the harmful outcomes of child marriage on both the parents and their children as well as their under-appreciation of the value of education were associated with higher child marriage rates. For Zambia as a whole, the impact of education levels (Naudeau, Hasan and Bakilana, 2015; Male and Wodon, 2016) and school-dropouts (Mann et al., 2015; Sandøy et al., 2016) on driving child marriage has been widely documented.

Traditional & Initiation ceremonies and dynamics of puberty contribute to child marriages in two provinces, but is a stronger phenomenon in Eastern Province.

The literature from Zambia shows that socio-cultural norms and practises, such as initiation ceremonies, are a key contributing factor, but stakeholders agreed that it is a stronger driver for child marriage in Eastern than in Western province. In Eastern province, the Ngoni people are the predominant inhabitants, along with the Chewa, Nsenga and to a lesser extent the Kunda and Tumbuka (Britannica, n.d.). Qualitative research indicates that social, gender, and sexual norms significantly influence young people's sexual behaviour in the region, particularly in relation to perceptions of childhood, adulthood, sexual moralities, and gender identities (Menon et al., 2018; Mkandawire et al., 2019). The Chinamwali initiation ceremony among the Chewa has been linked to increasing the likelihood of marriage for girls (Yowela, 2016), which has been validated by stakeholders in Chipata and Chadiza. A study in Eastern and North-western Provinces on Chinamwali initiation also showed the ceremonies socialise girls to be less ambitious and rather dependent on others in particular men and marriage (Fumpa-Makano, 2019). Another study from Eastern Province, Katete District in particular, these ceremonies, followed by confinement for two to four weeks, have been documented to have a significant impact on girls' education, leading to school dropout (Mkandawire et al., 2019). The existence of the socialisation process of girls towards marriage and its impact on girls' education was validated in the meetings in both Chipata and Chadiza. Furthermore, in Eastern Province stakeholders shared that after initiation girls tend to stay with an elderly woman or on their own, resulting in a “public announcement of readiness for marriage” and less direct supervision. In Western Province stakeholders mentioned that flags are being placed outside of the house during initiation rites, indicating girls' readiness to marry.

Chinamwali traditionally includes a ritual known as the 'Hyena concept' or 'Afisi,' which is associated with testing girls' sexual skills by adult men and promoting sexual intercourse after the ceremony, leading to early sexual debut, teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and child marriages (Munthali & Zulu, 2007). While efforts have reportedly been made to reduce this

practise, a few stakeholders mentioned it is still practised in some rural areas of Eastern Province more especially in Chadiza and Katete Districts (Lembani, 2019).

In Western Province, the Lozi people form the majority, known for their monarchy system under the leadership of their king, the 'litunga.' Other tribes in the region include Luvale, Mbunda, Kaonde, and Luchazi (Britannica, n.d.). Traditional initiation ceremonies such as 'Mupaa and Sikenge' are reported to have negative components that exacerbate child marriage (Mann, Quigley, & Fischer, 2015; Caritas and Save the Children, 2018). However, as the quote below illustrates, while initiation in Eastern province usually happens with girls' first menstruation, marking girls' ascribed readiness to take on adult responsibilities such as marriage, in Western province stakeholders elaborated on this timing more and more being delayed to after the girl has finished her education.

“The time to have the girls for initiation has not been compared, for example, to other provinces like Northern where initiation for the girls is done when a suitor is found or preparation for marriage is done when the suitor has been found. Whereas here the girls are taken in initiation as soon as they reach out of, they reach puberty.” (National AIDS council representative, Chipata).

Accounts from some stakeholders from Chipata and Chadiza Districts suggest that also in Eastern Province, the timing and content of the curriculum for initiation ceremonies are gradually changing. Some parents reportedly started delaying the ceremony to after the girl has finished her education, or only offer hygiene education at puberty stage. Others mentioned the content of the curriculum had been modified to mainly focus on hygiene practices, and not sexual practices (see more under interventions).

Self, peer and social pressure to marry early and keep a man satisfied influence child marriage. Several studies showed that initiation ceremonies incentivise young people's curiosity for sex and engaging in sexual relationships (Fumpa-Makano, 2019, Menon et al., 2018, Yowela, 2016), which stakeholders from both provinces agreed with. In their recent work in Zambia (Chadiza and Petauke Districts) as well as in Malawi and Mozambique, Kok et al. (2023) noted that while cultural practices can encourage girls to engage into sexual relationships or have unintended pregnancies, this situation tends to be worsened by the limited access to SRH information and services such as contraception among girls (more on this intersecting factor below). Several stakeholders stressed that girls' aspirations to live an “adult life” after they have undergone initiation is a common phenomenon in both provinces contributing to child marriage. Next to young people's own curiosity, also peer pressure from married adolescents plays a role in driving child marriage, making unmarried adolescents feel they are missing out as long as they are not married (Caritas and Save the Children, 2018), which has been acknowledged by stakeholders in both provinces.

While this has not been documented in the available literature, stakeholders in agreement with Lembani (2020 in Eastern Province indicated a strong practice around using *aphrodisiac herbs*

popularly known as “*Mvubwe*” in a local language in Eastern Province, which shows strong gender and sexual norms around men’s pleasure. Some stakeholders however noted that there has been a reduction in the use of the aphrodisiac herbs following sensitisation campaigns on the health effects of such herbs although *Lembani (2020)* argues that the usage of the aphrodisiac herbs is still on the increase which has been supplemented by the conversional tablets such as; *sildenafil*. This topic has not come up in discussions with stakeholders in Western Province.

Both provinces have high teenage pregnancy rates with challenges for sexually active unmarried women to access and use contraceptives, including emergency contraceptives:

Both the Eastern and Western Provinces have a teenage pregnancy rate of 1 in 3 (among girls aged 15-19), where Eastern province has the highest and Western province has the second highest rate nationally (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2019). Contraceptive use of currently married and sexually active unmarried women aged 15-40 was 54% and 30% in Eastern and Western province respectively (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2019). Unmet need for contraceptives of sexually active unmarried women aged 15-49 was 42% in Eastern and 30% in Western Province (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2019). In both provinces, stakeholders confirmed that there is the notion that unmarried adolescents are not supposed to be sexually active, which results in a clear gap of vision to provide contraceptives (including emergency contraceptives – of which there is often a stock out in health facilities, leaving only pharmacies open as source to get these) to this group, particularly girls. Furthermore, in both Eastern and Western Provinces, stakeholders strongly confirmed misconceptions and myths around family planning methods among people in general, such as; contraceptive use causing infertility.

Notwithstanding, in Eastern Province, child marriage is often seen as a more favourable option than pregnancy outside of marriage and a means to control or avoid undesirable behaviour of young people, while in Western Province initiation rites are an important avenue to reduce shame related to teenage pregnancy.

Data from Zambia suggests that marriage is sometimes seen as a risk-management strategy to control boys and girls who are engaging in behaviour that is deemed inappropriate or unacceptable (Mann, Quigley and Fischer, 2015). This includes having multiple sexual partners, repeatedly staying out late, hanging out in bars, and becoming increasingly disrespectful and uncooperative at home. In fear of girls’ sexuality and pregnancy, but also because of risk of HIV/AIDs and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), child marriage is seen as a more favourable option. It is also seen as more acceptable than girls becoming pregnant outside of marriage. In all three stakeholder meetings, participants confirmed that this factor is more prominent in Eastern than in Western province. While in Western province teenage pregnancies reportedly lead to initiation in case the girl has not undergone initiation yet to reduce shame for the family (emphasis on the shame of girls engaging in sexual activities before initiation), stakeholders considered that teenage pregnancies in Eastern province more often directly lead to child marriage to reduce the same for the family (emphasis on high levels of shame around unmarried pregnant daughters).

"So, I think here we are looking at, especially where the education levels are low and then a child becomes pregnant, it means that the parents prefer that the girl goes. If the girl [who] remains at your home is pregnant, having a child without a father for Eastern, most Easterners, they feel that is very shameful. [It] is better let her get attached to that particular man and that reliefs them from shame. So, it I think it's the opposite with Western." (Research participant, Chipata)

As the illustrative quote above shows, this dynamic reportedly can be found more predominantly in rural communities and parents with lower education levels.

Girls and young women facing barriers in using family planning & other SRH services: Access to SRH services in Zambia as a whole, including family planning continues to be a public health concern. SRH commodities frequently experience stock-out both in the public and private sector (Ooms et al., 2020). In rural areas, challenges such as long distances to health facilities and traditional barriers such as male spouses prohibiting women to use contraceptives, hinder adolescent girls and young women to use family planning services (Population Council, UNFPA, Government of Zambia Human Rights Commission, 2017). In all stakeholder meetings, restrictive attitudes and practices from health workers toward adolescents who are not married and/or not pregnant were validated. Particularly in Eastern Province, participants highlighted the fear of stigma and of being recognized by community members in the health facility affecting their access to family planning and other SRH services.

"I think the other thing [is] that limits our young people from accessing these services that the health facilities are offering, it's the age. Because this is a 14-year-old, as he's saying, she's already mature. And she can't go to the facility to access [contraceptives] because the facility staff will tell the child you're still young. Can you go and get a consent from your mother? And who is this mother that will come and agree and say let me take my child to go and access the family planning tablets or injection from the facility. So that also limits them from accessing the service from the facility, even if they are there, they are not able to access that. But that does not stop them from having sex. Because even if they know that if I do this, I'll get pregnant, they'll go for it because they are ready to doing that. So that limits them. The age also limits them. The fear from the parents that he has already said makes them not accesses the services from the facility, even if these people are there to offer them the services, they can't access that." (CSO representative, Chipata).

Furthermore, rural provinces record no (Eastern province) or the lowest rates (0.7% in Western province) of safe abortion performed in health facilities, because the conditions to terminate pregnancy are often too difficult to fulfil and Christianity, being the predominant religion in Zambia, is related to much stigma against abortion (Population Council, UNFPA, Government of Zambia Human Rights Commission, 2017).

Educated young people are better equipped to make informed decisions about when to marry: Research for Zambia as a whole show that educated young people have easier access to reproductive health information than their non-educated peers, equipping these educated young

people with skills to make informed decisions about when to marry. In contrast, evidence from other countries with high child marriage prevalence (in absence of specific data from Zambia) shows that poorer households often have inadequate access to SRH information and services, which can affect decisions around child marriage by both parents and young people themselves (Phiri et al., 2023). Stakeholders from both provinces validated and stressed this point, considering that the magnitude of the interlinking factors of poverty and low education levels have a very strong influence on adolescents' and their families' decision-making around child marriage.

Zambia as a whole, children without adequate supervision or social support, for example in the context of migration and new settlements, as well as children who leave home to attend boarding schools are perceived to be at higher risk of child marriage. The absence of recreational activities has been found to increase sexual activities and affect child marriage (Mann, Quigley and Fischer, 2015). This factor was validated across stakeholder meetings, particularly in interlinkage with families' poverty and education levels. The factor of alcohol/marijuana abuse (often referred to as "junkies" by stakeholders) was also highlighted as a driver of sexual violence, teenage pregnancy and child marriage in both provinces.

A widely held view in both urban and rural Zambia is that children are becoming less respectful, difficult to manage (Mann, Quigley and Fischer, 2015). During the stakeholder meetings, there was a strong notion in both provinces of intergenerational conflict in terms of understanding rights and responsibilities (often framed around young people's "indiscipline"). This conflict was said to be derived from the notion that parents could no longer discipline their children through beating or whipping as their children could then report them to the Human Rights Commission. Stakeholders talked about this resulting in parents not feeling able to be actively involved in the lives of their children as they do not have the tools to do so. This reduces the possibilities for constructive communication, including about how to avoid teenage pregnancy and related child marriage.

Some stakeholders are concerned about the potential linkage between new technologies and child marriage: While also regarded as a promising avenue to spread accurate SRHR information and allowing wider programming reach, in Eastern and Western Provinces, stakeholders perceived that social media are a contributing factor to increased sexual behaviour, and thus indirectly to child marriage. Some stakeholders were concerned about that such new technologies facilitate more connections among young people and provide information that carries notions around sexuality against the cultural norms, particularly in urban areas.

While child marriage is a form of Gender-Based Violence, sexual violence and child abuse further indirectly influence child marriage rates: Power imbalances between women and men have resulted in low female representation in formal employment, poor access to social services, and high levels of teen pregnancy, child marriage, and intimate partner violence (IPV) in Zambia (World Bank Group, 2022). Child marriage is consequently internationally recognised in law as a form of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) (Girls Not Brides, 2020). Stakeholders from Eastern and Western Provinces stressed high numbers of defilement and child abuse as a contributing factor to teenage pregnancies and subsequently child marriage.

What do we know about efficacious prophylactic interfusions that address the drivers of child marriage?

During some conversations with stakeholders, it became so evident that in Western Province, no direct child marriage prevention interventions are currently being implemented. However, indirectly it is addressed through interventions focusing on issues such as teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDs and GBV. In Eastern Province there is reportedly much more focus on child marriage programming directly. The following sections summarise the key findings from the literature and stakeholder meetings related to identified effective prevention interventions to address the key drivers of child marriage in Zambia.

Current interventions addressing poverty and economic factors

While unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) are often effective in increasing school access and protecting against early and high-risk sex, they generally do not lead to a reduction in child marriage (Mathers, 2021). Although cash transfers alone cannot change social norms related to girls' and women's work, marriage and sexuality in the short term, when combined with other policies and programmes, especially in education, they can empower girls to resist harmful practices and sow the seed for inter-generational change. In Zambia, the Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCT) is one such a programme administered by the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) through the Department of Social Welfare, providing payments of money to vulnerable individuals and households meeting selected criteria⁴ to reduce extreme poverty and intergenerational transfer of poverty (amounting to ZMW150 bi-monthly; while people with disabilities receive double). It started in 2003 in Kalomo District and has grown significantly in size over the past years, with now nationwide implementation (116 districts in 2021). Extensive evaluations of the SCT Programme showed that individuals and households accessing SCTs have seen notable improvements in their lives, including reduced hunger and better school attendance for children, revealing a 10% increase in the number of children attending primary school from SCT recipient households (Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2022). While such evaluations mainly focused on poverty-related objectives, (Dake et al., 2018) evaluated the impact of the SCT programme on delaying early marriage and pregnancy among youth aged 14-21 from ultra-poor and labour constrained households in Zambia and Malawi.

The study found significant impacts on poverty and schooling (for male youth only), but limited impacts on safe transition outcomes for both males and females. While no significant impact on child marriage was observed in Zambia, a marginally significant protective impact on marriage or cohabitation was found for male youth in Malawi. The authors acknowledged limitations in the study's demographic, duration and design, recommending further research to better understand how outcomes could be improved. Nevertheless, participants in Chipata District were concerned that the SCTs had an unintended negative effect on adolescents falling pregnant to qualify for the economic benefits.

- Welfare Assessment (PMT)

This final assessment potential beneficiaries are subjected to before being included on the social cash transfer program. At this stage the information on households or individuals characteristics correlated with welfare levels is used in a formal algorithm to proxy household income, welfare or need.

Conditional cash transfer, such as the keeping girls in school project, seems successful in preventing child marriage, while conditional cash transfer to delay child marriage seems to be less promising: Review of global evidence by Mathers (Mathers, 2021) found that cash transfers, specifically conditional cash transfers (CCTs) can help to address economic and social factors contributing to child marriage. CCTs have consistently shown to keep girls in school, counteract family and social pressures to marry, and reduce the risk of self-initiated unions and pre-marital relationships that may lead to pregnancy and marriage. Also a systematic review by Malhotra and Elnakib (2021) comparing different interventions for child marriage identified that supporting girls' schooling through cash or in-kind transfers had the most success in preventing child marriage. Eight out of ten medium-high quality studies showed positive results for this intervention type. Another systematic review by Kalamar et al. (2016) concluded that three interventions that provided incentives to stay in school all had a significant impact on reducing child marriage.

In Zambia, the government-run conditional cash transfer “Keeping girls in school” (KGS), covers boarding school fees and a grant to enable families buy other school requirements of around K150-200 for most target groups⁵ and K300-400 for people with disabilities and is given to girls of whose parents are under the SCT programme (Openaid, 2023). The programme runs since 2016 and is currently implemented in 39 districts in ten provinces across Zambia. It also includes a GBV action plan and referral pathway. From the 7,000 households who received the education grant in 2021, 72% of KGS girls progressed to the next grade and 93% of girls enrolled in grade 12 completed it successfully (Openaid, 2023).

A qualitative study by Milimo et al. (2021) conducted as part of Zambia's RISE initiative suggested several benefits of economic support for female adolescents, such as economic independence, increased assertiveness and autonomy, reduced desire for transactional sexual relationships, improved motivation for school, and enhanced parental and community support for female adolescents' education and reduced school dropouts. However, this study did not directly link these outcomes with reduced child marriage rates.

The above-mentioned systematic review by Malhotra and Elnakib (2021) showed that asset or cash transfers conditional on delaying marriage were successful in only two out of four evaluations, and unconditional cash transfers for poverty mitigation had no effect. On the contrary, a recent review of child marriage prevention interventions cash transfers to support girls' education appear to be promising. However, this finding is based on a limited number of interventions and insufficient geographic representation, so it remains difficult to pin down which interventions will be most effective in each context to tackle basal factors leading to child marriages (Lembani & Mijere, 2020).

Howbeit, researchers have proposed various frameworks laying out the hypothesized drivers, correlates, and outcomes of child marriage, with a good deal of overlap between frameworks

⁵ Girls or young women under 25 years living in SCT households who have qualified for secondary school are eligible for KGS.

(Lembani, 2020). Yet, many of these frameworks are complex, narrowly focused on one setting, or they lack a clear connection to policies or interventions. As a result, the field lacks a simple, unified framework that brings together an understanding of the drivers of child marriage for girls with clear implications for how programs and policies can better target the unique combination of drivers between and within settings.

Empirical Interventions Addressing Education: Educational interventions increasing enrolment, retention, completion and transition rates are key for reducing child marriage:

Among 132 African child marriage interventions reviewed, 38 publications focusing on educational interventions, particularly targeting unmarried girls, emphasized the importance of increasing enrolment, retention, completion, and transition rates (i.e. from primary to secondary school) for girls' schooling to delay marriage (Greene et al., 2023). These interventions, discussed above in relation to economic factors and social norms, provide valuable insights into effective strategies for addressing child marriage.

The Zambian School Re-Entry Policy from 1997 for adolescent mothers to return to school is a crucial enabling factor in addressing child marriage. However, stakeholders in both provinces highlighted that there are issues around stigma and open discrimination of young mothers by peers and teachers when returning to school. This result resonates with the findings from a recent national study on CSE which indicated that some participants perceived the re-entry policy as a double-edged sword that encourages adolescent pregnancy by allowing those who were pregnant to return to school (Chavula et al., 2023).

In more recent developments, the Free Education Policy from 2021 making primary and secondary free for all, in Zenda's (2022) words "raises hope and suspicion." The new policy came with an increased investment into education, with the government of Zambia having set aside a budget of 18.1 Zambian Kwacha for the education sector and with additional funds available through the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). However, stakeholders from both provinces were concerned about challenges around insufficient infrastructure and human resources in schools affecting education quality. There was further consensus that so far school-related GBV has insufficiently been addressed in the country.

Limited evidence points to the importance of a life skills approach and teacher training to reduce child marriage, but many challenges exist to roll this out successfully in Zambia:

A systematic review by Kalamar et al. (2016) identified the implementation of a life skills curriculum resulting in a decrease in child marriage and an increase in age at marriage as most promising intervention. Unfortunately, there is limited evidence available specifically examining the direct impact of life skills/sexuality education programmes on preventing child marriage. A qualitative study by Zulu et al. (2019) focusing on the nationwide implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in Zambia identified challenges in increasing young people's SRH knowledge to reduce child marriage rates. These challenges included individual teachers making decisions on their own regarding the content and timing of CSE, withholding

information from learners, promoting abstinence as the sole method of preventing pregnancy, or cancelling sexuality education sessions altogether.

A qualitative case study from Katete District in Eastern Province about a UNICEF intervention targeting Head Teachers with guidance and counselling and mentorship training around sexuality education reportedly showed positive effects on reducing pregnancies and early marriage among learners; affected parents' support toward girls' education and willingness to report cases of early marriage and pregnancies; and increased traditional leaders' proactivity in coming up with by-laws against early child marriage (Chuunga, 2023). The role of teachers in addressing ASRHR, including child marriage and teen pregnancies have been highlighted also in the RISE project in Zambia (Chilambe et al., 2023).

The new sexuality education curriculum was mentioned as a promising intervention by some stakeholders, but predominantly in Western province, discussions demonstrated high levels of concerns around its "comprehensiveness." These stakeholders were concerned, as one participant expressed it, that the "initiation ceremonies have been moved to schools", implying a teaching of culturally inappropriate syllabus and revealing a lack of parental involvement, as the quote below demonstrates.

"We have a bit of a challenge in our Africanness or in our culture, where our parents are not allowed to talk about sexual matters, you know with their children. But I feel that this is also contributing to child marriages and teenage pregnancies because as a parent, it would have been better if parents were allowed as well to talk about sexual[ity] education being in their homes, you know, rather than just pushing it. It's like we, we, we, we have pushed the issue of sexual[ity] education to the teachers, to schools and other organizations. As parents, we're saying no, no, no, no. We are holy. We can't talk about this sinful act. (...). But maybe if this barrier or this war was to be broken, then I think it can add. (...) You know as parents; we need to talk about these sexual issues with our children. Then it can be of great help rather just pushing them to the schools and other institutions." (Clergyman from Mongu District).

Intermediation (s) addressing social norms and attitudes.

Girls' empowerment interventions can have a significant impact on delaying pregnancy and therewith avoiding child marriage, but challenges around gender transformative approaches and intergenerational conflict remain: A study by Chae and Ngo (2017) reviewing 22 studies across low- and middle-income countries (including 9 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa) highlighted that empowerment interventions were the most utilized approach with a 57% success rate in reducing child marriage and teen pregnancies.

In the Zambian context, the effectiveness of empowerment interventions to prevent child marriage is mixed. A study by Makino et al. (2021) analysing data from randomized controlled trials in Zambia (and Bangladesh) found that providing empowerment interventions and safe spaces had a significant impact on delaying pregnancy, particularly for illiterate girls in communities where premarital sex was relatively common. The study emphasized that intervention effectiveness

varied depending on social contexts, norms, available opportunities, and girls' background factors such as literacy, agency, and household wealth. The findings further suggested that in Zambia, where premarital sex is common, empowering and educating individual girls may be more effective in delaying marriage and pregnancy than working with their parents. Also the UNFPA-UNICEF (UNFPA and UNICEF, 2021) Global Programme to End Child Marriage in Zambia showed positive results in girls' confidence and assertiveness after mentorship trainings on several SRH and gender topics and the safe space intervention contributed to an increase in small businesses and piecework as well as re-entry into formal education. For this intervention, no direct impact on child marriage was measured. A cluster randomized trial by Austrian et al. (2020) reported that providing safe spaces for adolescents alone or in combination with health vouchers did not have any impact on child marriage compared to the control group.

As a potential good practise to promote a supportive and gender-equal environment, the Global Programme to End Child Marriage programme has adapted evidence-based tools such as the Start Awareness Support Action! (SASA!) to the Zambian context to address gender norms through community dialogues (see more below) and engagements with boys and men (UNFPA and UNICEF, 2021). The formation of boys' and men's networks in targeted districts, mentoring on positive masculinities and on zero tolerance to violence through the safe space clubs resulted in most boys expressing a will to return to school and support positive masculinity actions, while the engagement with adult men targeted men who lead traditional initiation rites. While overall validating the importance of girls' empowerment interventions, stakeholders in both provinces stressed that too much emphasis is being put on the girl child and boys and adolescent men in Zambia are largely left out of child marriage interventions which is perceived to limit the effectiveness of such approaches.

Limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of traditional leaders in child marriage prevention, although some promising practices have been described.

Furthermore, the stakeholder meetings revealed that empowerment interventions from a human rights based approach seem to contribute to intergenerational conflict and misunderstandings around rights and responsibilities. Stakeholders further discussed the perceived benefits of role model interventions among adolescent girls (e.g. "buddy systems"), which were deemed effective by several adult stakeholders; while youth representatives, particularly vocal in Chipata as the accounts below illustrate, suggested that these interventions work better with having role models who are older and can speak to their previous life choices, rather than being compared to their successful peers. Limited scientific documentation exists on effective interventions involving traditional leaders in addressing child marriage. While a United Nations (UN) Women report (2020) disclosed the promising practice of traditional leaders developing community bylaws to address cultural practices, and a GBV assessment by the World Bank Group (2022) concluded that traditional leaders as custodians of customs need to play a key role in child marriage prevention, there is an overall lack of scientific evidence supporting the effectiveness of such approaches.

A qualitative study by Daka et al. (2020) in congruence with Lembani (2020) explored the involvement of traditional leaders in ending early child marriages in the Chewa Chiefdom more

especially in Chadiza, Katete and Chipata Districts of Eastern Province. Promising measures such as awareness creation & campaigns; collaboration with NGOs, teachers, and healthcare providers; and revising traditional practices related to initiation ceremonies with involvement of traditional leaders, were implemented. These measures were reported to have reduced child marriages and increased access to education. However, the study highlighted the persistent challenge of insufficient financial support in fully addressing child marriage and promoting education within the Chewa kingdom. In 2020, UNFPA supported the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, the Ministry of Gender and the Zambia National Traditional Counsellors to codify the curriculum used during rites of passage for adolescent girls aiming to make it more gender transformative (UNFPA and UNICEF, 2022). The analysis was based on various gender norms, sayings and songs from various provinces to ensure that the content did not promote male dominance or perpetuate the low status of women and girls in the communities. As the quote below shows, changes in initiation ceremonies' curricula over time has also been discussed by some stakeholders:

“There has been a change between the past and now. Previously just upon reaching puberty, the girl would be immediately taken into initiation ceremony and taught everything including how to sexuality satisfy a man through the example the use of aphrodisiacs. But now we been educated that these inserting aphrodisiacs/ herbs in the vagina can cause diseases. But from the time learnt about the negative effects of aphrodisiacs, now when children reach puberty, we only teach them mainly about hygiene practices, very few teach about sexual satisfaction during the initiation ceremonies.” (Traditional Leader, Chadiza District).

Howbeit, engagement of traditional leadership was clearly recognized as a core enabler for effective interfusions at community-level by stakeholders from the two provinces. Participants reported differences in child marriage reductions in conducive environments created by the leadership of the respective chiefs. In Eastern Province, significant focus is being put on bylaws and punitive measures, without consideration of potential unintended consequences. Stakeholders consider these measures to be effective, while robust evidence on effectiveness is missing, despite some chiefs having signed bylaws and making commitments to end child marriage, there are little accountability mechanisms to ensure implementation. While in Eastern Province, different tribes and chiefdoms have structures to deal with child marriage, such as community tribunals and bylaws, stakeholders brought up that these structures are very active in some settings but not everywhere. In Western Province, the chiefdom leaves legal issues to central government and no bylaws are in place.

Stakeholders highlighted the age of chiefs, education levels and willingness to engage with young people as enabling factors for effective child marriage prevention interventions centering traditional leaders.

“The reason Chief Zingalume embraced the fight against child marriages is that he is young and educated. (...) We can easily change the other two chiefs if us the youths can hold a meeting with them and conduct intergenerational dialogue, together with other Government leaders such as the DVCs, am sure they can also embrace and advocate against child marriage.” (Youth Led Organisation Representative, Chadiza District).

Even so, stakeholders from Eastern and Western Provinces unanimously revealed and acknowledged the strong influence of the Catholic Church in Zambia (CCZ) stressing those religious leaders are currently not consistently enough involved in child marriage's effective interfusions.

The term empowerment requires more conceptual clarity and more insights into “empowered girls” decision-making and experiences are needed: Child marriage programming has shifted towards focusing on girls' development, preferences, and decisions, moving away from viewing them solely as victims of parental and spousal pressures (Greene et al., 2023). However, this shift often results in an overemphasis on individual self-assertion rather than addressing the structural basis and root causes of gender inequalities (Cornwall, 2016). The lack of conceptual clarity and measurement of girls' empowerment makes it challenging to evaluate and compare intervention outcomes, as some programmes emphasize the relational nature of empowerment and others assets and opportunity structures (Greene et al., 2023). Some argue that despite empowerment efforts, girls still face structural inequalities that marginalize them, leaving them at greater risk, especially when interventions end and NGO staff depart, resulting in a state of "informed powerlessness" (Bessa, 2019). While progress has been made in reducing child marriage, there is limited documentation on efforts addressing the needs of child brides (Muthengi et al., 2021). Technology has the potential to play a crucial role as an affordable and user-friendly platform for sharing information in empowerment-based child marriage interventions (Greene et al., 2023).

Community and traditional leaders' involvement described as a promising practice for norm change. However, this will go hand in hand with economic support to significantly reduce child marriage rates:

While gender norms are identified as central drivers of child marriage, evidence on interventions addressing norms in Africa is scarce. Qualitative studies from Zambia emphasize the importance of community dialogues and engagement with traditional leaders, but these efforts alone are insufficient to prevent child marriage. Addressing socio-cultural factors is crucial in enhancing the acceptability of cash transfer schemes aimed at addressing early marriage and pregnancy in Zambia (Banda et al., 2019). However, the link between changes in attitudes and behaviour and actual reductions in child marriage or an increase in the age of marriage is not well established, leaving the impact of community pledges on actual reduction of child marriage unexplained (Bessa, 2019).

There are rifts in the documentation about nexus between pregnancy prevention and child marriage prevention programming: Several child marriage interventions in Zambia focus on adolescent SRH. However, further research is needed to understand the links between pregnancy prevention and child marriage, particularly in the context of Africa (Greene et al., 2023), including specific research in Zambia (Makino et al., 2021). Stakeholders' accounts in this study suggested that there indeed is a strong focus on intending to avoid teenage pregnancy through a normative response, but there seems to be space to strengthen such efforts informed by youth's perspectives and experiences, such as by bringing these services closer to the communities and working with well-trained peer educators. The stakeholder meetings further suggested that there is limited acceptability of the fact that young people are sexually active and thus require preventive SRH information and services at a young age.

Gender dynamics affect child marriage rates and are not adequately addressed in interventions. The review demonstrated how child marriage needs to be understood and tackled in light of gender inequality and gendered violence. There is a need to strengthen interventions addressing gendered notions around sexuality (such as remaining practises in some rural communities of sexual testing of the girl child; the use of aphrodisiac herbs to satisfy the man or initiation rites focusing on teaching girls on how to sexually satisfy a man with no focus on sexual needs of women), Gender-Based Violence (e.g. working more on gender norms change; focusing more on involving boys and men in programmes etc.) and gender dynamics within marriage (e.g. openly addressing adolescents' diverse life aspirations and traditional gender roles).

Attention for the implementation and effectiveness of laws and policies: Few studies report on the outcomes of advocacy and legal strategies to address child marriage likely due to challenges in conducting quasi-experimental and experimental research (Bokaie et al., 2021). While our analysis highlights effective practices, such as raising the age of marriage, strengthening civil registration systems and engaging committed leadership, it is crucial to monitor the implementation of child marriage laws and consider unintended consequences in girls' lives beyond marriage delay. Access to justice for married, divorced, or widowed girls also requires attention (Greene et al., 2023). Engaging traditional leaders in remote areas, as demonstrated in the Chewa Kingdom study, can be a promising strategy for effective public policy implementation making use of their existing structures on the ground and access to larger audiences (Daka et al., 2020). In Eastern Province, for instance, much focus in child marriage prevention is currently given to bylaws and punitive measures, with robust evidence lacking. It is important compare the trends in child marriages in chiefdoms that have the laws and those without the laws. It might also good to further analyse any potential negative impacts of the economic penalties of bylaws especially among the most marginalised people. Furthermore, no comprehensive review on how modifications of initial ceremonies' curricula has supported or affected the prevalence of child marriage rates has been conducted.

Linking child marriage with other global issues, are important within lobby and advocacy interventions: Child marriage interfusions often fail to address its interconnectedness with other global issues such as: poverty, climate change and there is a need for increased visibility of and attention, particularly to rural communities in Zambia (Hussain, 2020).

The success, scale-up, and sustainability of multicomponent programmes targeting child marriage have been limited, suggesting potential for single-component programmes (Chae & Ngo, 2017; Kalamar et al., 2016). However, Chandra-Mouli and Plesons (2021) argue that certain individual components of multicomponent approaches can be effective as standalone programmes. Most stakeholders in this study agreed, stressing that several factors including poverty, education levels, gendered and cultural notions of the socialization processes as well as SRH service factors do interact in multiple and often non-directional manners to undermine girls' decision-making power when it comes to marriage. This raises questions about the demonstrated effectiveness of intervention packages versus implementation and evaluation challenges (Chandra-Mouli &

Plesons, 2021). In Sub-Saharan Africa, interrelated root causes of child marriage emphasize the importance of multi-sectoral interventions that empower girls through education, social skills, health knowledge, and economic strengthening while addressing community gender norms and attitudes (Choudhury et al., 2017). Also the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2020) calls for more integrated child marriage interventions, integrated into GBV programming and with sexual reproductive, maternal and neonatal health components. Conditional cash transfers, while successful in improving education and health outcomes, are unlikely to fully address child marriage on their own, requiring a holistic and long-term approach (Amin et al., 2017). Joint efforts focusing on increasing school attendance and changing social attitudes are needed (Rasmussen et al., 2019). Further research is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of these multi-component approaches (Greene et al., 2023).

General Overall Perception

This study explored why, in spite of lower poverty and equal teenage pregnancy levels, are there higher child marriage rates in Eastern than in Western Provinces. Upon review of the available literature and after discussion with key stakeholders in Mongu, Chipata and Chadiza Districts, the difference in child marriage rates in Eastern and Western Provinces seem to be largely influenced by two core factors:

Firstly, there are distinct notions in each province around shame of parents related to child marriage as a result of teenage pregnancy, and about how parents view keeping/marrying off daughters as an economic incentive. This interlinks with differences in the socialisation of girls in both provinces and ascribed dependence of girls from boys. In Western Province, these dynamics lead more often to pregnant girls being kept in the family, while pregnant girls in Eastern Province are more likely to be married off.

Secondly, the high value that parents and young people themselves give to education in Western Province, as a result of education historically having been well integrated within the province's traditional structures ensuring that these values move from generation to generation, leads to a strong desire for children to finish school, including when faced with teenage pregnancy.

Conclusion

Systematic reviews have shown that supporting and empowering girls, enhancing their human capital⁶ are effective pathways to delaying marriage in low- and middle-income countries (Kalamar et al., 2016; Makino et al., 2021; Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021). Combining multiple empowerment approaches has also been highlighted as successful (Chae & Ngo, 2017). The effectiveness of conditional cash transfers has been well-documented, although for Zambia there are still research gaps. Studies in the country have shown positive impacts of both conditional and unconditional cash transfers on poverty and education but have not documented their direct impact on preventing child marriage (Dake et al., 2018; Milimo et al., 2021). In the meetings, the need for supporting girls economically as a means to addressing some of causes of pregnancy was also mentioned.

⁶ Girls' human capital includes their gained knowledge, skills, know-how, good health, and education.

There is, however, limited evidence regarding costs and benefits of programmes, synergies of programme components in integrated or bundled programmes, and the inclusion of men and boys in child marriage prevention programmes. The consideration of additional pathways to address mental health or sexual debut or inclusion of subgroup analysis by orphan status, have not been taken into account when studying the impact of cash transfers in the Zambian context (Dake et al., 2018). Stakeholders overall confirmed that there is need to more comprehensively document the impact of the Zambian cash transfer programmes on reducing child marriages rates. While ongoing education interventions demonstrate clear signs of promising practices around increased education enrolment, retention, completion and transition rates in Zambia, there is room to strengthen efforts around school infrastructures, addressing SRGBV, stigma around re-entry.

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