

**VULNERABILITY TO CHILD MARRIAGE: PERSPECTIVES OF  
ADOLESCENT GIRLS FROM A RESOURCE-POOR RURAL  
COMMUNITY IN MANICALAND, ZIMBABWE**

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## DECLARATION

I, **Tsitsi Dube**, declare that:

- i. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
- ii. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- iii. This dissertation/thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs, or other information unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher: Tsitsi Dube

## **STATEMENT BY SUPERVISOR**

This thesis is submitted with my approval.



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Supervisor: Dr Ndumiso Daluxolo Ngidi

## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the vulnerability of rural adolescent girls to child marriage. In particular, the research explored how twenty adolescent girls who were conveniently recruited from a resource-poor rural community in the Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe understood and communicated their vulnerability to child marriage. The adolescent girls who participated in this study emerged from a resource-poor context where they were oppressed by poverty, heteropatriarchy, and prevailing gender norms characterized by the sociocultural and economic ecologies of Manicaland. The study used focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to gain insight into the adolescent girls' understandings of their vulnerability to child marriage. Analysis in the study was informed by two theories. First, feminist theories provided a framework for understanding how gender shaped the lives of rural adolescent girls, and in turn, rendered them socially inferior and susceptible to the experience of child marriage. Second, the social norms theory provided a framework for understating how prevailing social and cultural norms endangered marginalised and exposed adolescent girls to perilous practices such as child marriage. The data generated in the study were analysed using a thematic approach. Findings revealed that the adolescent girls who participated in this study were vulnerable to child marriage. They understood their vulnerability to child marriage in several ways that were tied to their gender identities, their inferior social positions as girls, enduring household and community poverty, perilous gender norms and inequality, heteropatriarchy, and religious and cultural norms. Within this context, the participants reported that their agency to resist child marriage was limited. The findings have implications for ameliorative programming and interventions that are focused on giving adolescent girls safe spaces and the voice to challenge gender, sociocultural, and the heteropatriarchy that rendered them vulnerable to child marriage.

## **DEDICATION**

To my father, who has always believed that to change the world every child should be educated and uplifted. This research is dedicated to my father who made me realised from a young age the importance of education and the need to see to it that young girls are not deprived of it. Dad (Samaita) this is for you. To my mother, for everything you have done, thank you.

To all the girls who participated in this research: The world is your parish go out and be bold and conquer it.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*“Write down the vision plainly so he may run with it he who reads it”* (The Holy Bible, Habakuk 2:2).

It started as an idea that did not seem possible, but the Lord saw me through it, and with that, I am forever grateful.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AU-African Union

CARE- Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere

CAMFED- Campaign for Female Education

CAR -Central African Republic

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

FGD-Focus group discussion

GBV-Gender-based Violence

HIV- Human Immunodeficiency Virus

IDI-In-depth Interviews

SDG- Sustainable Development Goals

SSA-Sub-Saharan Africa

UDHR -Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNFPA- The United Nations Population Fund

UNICEF- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNGEI-UN Girls' Education Initiative

UNCRC -United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

ZNCWC - Zimbabwe National Council for the Welfare of Children

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **UNDERSTANDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN RESOURCE-POOR RURAL CONTEXTS: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Child marriage is a historic practice that has plagued global south countries for centuries (Loreti, 2020; Avogo & Somefun, 2019; Awuye, 2018). It is described as the forced or coerced marriage of a child before they reach the sexual-maturity age of 18 years (Walker, 2012; UNICEF, 2018). Often, children who are coerced or forced into these marriages are not psychologically and physically mature enough to enter into such a union (UNFPA, 2012; Steinhaus et.al, 2019). To date, available literature reports that adolescent girls remain vulnerable to this form of human rights violation in several countries, including in Zimbabwe where this study was located (UNICEF, 2020). While there exist global and regional commitments to protect girls against violent culturally permissible practices, child marriages continue unabated in several societies. Studies report that in predominantly impoverished rural communities, adolescent girls are at risk of being forced into early non-consensual marriages (Mardi et al., 2018; Abera et al., 2020; Amzat, 2019). For example, the marriage of adolescent girls is more likely to occur in resource-poor rural communities when compared to the more affluent urban communities (Raj, 2010; Gemignani & Wodon, 2015).

Noteworthy, across the globe, child marriage is on a decline, however, the progress is uneven and slow across some regions and countries (UNICEF, 2014). It remains prevalent in several African, Middle Eastern, and South-East Asian countries where the rights of girls are often not recognised (Gemignani and Wodon, 2015; Nayan, 2015; Steinhaus et.al, 2019). Within these regions of the world, child marriage practices continue persistently even though the practice has received condemnation from researchers, politicians, and gender activists (Baral, 2019; Horii, 2020; Kalra & Joshi, 2020). It is well documented that in traditional rural societies marriage comes with great responsibility for girls and women (Kapur, 2019; Marphatia et al., 2017; Stark, 2018). This includes the expectation to bear children and to perform household domestic duties. Child marriage poses multiple threats and infringes on children's right to

education, health, development, and economic prospects (Kachere, 2009; Melnikas et al., 2020).

Child marriage is often gendered, with girls more than boys more likely to be pushed into an early marital union (Malhotra et al., 2011). Globally, in 2009 alone, an estimated 60 million girls were married before they reached 18 years (Raj, 2010). Further troubling is a report from UNICEF (2014), which suggests that over 280 million girls globally will likely be married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and that this number might rise to around 700 million girls by 2030 (Kurebwa & Kurebwa, 2018). These figures are alarming and highlight the depth of vulnerability to child marriage faced by adolescent girls, especially those who live in rural communities (Centre for Human Rights, 2018). According to Kurebwa and Kurebwa (2018), this practice is one of the most sustained indications of gender inequality in several African and Asian societies, and it mirrors social, religious, and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination. In remote rural communities, child marriages often go unnoticed largely because these communities exist in isolation from the broader society (Moletsane & Ntombela, 2011; Nayan 2015). Adolescent girls within these communities lack the agency, confidence, and voice to address and challenge violent practices that place their lives at risk (Dixon et al., 2019; Greene & Burke, 2018; Harper et al., 2018).

The practice of child marriage in poor and marginalised African rural communities merits more attention and interventions to curb it (Nguyen & Wodon, 2014). As researchers attest, more scholarship is needed to understand this phenomenon from the perspectives of those that are vulnerable, such as adolescent girls (Petroni et al., 2017). In light of this background, the study reported in this dissertation examined rural adolescent girls' understanding of their vulnerability to child marriage. In particular, the study focused on 20 adolescent girls who were not married from Nyanga, in the Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe to examine how they understood and communicated about their vulnerability to child marriage in their resource-poor rural community. The study further explored these girls' agency in addressing their vulnerability to early marriage. To gather data, the study used in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD). A detailed description of the research process is provided in Chapter Four. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the study.

## 1.2 Contextualising Child Marriage

Child marriage is a name given to describe the practice of engaging children who are below the age of 18 years into marital unions (Mourtada et al., 2017; UNFPA, 2018). It is recognised as a public health, human rights, and education challenge that compromises children's physical and mental health, their development, as well as their right to education (Ketema & Erulkar, 2018; UNFPA, 2018). As a human rights concern, the practice takes place on a vast scale in several African countries and disproportionately affects adolescent girls (Nayan, 2015; Maswika et al., 2015). Six of the world's 10 countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage are found in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), where four in 10 girls are married before they reach 18 years (UNICEF, 2017). An early Human Rights Watch report (2015) supports this claim by suggesting that 40 percent of girls in this region marry before the age of 18 years and that African countries, generally, account for 15 of the 20 countries with the highest rates of child marriages. According to the Borgen Project (2020), the rate of children who are married in southern Africa is 10 percent higher than in any other sub-region of the world. Indeed, numbers vary in different regions, with Latin America and the Caribbean accounting for approximately 24 percent, a further 17 percent is reported in the Middle East, and 12 percent of married children are found in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (UNICEF Global Databases, 2020). Regionally, UNICEF (2018) reports that South Asia is home to the largest number (39 percent) of child brides, followed by SSA with a 36 percent record of known child brides (Wodon et al., 2017).

In Africa, as I have argued above, child marriages are high and merit scholarly attention. For example, West Africa has over 35 percent of documented girls that are married (Mellese et al., 2021). Likewise, Central Africa has a documented rate of 38 percent of married girls. Finally, Southern Africa and Eastern Africa account for 37 percent and 34 percent of married girls, respectively (Smaak & Varia, 2015; Odhiambo, 2017). These figures demonstrate the vulnerable state that girls, and especially adolescent girls, who are most likely to be married, find themselves trapped in.

While many regions of the world report progress in reducing child marriage<sup>1</sup>, Southern Africa has shown slower progress in the last 15 years (Centre for Human Rights, 2018). UNICEF (2018) has lamented the fact that the reduction of child marriage rates is not occurring quickly enough in Southern Africa, and that this region is not on track to meet the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for reducing child marriage by 2030. UNICEF further predicts that child marriage figures will remain above 30 percent in all the regions of Africa even beyond 2030. This is because child marriage remains one of the products of long-standing cultural and traditional beliefs. The practice is located within the system of heteropatriarchy that is rooted in extreme poverty, gender inequality, and gendered discriminations that allocate girls to low social statuses in comparison to boys, and where marrying girls early is part of an economic survival strategy (Parsons et al., 2015; Fresseco & Whiting, 2018; Smaak & Varia, 2015). Heteropatriarchy is a social, cultural, and political system in which men are afforded privilege and dominance over women and girls (Woodson & Pabon, 2016; Harris, 2011). Mwambene (2018) affirms that most child marriages occur in the poorest of rural areas where it has been linked to harmful practices that are embedded in culture and religion.

Available research reports that child marriage often occurs when children are between the ages of 15 and 18 years (Griffiths, 2017). However, some girls are married even before they reach 15 years (Freccero & Whiting, 2018). In SSA, for example, over 12 percent of girls are married before the age of 15 years (Ahmed et al., 2019). As noted above, girls tend to be married earlier and more frequently in comparison to boys (Biswas et al., 2020). Admittedly, the global scale of boys affected by child marriage is unknown as reliable data remains limited (Misunas et al., 2018; UNICEF, 2014). However, even for boys, child marriage is recognised as a significant problem in several countries (Warria, 2019). For example, the Central African Republic (CAR) reports one of the highest global rates of boys who are married before they reach the age of 18 years (Gaston et al., 2019). Available statistics suggest that 28 percent of boys in CAR are married by the time they are 18 years old (UNICEF, 2019). In comparison, this rate is 12 percent in Comoros, and 13 percent in Madagascar, where reliable data is available (Misunas et al., 2019).

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the rate of child marriage in Western Africa dropped from 44 percent in the early 2000s to 38 percent in the 2010s. Likewise, In Central and Eastern African, child marriages dropped from 42 percent in the early 2000s to 36 percent by the late 2010s (Centre for Human Rights, 2018).

While boys' experiences are a concern, the early marriage of girls in the African continent is alarming and merit further attention. For example, Human Rights Watch (2015) reports that 77 percent of girls in Niger, and over 60 percent in both CAR and Chad marry before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. If no progress is made to reduce and even end the number of girls married early, Human Rights Watch estimates that by 2050 the number of girls married in Africa will be doubled. This is concerning given the fact that girls who marry young are often denied a range of human rights, especially in a context where they have little or no power to make life choices, or where their voices are often ignored (Haberland et al., 2003). For example, girls tend to discontinue their education, face serious health implications, including multiple pregnancies, suffer both domestic and gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual violence when they are married early (Human Rights Watch, 2015; Hotchkiss et al., 2016). When girls are out of school and suffer multiple health risks, nations lose out on social, economic, and political contributions that girls might make towards their communities if their rights are recognised (Biswas et al., 2020).

To date, not much attention is being given to child marriage around the African continent, and even little is known about this practice from a Zimbabwean perspective (Ahinkorah et al., 2019; Horii, 2020; Tisdall & Cuevas-Parra, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). However, commitments are made by certain states, civil society, scholars, as well as local and international human rights agencies who continue to advocate for increased investment in young people's wellbeing (Dziva & Mazambani, 2017; Hackett et al., 2015; Mhlambo et al., 2019; Chandrea-Mouli et al., 2019). A common argument made by child advocates centres on the fact that more scholarly work and interventions are needed to not only understand child marriage but to effectively address, curb and eventually end it (Svanemyr, 2015). Further, scholars advocate for the full participation of girls, especially in research projects and policymaking, so that girls might verbalise their perspectives about child marriage (World Bank, 2017<sup>2</sup>; Tisdall & Guevas-Parra, 2020). It is within this broader context that the study reported in this dissertation was conceptualised.

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<sup>2</sup> Girls are powerful agents of socioeconomic change and the World Bank is committed to keeping them in school and learning. Each year of secondary education may reduce the likelihood of marrying before the age of 18 by five percent or more in many countries (World Bank, 2017).

### 1.3 The Rationale for the Study

My interest in the vulnerability of adolescent girls to early marriage is largely personal and stems from my upbringing in a poor rural community in Zimbabwe. Growing up in a rural neighborhood, where my parents worked as teachers, while I was attending an urban school, made me acknowledge some socioeconomic and cultural differences that existed in these two areas (the urban and the rural). For example, in the rural area where I grew up, not many girls had the privilege to complete high school (Gatsi et al., 2020; Ganga et al., 2019). In cases where a family was poor, it would be the boys in that household who would be awarded the privilege of attending and completing school (Chisamya et al., 2012; Javed & Mungal, 2019; MarcoGracia, 2021). This was also a common practice in the Apostolic Churches that were dotted in and around my community, and where my family attended religious gatherings. In those churches, senior members, especially the male leaders of the church, did not recognise nor acknowledge the importance of girls attending school. A common belief that they occasionally preached about at sermons and other religious gatherings was that girls would eventually get married and be looked after by their husbands (husbands who in many instances would have other wives or/and children older than the new brides) (See, for example, Sithole & Dziva, 2019)<sup>3</sup>.

A particular incidence that troubled me occurred in 1999, when five adolescent girls from my community, who were between the age of seven and 15 at the time, were handed over by their parents to a Kupemba<sup>4</sup> family for marital purposes. The handover was in compensation for their father's murder in the Honde Valley, in Manicaland, Zimbabwe (Kachere, 2009)<sup>5</sup>. Media reports later suggested that a Kupemba family member was murdered to prepare traditional medicine (Kachere, 2009; Chivasa, 2019). The community feared that the spirit of the deceased might avenge the murder and cause misfortune in the area. Therefore, as a means to stop the avenging spirit, and according to traditional beliefs in the area, the perpetrator's family had to

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<sup>3</sup> The practice is exacerbated by religious groups such as polygamous Apostolic sects which encourage the marrying of young girls (Sithole & Dziva, 2019)

<sup>4</sup> Kumpeba family is a family whose relative was murdered by an atoning family. The Kumpeba family thus demands a settlement in the form of a virgin girl or girls from the atoning family as compensation for the murder.

<sup>5</sup> The girl's relatives killed Kupemba to prepare muti (Traditional medicine) which is sometimes made from body parts. Kupemba's son later claimed that his father appeared to him in a dream demanding a virgin girl as compensation from each family involved in his murder (for a further reading, see Kachere, 2009).



atone the murder in the form of virgin girls to appease both the bereaved family and the spirit of the deceased (Duri & Fideli, 2019).

In a way, the adolescent girls were offered as brides to pay off for the atrocities done by their family members through a practice commonly known in the area's local language, as *Kuripa Ngozi* (also known as *appeasing the dead*) (Refugee Review Tribunal, 2010). This is a traditional form of child marriage within the Shona culture (a culture that I was born and raised into) where a family of someone accused of murder pays in compensation through pledging a virgin girl to appease the dead person's spirit. Through this practice, a young virgin girl is married into the family of the deceased (Karimanzira, 2015). *Kuripa Ngozi*, or virgin pledging (as it is called in English language speaking communities in Zimbabwe), is a criminal offense under Zimbabwe's Domestic Violence Act of 2006. However, the practice continues relentlessly in several rural communities, and some girls, and sometimes women, bear the brunt because the practice is conducted silently at the family level (Sithole & Dziva, 2019). The secrecy with which *kuripa ngozi* is conducted makes it difficult for law enforcement officials to intervene (Chivasa, 2019). This demonstrates how laws are passed but fall short of implementation (Human Rights Watch, 2014). In 2006, seven years after the girls were sent off to get married, the police and the Department of Social Welfare were compelled by concerned community members, and a progressive community traditional leader (or headsman of the community), to investigate and return the girls to their families. However, the headsman pulled out of the case because he was accused of interfering and preventing the two families from resolving their domestic affairs. The girls were rescued by the police and subsequently returned home. Nevertheless, their family returned them to the marital family because of fear of avenging dead spirits (Kachere, 2009).

When the incident occurred, I was still young to understand the complexities and the gendered nature of child marriage. However, at the age of 12 years, I knew I would not have wanted to be separated from my parents and be forced to drop out of school (or even play with my friends). Through engaging with the literature in preparation for this study, I have come to understand how child marriage denies girls the opportunity for cognitive development as the practice snatches away their right to freedom and education (Chinyoka, 2017). It reinforces powerlessness and interferes with girls' physical, mental, intellectual, and social development (Chenge & Maunganidze, 2017). Indeed, by reading feminist literature, I have come to

understand the concept of gender-based violence (GBV), and how sometimes, and often in rural contexts, even the law fails to protect girls from this form of violence and abuse. In Zimbabwe, as I noted above, *kuripa ngozi* has now been declared an offence and is punishable by law (Chivasa, 2019). Yet, available scholarship and the media still report isolated cases of this practice in remote and marginalized rural areas (Nyamanhindi, 2020). The non-compliance of local people, including some headsmen, in ending child marriages, points to contestation of power between political and traditional leadership (Claassens & O'Regan, 2021); a contestation that fuels girls' vulnerability to child marriage practices.

My interest in this topic, particularly about hearing the perspectives of adolescent girls, comes at a time when Zimbabwe's socio-political climate remains largely heteropatriarchal, and the voices of adolescent girls are silenced (Bhatasara & Chiweshe, 2021). Adolescent girls in the country continue to occupy marginal social positions (Chiweshe, 2015; Mutekwe, 2018). They are often denied safe spaces and a voice to articulate their challenges and develop personal agency in addressing these challenges (Charli-Joseph et al., 2018). I was, therefore, interested in providing a platform where adolescent girls could communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage. In this study, I acknowledge my privileged position as an educated woman, who was raised by educated parents who not only insisted on educating their children but also offered protection from harmful socio-cultural and religious practices. The girls who participated in this study, as well as others in several rural communities in Zimbabwe, might not have the privilege which sheltered me from harm and the possibility of early marriage. It is the voices of these girls, who are often marginalised and ignored, that I was interested in engaging for this research. I wanted to theorise their understandings of, as well as how they communicated about, their vulnerability to child marriage. Moreover, I was interested in how they might develop personal agency in addressing child marriage.

## **1.4 Statement of the Problem**

Child marriage is a centuries-long practice that is global public health, education, development, and human rights concern (Ellsberg et al., 2015). It affects adolescent girls more than any other social group, and if it is not curbed, it remains a serious threat to their health and wellbeing. Indeed, adolescent girls in poor rural communities are the most vulnerable to child marriage (Mukambachoto, 2016; Petroni et al., 2017). In these communities that are often characterised

by poverty, marriage for adolescent girls is mostly not a negotiable decision, and parents and/or other community elders have the final word in the decision-making (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003). Indeed, adolescent girls are forced or coerced into marriage without their consent (Wayomi et al., 2019; Mardi et al., 2018; Forke et al., 2018). In some communities where child marriage still occurs, it is considered a cultural norm and an expectation to which girls cannot object (Rembe et al., 2011).

As argued above, child marriage has negative health, development, and educational implications for girls. Since they are young, they are often stripped of any agency and decision-making rights in their marital families (Male & Wodon, 2018). Moreover, according to a Girls Not Brides (2020) report; girls are forced to leave school and take care of their ‘new’ families. Available literature also reports cases of physical and sexual abuse of girls who are married (Kidman, 2017, Li et al., 2019; Shamu et al., 2018). Furthermore, girls are also at risk of early and multiple childbirths and the subsequent risk of mortality induced by complications during pregnancy or childbirth (UNFPA, 2012)<sup>6</sup>. In sum, child marriage renders girls vulnerable to many social ills and jeopardises their developmental ability, livelihood, and socioeconomic capabilities, as well as personal growth (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi 2003).

Scholars maintain the need to understand and address child marriage within a context of highly gendered environments and to transform how girls are valued in their societies (Petroni et al., 2017). Moletsane and Ntombela (2010), for example, link poverty and the lived experiences of GBV against adolescent girls in rural communities. These scholars argue that GBV against girls is established and reinforced through existing power imbalances and the low social status that is often occupied by adolescent girls in their families, schools, and communities (see also, de Lange et al., 2012). In light of this argument, adolescent girls who marry early are thus vulnerable to sexual violence, physical, emotional, and economic abuse, material neglect, as well as other human rights violations in their often-unequal marital relationships.

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<sup>6</sup> Complications of pregnancy and childbirth are the main causes of death among adolescent girls ages 15-19 years old in developing countries. Among the conditions associated with early childbirth is obstetric fistula, an injury which leaves girls in constant pain, vulnerable to infection (Nour, 2009; Erulkar, 2013).

## **1.5 Purpose of the Study**

As discussed above, adolescent girls in poor rural communities tend to be the most vulnerable to child marriage (Jones et al., 2020; Tafere et al., 2020). This is because they are not only socialised into passive roles, but they further occupy low social statuses in their families and communities (Hampshire et al., 2020; Onyango et al., 2019; Ghavami & Mistry, 2019). Yet how they understand their vulnerability to child marriage remains under-studied. Specifically, how they describe their vulnerability and how they might address the threat of child marriage is largely silent in the literature. Thus, the study reported in this dissertation examined how adolescent girls understood and communicated about their vulnerability to child marriage practices in their resource-poor rural communities in Nyanga, Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the study sought to explore these girls' agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage practices. Using IDI and FGD to unearth these narratives, the study relied on the participant's voices to formulate an understanding of girls' vulnerability to, and their agency in addressing child marriage. The participants who participated in this study were not married during the time of the study and had no direct experience of child marriage.

### **1.5.1 Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following two critical research questions:

- *How do adolescent girls living in a resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe understand and communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage practices?*
- *How do these adolescent girls negotiate their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage?*

## **1.6 Overview of the Theoretical Framework**

Analysis in this study was informed by feminist theories and the social norms theory. The research located within the feminist theories is particularly interested in, and attuned to, issues of gender inequality that subordinates and disadvantages girls. In other words, feminism is a framework that advocates for equality among genders (Gray & Boddy, 2010). Feminist theories challenge the privileges and authoritative accounts of the world written from the perspective of socially privileged men who maintain unjust gender relations and promote powerful constructions of masculinity and male identities (Flood and Pease, 2005). It operates as a

framework that challenges the existing heteropatriarchal constructions on girls' and women's lives (Gqola, 2015). The core value of feminist theories is to analyse the construction of women and girls' identities which entails the enforcement of passive forms of femininity (Becker, 1999). Traditionally, girls are socialised into roles that reinforce their caregiving capabilities in the private sphere of the home, with feminine traits emphasising the value of passivity, obedience, vulnerability, supportiveness, weakness, and emotionality (AI Naimi, 2021). On the other hand, boys are encouraged to engage in behaviours that assert masculinity, autonomy, assertiveness, and authoritativeness (Policasto, 2016). Thus, feminism troubles the idea of girls being inherently inferior in their families and communities (Rimke, 2018; Muntian & Shpak, 2019). Feminist theories helped to locate girls' vulnerability to child marriage within a system of heteropatriarchy that reduces girls into subordinate positions.

The research framed within the social norm perspective is interested in how sociocultural factors operate to influence and shape beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, and practices (Keizer & Schultz, 2018; Kim & Seock, 2019; Kornilaki & Font, 2019). Cislighi et al., (2020) argue that social norms are the collective unwritten laws and rules that guide acceptable behaviours in any given society. Consequently, social norms govern and shape the lives of people within communities. The social norms perspective is centred around beliefs about social expectations which are sustained by what is socially approved or condemned. Social norms have traditionally guided how communities and the individuals living within those communities should behave (Watson, 2014). Therefore, the perspective of the social norms was used in this study to understand how socially sanctioned beliefs and attitudes perpetuate adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage. Within this framing, child marriage is understood as a product of dominant social norms that are embedded in cultural and religious practices and are accepted as the standard of behaviour.

In this study, both feminist theories and the perspective of the social norms were used to examine how adolescent girls understood and communicated about their vulnerability to child marriage in their resource-poor rural community. Further, both theories analysed how these girls negotiated their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage. The theoretical framework which informed analysis in the study is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

## 1.7 Overview of the Methodology

This research addressed two critical questions, as stated above. To address these questions, I located the study within the critical paradigm (which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four). Research within the critical paradigm is predominantly interested in issues of power and the promotion of wellbeing among those who are vulnerable, oppressed, or exploited (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005). It analyses the impact of social, cultural, political, and historical factors that influence vulnerable and marginalised groups (Chaplin et al., 2019; Sujakhu et al., 2019). Moreover, research that is positioned within the critical paradigm analyses how socioeconomic and cultural factors have an impact on the lives of adolescent girls (Choudhry et al., 2019; Kumala Dewi & Dartanto, 2019). Informed by the critical paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative research design that acknowledged adolescent girls as critical actors and hubs of knowledge in their own lives (Oakley, 1994), and as such, this research privileged the participants' voices in the analysis of their vulnerability to child marriage. The study used IDI and FGD to generate data with 20 adolescent girls who lived in Nyanga, a resource-poor rural community located in the Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe. To address the first research question: *How do adolescent girls living in a resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe understand and communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage practices?* my data sources included transcripts from both the IDI and the FGD. To address the second research question: *How do these adolescent girls negotiate their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage?* my dataset involved transcripts from the FGD. Data generated using these approaches were analysed using thematic analysis. A detailed overview of the research design and methodology is outlined in Chapter Four.

## 1.8 Overview of the Ethical Considerations in the Study

Considering the sensitive nature of the topic in this study (i.e., vulnerability to child marriage) and the participants involved (i.e., adolescent girls), ethical issues emerged that had to be mitigated. First, before the commencement of the study, written permission to conduct the research was sought and obtained from relevant institutions including the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) (Protocol number: HSSREC/00000916/2019), the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development of the Manicaland Province, and

Ministry of Education in the Nyanga Rural District in Zimbabwe. The participants in the study were minors, which meant that full written consent for their participation was requested and obtained from their caregivers. Following this, the participants themselves gave written assent for their participation in the study. Only those participants whose caregivers had fully consented, and who assented to participate were recruited into the study. Permission to record the IDI and FGD was obtained from the participants. In Chapter Four, I provide a detailed discussion of all the ethical issues that emerged in the study and how they were addressed.

## **1.10 Synthesis and Overview of the Dissertation**

The study reported in this dissertation examined how a group of adolescent girls understood, experienced, and communicated about their vulnerability to child marriage in one resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe. The study also examined how these girls negotiated their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage. This dissertation is organised around seven chapters. In this chapter, I introduced the study, outlined its rationale and its purpose. The chapter also identified the research questions used to generate data, as well as the overview of the theoretical framework and the methodology (including ethical considerations). The remainder of the dissertation is structured as follows.

Chapter Two, a literature review, provides a broad analysis of scholarship on the vulnerability of adolescent girls to child marriage in poor rural contexts. The chapter also reviews responses that have been established to address child marriage practices against adolescent girls, as well as the literature on intervention for addressing girls' vulnerability to child marriage. The chapter concludes with a discussion of key arguments in the literature and moves to develop a conceptual framework that guided analysis in the study.

Chapter Three discusses the theoretical framework that informed analysis in the study. The chapter opens with a discussion of the feminist theories, which is followed by a discussion of the social norms theory. The chapter closes with a set of propositions that guided data analysis and a synthesis of the chapter.

Chapter Four describes the research design and the methodology employed in the study, as well as the research approaches used to generate data. The chapter provides a detailed discussion of

qualitative research, which is followed by a discussion of the context, the participants, data generation, and the data analysis strategies employed. Finally, the chapter addresses questions regarding trustworthiness and ethical considerations in the study.

In Chapter Five, I present findings that addressed the first research question: *How do adolescent girls living in a resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe understand and communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage practices?* In this chapter, I present findings on the participants' understandings of their vulnerability to child marriage in their rural community. In Chapter Six, I present findings that addressed the second research question: *How do these adolescent girls negotiate their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage?* The chapter presents findings on whether or not the participants were able to negotiate their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage.

In Chapter Seven, I conclude the dissertation by offering a summary of the findings. I further reflect on the contributions that the study makes. Further, I reflect on the methodological contribution of the study and conclude with a discussion on the implications of the findings.

The next chapter is a literature review related to the topic under study.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **ADOLESCENT GIRLS' VULNERABILITY TO CHILD MARRIAGE IN RESOURCE-POOR AFRICAN RURAL CONTEXTS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

Child marriage represents one of the most grievous acts of child abuse, which infringes on children's right to education, security, safety, health, and wellbeing (UNICEF, 2020). While there exist global and regional commitments to protect girls against this practice, child marriages still occur in several societies, including those in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) where it continues to be a public concern (Wodon et al., 2016; Suarez, 2018). Studies report that in predominantly resource-poor and marginalised rural communities, adolescent girls are vulnerable to child marriage (Nayan, 2015). For example, research reports that marrying adolescent girls is more likely to occur in resource-poor rural areas when compared to the more affluent urban/suburban communities (Moletsane & Ntombela, 2010; Chinyoka, 2017). Girls affected by child marriage are some of the most marginalised in the world (Raj, 2010), and are among those who should be protected and empowered against early marriage. Often, children who are vulnerable to these marriages are not psychologically and physically mature enough to enter into such a union (Steinhaus et.al, 2019). The practice is largely equated with forced or coerced marriage, with young girls experiencing early sexual debut which is linked to domestic and sexual violence (Walker, 2012).

Child marriage is also regarded as a form of sexual exploitation of young girls in several resource-poor rural communities in the global south (Rembe et al., 2011). Moreover, it acts as a socioeconomic development barrier for those who are vulnerable. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, child marriage remains a reality for some adolescent girls in resource-poor communities (Chowdhury & Morium, 2018). As a response, the elimination of child marriage has been included as part of the targets in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. For example, SDG number 5.3 aims to eliminate all harmful practices such as child marriage, forced marriage, and genital mutilation against women and girls (United Nations, 2015).

The previous chapter introduced the study by outlining its background, rationale, and research questions. In this chapter, I outline broader understandings of the vulnerability of adolescent girls to child marriage in resource-poor rural communities in Africa. Specifically, I outline how gender norms and inequality, heteropatriarchy, cultural and religious beliefs, lack of access to education, and existing legal frameworks contribute to the proliferation of child marriage. Furthermore, the chapter explores the literature on the impact of child marriage on girls' education, mental and physical health and wellbeing, economic and financial wellbeing, as well as their freedom, and human rights. The chapter also discusses some pertinent responses that have been tabled to address child marriage across the globe, and in Zimbabwe where this study was conducted. Moreover, the chapter discusses some of the critical interventions in place to curb child marriage. The chapter closes with a conceptual framework for understanding child marriage in resource-poor rural communities.

## **2.2. The Vulnerability of Adolescent Girls to Child Marriage in Africa**

Globally, the rate of child marriage is devastating and has several implications for girls (Nour, 2009; Adesina et al., 2020). For example, child marriage results in adolescent girls dropping out of school to become young brides who will take care of their family-in-law (Wodon, 2017). The practice remains prevalent across the globe. UNICEF (2018) reports a global rate of 650 million children who are married before they reach the age of 18 years. This number includes those adult women who married in their childhood (UNICEF, 2018). Across the resource-poor areas of the global north, approximately 30 percent of girls are married immediately after their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, while at least 10 percent are married before the age of 15 years (UNICEF, 2015). In comparison to their global south counterparts, 52 percent of girls marry immediately after their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, while around 20 percent marry before this age (UNICEF, 2015). Indeed, a growing population, combined with a slow decline in the practice of child marriage in the global south puts millions of girls at risk for early marriage (UNFPA, 2013).

Remarkably, across the globe child marriage is on a decline (UNICEF, 2018). Yet, in some parts of Africa, and especially in the Sub-Saharan region, the total number of girls that are at

risk of, or that are affected by, child marriage remains significantly high (Wang, 2016)<sup>7</sup>. This signifies that girls' rights in the continent remain under-recognised and/or ignored (Gemignani & Wodon, 2015; Steinhaus et.al, 2019). It further suggests that girls' livelihoods are placed on the margins of society. The slow progress in ending child marriage in Africa is concerning and requires immediate interventions and programmes to end it completely (Muchacha & Matsika, 2018). In SSA, 35 percent of young women report that they were married as children or before they reached the age of 18 years (Schaffnit et al., 2019), whereas, in West and Central Africa 42 percent of young women report the same (Versluys, 2020). In East Africa, child marriage has affected at least 37 percent of adolescent girls (Manyane, 2018). Malawi has the highest rate of child marriage of any African country, with over 50 percent of children (both boys and girls) married early (Richardson, 2018). Child marriages are also intensely entrenched in Malawi's tradition and the country's patriarchal culture. An estimated 46 percent of girls in Malawi are married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (Richardson, 2018). Likewise, in Uganda, over 46 percent of girls are already registered as married before the age of 18 years, while a further 15 percent of girls registered their marriages before the age of 15 years (UNICEF, 2011). According to a World Vision (2015) report, Zambia has at least 42% of women aged 20-24 who were married before the age of 18 years. Even though these rates are still significantly high when compared to global trends, a Borgen Project report (2020) notes that there has been a significant reduction in the rate of child marriage; a decline from 42 percent to 31 percent across the African continent. Researchers agree that it is difficult to get accurate continentwide data on child marriage in Africa because most marriages are not officially registered, with some parents resorting to falsifying their daughters' age to get them married early (IPPF, 2006; Udgiri, 2017). Nonetheless, as the World Health Organisation (2018) reports, much work still needs to be done to curb and stop the practice of marrying adolescent girls on the continent. If no pragmatic and sustainable interventions are taken, and if current trends continue, Africa will become the continent with the highest number of global child marriages by 2050 (Centre for Human Rights, 2018).

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<sup>7</sup> A female senior chief in Dedza District, Malawi was recently reported to have ended 330 customary child marriages and encouraging child brides to return to school (Wang, 2016). This was in just one village in the Dedza District of Malawi.

Vulnerability to child marriage, particularly in the African continent, has been framed within the context of rurality, poverty, gender inequality, cultural practices, religious beliefs, and the heteropatriarchal system of dominance that controls and places constraints on adolescent girls (Makama, 2013). Moreover, notions of respect (i.e., that children, and girls, in particular, must respect adults without question) render girls vulnerable to early marriage (Salim, 2020). Indeed, it is the poorest and the least educated of adolescent girls, and particularly those who live in resource-poor rural communities, who are the most vulnerable to child marriage (Verawati, 2019).

### **2.3. Risk Factors Associated with Child Marriage in Africa**

There are no straightforward answers about what facilitates or encourages child marriage practices in Africa. Some studies suggest that it is fueled by unequal gender norms and inequalities that privilege men/boys over women/girls, heteropatriarchal attitudes, and the misconception that marriage offers protection for adolescent girls (Ali et al., 2011; HalperinKadderi & Freeman, 2016; Tayalyan, 2020). Other scholars suggest factors such as a lack of access to educational opportunities for adolescent girls, the stigma of pregnancy outside of marriage, increased poverty (Nour, 2009), and the absence of economic opportunities (Lowe et al., 2020; Mlambo et al., 2019). In this section, I illuminate understandings about the socioeconomic factors that facilitate the permissibility of child marriage in Africa.

#### **2.3.1. Prevailing Social Norms and Gender Inequality**

Child marriage is a symptom and manifestation of the profound gender inequalities that exist within African societies; inequalities that stem from the social constructions of gender (Maholtra & Elnakib, 2021; Sarfo et al., 2020). This is reflected in the overwhelmingly disproportionate prevalence of child marriage among girls compared to boys; a trend that reinforces and reflects persistent girls' low social statuses (Center for Human Rights, 2018; Koski & Clark, 2021). Certainly, gender inequality is a result of power relations that structure how societies are organized and how sociocultural ideologies are shaped (George, 2020). Gender inequality also manifests through socialization (Mouli et al., 2018), which is centred on the construction of unequal social statuses for boys and girls (Cohen, 2018). Restrictive social norms are ideas centred on the gendered socialisation of boys and girls, which involves a different set of behaviours, attitudes, personalities, and characters that are expected and

encouraged from boys and girls because of their anatomical makeup (Kohli, 2017; Moletsane & Ntombela, 2010). What socialization does is teach girls to accept inferiority to boys and men (Yarrow et al., 2015). Girls are taught to learn early in their lives that a woman is a typical homemaker (Raj, 2010), thus should conform to childcare, nurturing, and management of domestic activities (Tefere et al., 2020). Consequently, gender inequality and socialisation push girls to conform to these gendered expectations (Balvin, 2017); becoming vulnerable to child marriage as it is socially acceptable.

The practice of child marriage reflects society's negative attitude towards girls. It also reveals how important decisions such as marriage, choice of partner, and girls' sexualities are controlled by others (Amoo, 2017). Feminist scholar and novelist, Chimamanda Adichie (2017), argues that gender roles are not ingrained in biology but are taught. Madut (2020) further adds that practices that involve inequitable gender roles have resulted in the neglect of the welfare of girls (Montazeri et al., 2016). Examples include being married early and being exposed to physical, emotional, sexual, and domestic abuse (Hattar-Pollara, 2019; Landis et al., 2018; Roupetz et al., 2020). As girls and boys receive different affirmations regarding agentic behaviour (Sathipasard et al., 2008), the expression of agency by girls is either restricted or disapproved within communities and families (Jones & Lunin, 2018). Instead, passivity and submissiveness are taught, expected, and reinforced among girls (Muhanguzi, 2011). In one study from Ghana, Sarfo et al., (2020) show that adult men preferred to marry adolescent girls because these girls were more submissive and easier to control. The belief that girls are easy to control is also associated with girls being expected to submit to male authority and power.

The notion of girls as passive, submissive, and controllable in society stems from restrictive social norms which are the unspoken attributes and behaviours that are considered acceptable for boys and girls within communities (Heise et al., 2019). These norms govern, define and control what is considered normal and acceptable (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). For example, there is an emphasis on the purity of girls (i.e., emphasis on their virginity), until marriage (Ramanaik et al., 2018; Estrada, 2021; Olson 2019). Thus, as a way to preserve their family's honour, girls are expected to marry early and avoid any form of sexual practice (Psaki et al., 2021; Stark, 2018; Raj et al., 2019). Girls who engage in sexual practices before marriage are sometimes considered promiscuous (Foster et al., 2010; Bacchus, 2017; Wolfinger & Perry, 2021). The

adverse is true for boys, who are encouraged to experiment with their sexuality even outside of marriage (Heise et al., 2019). Within this context, child marriage has historically been regarded as a socially permissive act, with girl's voices and agency ceded from the decision to marry; thus, reducing their ability to resist or address their vulnerability (Besa, 2019; Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007; Wodon, 2016).

A significant example of how girls are marginalised and reared towards becoming wives comes dramatically from a Zimbabwean feminist novelist Tsitsi Dangarembga's fictional book, *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Located in a resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe, the storyline in *Nervous Conditions* centres around one rural adolescent girl's life (named Tambu). Through a self-narrated detailing of her life, we see Tambu being denied the opportunity to attend school. Rather, her brother is granted this privilege. Indeed, in her upbringing in a heteropatriarchal family and neighbourhood, Tambu carries several domestic chores that are meant to prepare her for marriage. Of interest to the study presented in this dissertation, *Nervous Conditions* highlights how society centres the lives of girls and women around their marriageability. Speaking about her book, Dangarembga (1988, p. 183) notes that,

[she] has nothing against [marriage] in principle, but it is irritating that it always crops up in one form or another, stretching its tentacles back to bind [her] before [she] even began to think of it.

This highlights the attitudes that are centred on the beliefs that girls' lives and actions are governed by strict social scripts and the expectation of their complete adherence to these rules. This further highlights that throughout their childhood, girls are constantly reminded that they are raised towards the end goal of marriage.

Gender norms and inequality in this context are interwoven with heteropatriarchy. While heteropatriarchy does not directly cause child marriages, it does however influence the attitudes, beliefs, and systems that render girls powerless due to paternalistic ideologies about femininity (Sultana, 2011; Greene & Stiefvater, 2019). Heteropatriarchy is the manifestation, extension, and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in their families, communities, and social institutions (Margaret et al., 2018). It implies that men and boys hold power in all the important aspects and institutions of society (Wessinger, 2020) and that girls and women are deprived of access to such power (Greene et al., 2018). Moreso,

heteropatriarchy refers to a male-dominated social structure in which men (often heterosexual) as individuals and as a collective govern social relations (Sultana, 2020). Heteropatriarchy is a societal structure based on the oppression of women and those who identify outside the heterosexual binary. As a system, it derives its power from racist, sexist, and classist ideas that are reinforced through normative beliefs and values (Lane 2019). Heteropatriarchy emphasises that masculinity is organised through relations of hierarchy and subordination among men themselves (Eivergard et al., 2020; Yang, 2020). It also renders authority and power to men, which often results in the subjugation of women (Flood, 2021; Lane, 2019). Therefore, heteropatriarchy functions to discipline differences in the system of social relations within communities (Sebastian, 2018).

The performance of masculinity, which is rooted in heteropatriarchy, is sustained through policing gender conformity, maintaining male privileges such as sole decision making, social relations, and kinship networks (Nelson, 2021). Thus, the practice of child marriage is tied to the acceptability of culture and tradition that is deeply entrenched in heteropatriarchal values and reinforced through the practice of perilous masculinity (Ghosh, 2011). According to Edstrom et al., (2014), to undress heteropatriarchy, restrictive social norms, and gender inequality is to invite new perspectives and connect the men and masculinity debate more concretely with conversations and activism with feminism, sexual rights, and social justice at large. It is imperative for the inequalities that are gendered, and which thrive under heteropatriarchal values and dominance, to be challenged for the sake of survival, equality, and security; each of which is essential to all gender identities (Reardon & Hans, 2019).

### **2.3.3. Tradition, Culture, and Religious Practices and Beliefs**

The preservation of certain cultural practices and religious beliefs has influenced the continual practice of child marriage for many generations (Rumble et al., 2018). Culture is described as people's store of knowledge, beliefs, morals, laws, arts, and customs (Steinhaus et al., 2019). It is a means of expression of a shared sense of identity, values, and traditions (Bicchieri, 2014). On the other hand, Geertz (1966) defines religion as a system of symbols that act to establish powerful, prevalent, and ongoing attitudes, and motivations in people by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence, clothing these conceptions with such an impression of factuality that these attitudes and motivations become realistic within communities. Following Geertz definition, religion and culture are institutions that govern society and

establish prevalent attitudes, practices, and beliefs that become a norm. Ultimately these norms feed into the dominant social actions that perpetuate gender inequality (Weber et al., 2019). According to Klingorova & Havlicek (2015), world religions maintain social dominance within societal structures which reflect heteropatriarchal values. Further, these scholars highlight the fact that within the realm of religion the voices of women are rarely heard due to heteropatriarchal dispositions in societies (Ruspini et al., 2018). This stems from what Holm (1994) argues regarding the belief that the role of God or a creator of religion is always taken to be male (or a man) and that the woman is primality valued as a mother, with her place in the household and less so at religious ceremonies or in public positions. This illuminates the influence religion has on the societal structure and how it limits the involvement of women in social issues.

Religion and culture are also linked with gendered expectations and gender roles since religious and cultural norms are centered on what is morally acceptable in households and communities (Tett, 2020; Glas et al., 2018). Within the African context, religion and culture are often intertwined as churches blend some elements of culture and religion. In these settings, gender segregation is emphasised. For example, men and women, as well as boys and girls do not sit together in several churches in Africa (Brown, 2020). There is also an emphasis on male supremacy and an insistence on girls' and women's obedience (Udoh et al., 2020). For example, the Nazareth Baptist Church (popularly known as the Shembe Church), found largely in KwaZulu-Natal, blends in elements of both culture and religion, which emphasises gender segregation, male supremacy, and women/girls' obedience (Sitompul et al., 2020). Moreover, early marriage for girls in this church is encouraged; with girls often marrying older men who have polygamous desires (Alhuzail, 2020; Mek et al., 2018).

According to Magwaza (2004), the Shembe church upholds Zulu culture and can therefore not be understood outside of Zulu indigenous beliefs, attitudes, and cultural practices. Likewise, as Shange (2013) affirms, in the Nazareth Baptist Church, women and girls have no opportunity to significant positions of power compared to men who are the sole authority in both the church and their households (Mkhize & Ramathan, 2021). Okoli & Akwuosa (2020) further report that women are not allowed to ascend to a high level of church authority or partake in high-decision-making boards. Indeed, even concerning marital aspirations, women and girls are not consulted in the decision-making process (Abu et al., 2019). Rather, it is only men who decide on sexual



relations, including the decision to have multiple wives (Shange, 2013). Several other religious institutions, such as the Zion church and others, intertwine elements of both culture and religion that promote strict adherence to gendered rules and practices. These examples illustrate how gender roles and decision-making are constructed through the merger of religion, culture, and socialisation that regulate human interaction, behaviours, and attitudes; ideals that are prominent in perpetuating gender inequality (Furness & Gilligan, 2010; Le Roux et al., 2016).

It is through religion and culture that certain beliefs and customs define particular values (Mukaruru et al., 2019). Child marriage is often driven by religious and cultural beliefs, as these aspects govern societal practices (Hajihasani & Sim, 2019; Stark, 2018). For example, the fear held towards pre-marital sex and pregnancy outside of marriage pushes parents to consider marriage as a viable option for their young daughters to avert shame (Le Roux & Palm, 2018; Lowe et al., 2020; Mwambene, 2018; Msuya, 2020). In this regard, as noted above, sex and pregnancy before marriage are considered religious taboos and culturally unacceptable. Thus, child marriages have become accepted as a means to protect girls and their family's honour (Gwature, 2018; Nour, 2006). Often the family honour depends on a girl's ability to navigate adolescence without compromising the family's reputation through engaging in premarital sexual practices (Margaret et al., 2018). Thus, the acceptability of early marriage is seen as a way to minimise the risk of dishonour and improper sexual conduct (Singh & Vennam, 2016). One notable example comes from Zimbabwe's Masvingo province where culturally and morally (from a religious perspective) it is considered abominable for a pregnant unmarried girl to stay in her father's homestead (Tatira, 2016). According to Gumbo (2020), these attitudes are rooted in ideas about procreation outside marriage as an unacceptable and shameful act. Thus, the justification of child marriage is for enhancing integrity, the need to protect young girls from pre-marital sex, pregnancy, and sex work (Chenge & Maunganidze, 2017; Kohno et al., 2020). These examples draw attention to how religion and culture are mutually inclusive and render girls vulnerable to child marriage practices (Mudzimu, 2021).

#### **2.3.4. Poverty**

Available literature report that poverty plays a significant role in society's support for child marriage (Bhanji & Punjani, 2014). For example, child marriage is prevalent among the poorest and economically marginalised populations that often exist in isolated rural areas (Amoo, 2017; de Groot et al., 2018). Where poverty is acute, girls are regarded as an economic burden for

their families (Talukder et al., 2020; Salam & Aktar, 2020; Barman, 2019). Therefore, families decide to marry their daughters as a means of removing this so-called financial burden (Dewi & Dartanto, 2019; Nasrin & Rahman, 2012). Within this context, marrying girls early is believed to reduce the number of household members to feed, clothe, and educate, which inevitably lessens a household's economic burden (Lee-Rife & Malhotra, 2012; Nawal & Nour, 2009; Warria, 2019). In other instances, as Paul (2019) notes, where lobola<sup>8</sup> is paid to the bride's family, the payment is regarded as a financial incentive or a means to financial security. Hotchkiss et al., (2016) report that marriage decisions can be influenced by economic incentives in the form of bride price or lobola. For example, in the Tabora region of Tanzania, families use child marriages as a means to gain financial ties with wealthier people (Osakinle et al., 2015). While poverty creates a powerful, yet irrational, incentive for families to encourage child marriage, the practice however perpetuates the cycle of gender inequality and the controlling of girls' lives (Greene & Stiefvater, 2019; Sunder, 2019).

Other scholars argue that child marriages have been sustained even in the face of progressive global goals to end it due to relentless poverty at the community and household levels (Niinsima et al., 2020; Stark, 2018; Verawati, 2019). Child marriage seems like an attractive option for parents who are willing to secure a better future for their child, and possibly girls themselves see it as an opportunity to escape poverty and ease the family's financial burden (Schaffnit et al., 2019; Pandey, 2017). The economic reasons that often underpin decisions to marry early are directly linked to the lack of economic opportunities for girls in rural areas (Azizi et al., 2021). Thus, even girls may be lured into marrying older men with the promise of being well catered for outside the poor livelihoods they experience in their families (Tsekpo et al., 2016; Madut, 2020).

### **2.3.5. Girls Access to Basic Education**

Limited access to educational opportunities for girls is both a factor for and an outcome of early marriage (Klugman et al., 2014). When girls are denied access to education it cedes their voice and their ability to exercise agency (Martin, 2017). Girls aspire to education and obtain developmental skills, as education can be used as a structural empowerment tool that assists them to exercise their agency (Maholtra & Elnakib, 2020). However, in the most remote of

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<sup>8</sup> Lobola is the provision of gifts to the parents of a bride usually in the form of cash or livestock (Ansell, 2001).

rural communities, girls often cannot access educational opportunities in the face of socioeconomic hindrances such as poverty, rural residence, gender inequalities, and social discrimination (Arafat et al., 2021). Dangarembga's book, *Nervous Conditions*, highlights a rural setting where girls are at a disadvantage and despite their potential and willingness to attain an education, they are often overlooked and limited by societal norms. *Nervous Conditions* highlight the problems that affect girls, and it is worth noting that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century adolescent girls still face discrimination and are afforded a low social status when compared to adolescent boys (Khanal, 2018; Tian et al., 2018). For example, the case of Malala Yousufzai, a 14-year-old girl who was shot for fighting for her rights to education in Pakistan where girls are not allowed to go to school (Garcia, 2019) represents the reality of many girls across Asia, the Middle East, and Africa (Noori, 2017). Malala's circumstances follow a reality of how girls are denied the right to education and are often silenced when they speak out against the injustice they experience. Across the globe, an estimated 63 million adolescents are not in school and girls represent more than half of out-of-school children (McCleary-Sills et al., 2015). It is important to note that there is a need to improve girls' access to education so to reduce child marriage (Male & Wodon, 2018).

Indeed, McCleary-Sills et al., (2015) note that across the global south contexts, girls have limited to zero access to education, which opens unwanted avenues for the prospect of becoming a child bride (see also, United Nations, 2013). For example, in the northeastern region of Gombe in Nigeria, approximately 60 percent of young mothers in the age group of 15-24 years have only a primary level education (Adesina et al., 2020). Several authors suggest that this is rooted in decisions by parents who are often reluctant to invest in the education of their daughters in preference for them to get married instead (Kartika et al., 2021; Spencer, 2015). Among the Maasai people of Kenya, giving a daughter in marriage is viewed as a better option in the decision of ensuring that there is one less person to educate (Girls Not Brides, 2017; Parsons, 2015). More so, in some Asian rural communities, parents see it as worthy of educating their sons instead of their daughters because of the financial returns acquired from investing in boys' education (Mahmuda, 2019; Min-Harris, 2009; Daraku et al., 2020; Rahaya

& Wahyuni, 2020). These attitudes not only imply gender inequalities between how boys and girls are treated<sup>9</sup>, but they also illustrate dangerous perceptions regarding unnecessary and wasted costs of investing in girls' education. Some parents believe that their daughters will eventually be married and would not need an education for marriage (Adesina et al., 2020).

Limited access to basic education is detrimental to girls' lives. Male and Wodon (2018) report a sustained relationship between girls' limited access to education and their limited economic development prospects. Girls thus lack financial independence and access to the labour market (Kerr & Ghan, 2018; Worral, 2019). They also marry early, which in turn affects their agency; resulting in a reduction in decision-making abilities within their marital households (Kohno et al., 2020). McCleary et al., (2015) add that a lack of education affects girls' agency<sup>10</sup>, thus limiting their ability to overcome social barriers. One barrier they fail to overcome is that of reaching and/or completing secondary education (Nguyen & Wodon, 2015) and having free and full consent to marry at the full age of 18 years.

Tambu, the fictional character from *Nervous Conditions*, and Malala display how discrimination and inequality are often manifested through education. For example, boys are encouraged to go to school, but girls do not get the same right (Paul, 2019). Notably, lack of access to basic education has devastating implications for girls. These include girls limited critical thinking and other developmental skills that enable them to negotiate and exercise their agency (Kohno et al., 2020). Consequently, girls become relegated in decision-making spheres (Daraku et al., 2020), where oftentimes these decisions made on their behalf are detrimental to their lives (Powell et al., 2020; Psaki et al., 2021). Accordingly, the importance of education cannot be ignored. Promoting education for girls can prevent child marriage, while in return promoting secondary school completion (McCleary et al., 2015). Education is cited as an empowering tool that ushers economic and social independence that breaks inherited poverty among girls (Dyson, 2019; Santelli et al., 2019). Therefore, education can be used as a structured tool to deal with and address girls' vulnerability to child marriage (Maholtra & Elnakib, 2021).

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<sup>9</sup> Gender discrimination appeared to be the reason for school dropout along with poverty or household responsibilities. It was apparent that most grandparents were against girls' education but remained supportive of boys' education (Yasin & Aslam, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Agency is what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of goals or values he or she regards as important (McCleary et al., 2015).

### **2.3.6. Legal Frameworks**

International agencies, scholars, and advocacy groups have called on countries to establish legal frameworks that prohibit child marriages (Arthur et al., 2017; Walker, 2012). According to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 2014), the minimum legal age of marriage without parental consent is set at 18 years. The challenge for the international community and national governments is to provide consistent universal legal, technical, and concrete financial resources to address the harmful practice of child marriage (Calimoutou et al., 2016). This stems from the inconsistencies within some legal frameworks, which have loopholes that allow for the proliferation of child marriages. The ineffectiveness of legal frameworks has perpetuated the practice of adolescent girls being married early, due to the lack of proper and coherent laws that prohibit the practice of child marriage (Kabir et al., 2019; Bessa, 2019).

Tackling child marriage requires structural changes including framing appropriate and consistent laws and mechanisms to monitor and enforce them. The lack of adequate enforcement on child marriage in most African countries, particularly in rural areas, is a significant impediment to the prohibition of child marriage (Centre for Human Rights, 2018). This is seen in the different types of marriages that are regulated under separate laws that are commonly unconnected. For example, in Zimbabwe, the 2013 Constitution sub-section 78 (1) and (2) set the minimum age for marriage at 18 years and subsequently prohibits forced marriages. However, the Customary Marriage Act, which regulates customary marriages, does not stipulate the prescribed age of marriage (Mwambene, 2018). These differences lead to confusion, defective registration, and ultimately to non-compliance with registration procedures (Mwambene, 2018). Legal uncertainty around child marriage is also caused by the ambiguity of different and conflicting laws within the same statutory legal system. For example, in Malawi, while the new Marriage, Divorce, and Family Relations Act establishes 18 years as the minimum age for marriage, the Malawian Constitution still allows children aged between 15 to 18 years to marry with the consent of their parents; giving rise to some degree of legal uncertainty (Wang, 2016). With such inconsistencies and discrepancies, combating child marriages might be slow and fail to meet the SDG goals. The implications of legal uncertainties fall on adolescent girls who are vulnerable and lack protection. This results in the

continuous rise of child marriages and further perpetuation of gender inequality, violation of girls' freedom, and their right to education and health.

Further, as discussed earlier, child marriage within rural contexts is centred on institutions of family, religion, and is tradition-bound (Ghosh, 2011). Often, child marriages take the form of traditional or customary marriages, which occur under customary or religious laws (Udgiri, 2017). These go unregistered and any disputes that arise tend to be resolved under the auspices of customary or religious authorities (Huseynli, 2019; Warria, 2019). Even those that enforce laws cannot interject traditional and cultural beliefs (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2018). This presents a challenge to those with a mandate to enforce laws as they do not have the capacity or jurisdictional authority to intervene within traditional boundaries that are governed by traditional leadership (Sloan, 2000). Therefore, any successful strategy of child marriage prevention should utilize social capital and engage in respectful and inclusive dialogue with local communities. Moreover, even in places where the law does not allow early marriage, it is often hard to legislate this practice because of the remoteness of rural areas, the supremacy of traditional leadership, and that laws do not always translate to practice (Mabunda, 2017).

Baxter (2019) acknowledges that states should protect girls from abuse and exploitation. This is done through legislation and structures that enable monitoring, evaluating, and facilitating compliance to limit minors from making any decisions that may have negative long-term consequences. However, there is little monitoring and facilitating compliance concerning child marriages (Muchacha & Matsika, 2018; Rumble et al., 2018). Strode et al., (2010) notes that children who are under the age of 18 years have limited capacity to make informed and independent decisions without an adult. However, Strode et al., (2010) further allude to the fact that children are being recognised as having an evolving capacity. This means that they can give consent to some aspects such as medical treatments, HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) testing, and sexual intercourse, but they cannot consent to other aspects such as operations and health research. While there is a need to argue for legal frameworks to protect the rights of adolescents as well as to protect their bodily integrity, the laws have serious limitations (Ghosh, 2011). This creates loopholes in the process of trying to protect the rights of minors. For example, South Africa has legal frameworks that give adolescents the right to access a range of sexual and reproductive health services (SRHS) such as contraceptives, and unwanted pregnancy termination (Johnson et al., 2020; Strode et al., 2018; Fynn et al., 2020).

They also have a right to engage in healthy sexual behaviour (Bhamjee et al., 2016). This raises a few questions. For example, are minors allowed to marry each other in the name of healthy sexual engagements? At what point does child marriage become a human right violation if minors fully consent to the marriage? Arguably, Baxter (2019) points out that contracts made by minors are typically null and void. In the case of child marriage, is the union of minors null and void if they gave informed consent, or does the stance of children having limited capacity to act independently still stand? The incoherence within the legal spectrum creates confusion (Walker, 2012) that often leaves girls vulnerable.

## **2.4. The Impact of Child Marriage on Adolescent Girls**

Available literature points to several ways in which child marriage affects adolescent girls. In the following sub-sections, I discuss the multiple ways that child marriage impedes and challenges girls' livelihoods.

### **2.4.1. Adolescent Girls' Educational Attainment and Social Mobility**

Education is a key area where child brides lose out when they are married too early (Berliana et al., 2021). Child marriage impedes acquiring education as girls are forced to drop out of school (Ganira et al., 2015). It is also true that the lower a girls' educational attainment, the higher her chances are of being married young (World Bank, 2020). Adolescent girls who are married early have lower educational attainment as some do not enroll in school, while others drop out (Chari et al., 2017; UNFPA, 2012). Child brides have restricted social mobility, as they become isolated and have limited opportunities for independent living (Abera et al., 2021).

Social mobility is the movement of people/individuals from one socioeconomic position to the other (Webb et al., 2017). According to Brown (2013), the education system assumes a role in training to meet the demands of the future workforce. However, child marriage presents a barrier for adolescent girls as they struggle to get into the labour force (Dean et al., 2019; Trinh & Zhang, 2021; Banerjee, 2019) because they have low/limited qualifications, which in turn limit their social mobility. Girls who marry early undertake domestic responsibilities and go through early childbirth that infringes their educational attainment (Rahayu & Wahyuni, 2020; Adedokun et al., 2016; Islam et al., 2016). Thus, lack of education deprives girls of

opportunities to acquire skills that enable them to be socially productive and financially independent (Brown, 2012; Efevbera et al., 2019), which further deprives societies of girls' intellectual and financial/livelihood contributions (Daraku et al., 2020). Missing out on educational opportunities has long-term financial and developmental implications on child brides, within the society, and on the offspring of these brides. Efevbera et al., (2019) highlight that the children of young and uneducated mothers are less likely to attain higher levels of education; perpetuating cycles of illiteracy and limited livelihood opportunities.

The curtailment of girls' education directly undermines national and international efforts to achieve targets on education and gender equality in education policies (UNICEF, 2019). Furthermore, the continual lack of access to formal education is a prime example of a social factor that both results from and renders girls more vulnerable to child marriage (Centre for Human Rights, 2018; Hodgkin, 2016; Sekine & Hodgkin, 2017). Undeniably, taking girls out of school undermines girls' right to autonomy, and it deprives them of their fundamental right to education and freedom (Lansdown, 2011; Nguyen & Wodon, 2014a) and perpetuates the endless cycle of poverty. According to Save the Children (2017), approximately 15 million girls will never have the opportunity to learn to read and write in primary school, while 9 million girls will never attend school across sub-Saharan Africa. These are the dreadful consequences that adolescent girls' face, due to the practice of child marriage. Thus, to fully address the global education crisis and reap vast social and economic rewards, equal and quality education must be made available to all, and child marriages must be stopped.

#### **2.4.2. Adolescent Girls' Health and Wellbeing**

##### **a. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**

The practice of child marriage increases the risk of early sexual debut, unwanted pregnancy, and early childbearing (Abera et al., 2020) as girls face the pressure to become pregnant shortly after their marriage (Koski, 2016). Adolescent girls face a high fertility burden early in their reproductive years from the pressure to prove their fertility (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Paul, 2019; Sahbani et al, 2016). For example, in Yemen, a 12-year-old girl died of internal bleeding after her wedding and it was reported that she suffered from sexual exhaustion, cervix tears, and severe bleeding (Wheeler, 2010). This highlights how adolescents' wellbeing is affected,



as they are faced with coerced sexual encounters such as intimate partner violence (IPV) and vulnerability to experiencing early sexual debut (Menon et al., 2018).

Furthermore, adolescent girls who marry early are at a high risk of experiencing childbirth complications such as fistula development caused by obstructed labour and excessive bleeding (Sinha, 2017). Obstructed labour is a result of a girl's pelvis being too small to deliver a foetus because their reproductive system and bodies are not fully developed to carry the foetus to term (Nour, 2006; Wells, 2020; Sharma et al., 2016). Thus, early pregnancy puts girls at a higher risk of maternal morbidity and increased child mortality (Mehra et al., 2018; Kamal et al., 2015). According to a Human Rights Watch report, *The Right of Everyone to Sexual and Reproductive Health* (2021), forcing any girl into marriage exposes them to serious reproductive health risks, including premature death. For example, in Zimbabwe, a 14-year-old child bride who had been forced out of school, died while giving birth at a local church shrine (H-Metro, 2021). This reflects the negative impact on the lack of access to sexual reproductive health rights education and services, such as access to contraceptives and maternal care (Yaya et al., 2019). Further, it becomes imperative to note that child marriages have gruesome outcomes on girls. It affects their health and wellbeing, resulting in poorer health and developmental outcomes (Addaney & Azubike, 2017; Williamson et al., 2013) and ultimately in their death (de Groot et al., 2019).

It is also true that girls lack sexual autonomy in their marital partnerships (Tenkorang, 2019; Silverman et al., 2020). For example, girls struggle to negotiate safer sex as well as decisions on when and how many children to have (Dodoo et al., 2019; Memiah et al., 2019; Karp et al., 2019). In three separate studies conducted in the Tshikhudini area of the Limpopo province, South Africa, researchers found that women and girls were not allowed to access contraceptives once they were married (Mudau & Obadire, 2017; Aderinto, 2017; Arab & Sagbakken, 2019). As a consequence of this denial of their right to access healthcare, girls undergo unwanted and frequent pregnancies and childbirth (Efevbera et al., 2017).

## **b. Mental Health**

Adolescent girls that are married early are at risk of depression and suicidality (Fakhari et al., 2020; John et al., 2019; Sezgin & Punamaki, 2020). The transformation of their lives, stolen childhood, and early entry to wifehood have psychological effects that are debilitating for girls

(Grose et al., 2019; John et al., 2019; Mazzuca et al., 2019). For example, married girls are subjected to social isolation, forced sexual relations, physical and domestic violence, as well as domestic and maternal duties that they are not mentally prepared for (McGavock, 2021; Tenkorang, 2019). Due to the life-changing process of early marriage, girls often suffer from trauma and hopelessness (Margaret et al, 2018). They also suffer psychological and emotional distress, which often results in suicide (John et al., 2019; McGavock, 2021; Varia, 2016).

Indeed, the lack of social support and the absence of empathy plays a role in fueling depression among adolescents who are married early (Calandri et al., 2019; Hamilton et al., 2014). The impact can be subtle and insidious, but the damage is hard to assess (Kumar et al., 2018). Research done in SSA, South Asia, and the Middle East reveals that adolescents are at risk of adverse mental health and psychological problems, with scholars suggesting a higher risk for depression and suicidality among girls married as children when compared to those who are not married (John et al., 2019; Osok et al., 2018). For example, according to a New York Times report, in Afghanistan, girls who marry young have reportedly burnt themselves to death (Marshal, 2016). Even though some survive, this act is a means to escape the gruesome reality of early marriage (UNICEF, 2001; Rubin, 2010). Human Rights Watch (2018) reports that in Lebanon, a 16-year-old child bride attempted suicide by jumping off the roof of a building. Further, according to The Times of Israel (2018), a 14-year-old girl poisoned herself to escape her marriage to a 53-year-old man. This reflects the dire impact of child marriage on the mental health of adolescents.

### **c. Physical Health and Wellbeing**

Adolescent girls who are married are also vulnerable to and are often victims of domestic violence (John et al., 2020). They are powerless and lack access to vital resources to protect themselves, thus their physical health and wellbeing are affected (Shiva Kumar et al., 2017). Child marriages tend to create a multitude of conditions that make married adolescent girls vulnerable to violence (Stark et al., 2020). Domestic and intimate partner violence are found to increase girls' physical health problems and to deteriorate their somatic health (Bacchuset al., 2018). These form a possibility for physiological risk factors such as muscle pain and recurring headaches that are triggered by stress reactivity (Sezgin & Punamaki, 2019). Moreover, problems associated with sexual coercion, rape, and communication breakdown in marriages

result in poor physical health outcomes among young brides (Yount et al., 2017). Other scholars report that girls suffer from eclampsia, postpartum haemorrhage, and obstructed labour (Agere et al., 2018; Lawot et al., 2018; Oyeyemi et al., 2019). These have adverse consequences on the girl's physical wellbeing, which oftentimes result in death (Rumble et al., 2018).

#### **2.4.3. Impact on Girls' Economic/Financial Wellbeing**

Child marriage compromises the ability of adolescent girls to be economically independent (Raj, 2019). It impacts their economic development and growth opportunities and affects their ability to take part in developmental opportunities (Biswas et al., 2020) since it denies them an equal opportunity to engage in civil and economic chances (Arubayi & Arubayi, 2016; Yafi, 2018). A lack of physical and mental development puts girls at a disadvantage position in the economic sphere (Taiwo, 2019). This has a dire effect on girls' attempts to reduce poverty as they cannot participate in the labour force (Guimaraes et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2020).

It is imperative to note the relationship between child marriage, high fertility, and the impact on the economic and financial wellbeing of adolescent girls (Nash et al., 2019; Maholtra & Elkanib, 2021; Sagalova et al., 2021). Child brides who have multiple births and multiple children become financially insecure as they are not often able to provide for their children (Mitra et al., 2020). Inevitably, this affects the household living conditions since young brides cannot afford necessities such as food, education, and health care for their children (Rahayu & Wahyuni, 2020; Ingutia et al., 2020). Households then become vulnerable to poverty and economic shocks (Martin et al., 2020). This has an inter-generational impact as there is little investment in the children's health and education (Ingutia, 2020).

#### **2.4.4. Impact on Girls Freedom and Human Rights**

Girls who are married early become victims of human rights violations by being deprived of the rights to childhood and an adequate standard of living (Addaney & Azubike, 2017; Arthur et al., 2018). Indeed, child marriage ends childhood abruptly (Hogdikin, 2016). Girls who are married early have limited control over the decision-making of their reproductive rights and have restricted access to resources, social support, education, economic opportunities, and health care (George, 2020). The limitation in autonomy and access to resources impacts their

freedom and human rights. For example, adolescents might not have the freedom to decide how many children to have (Ellsberg, 2015). It is worth noting that often, adolescent girls have no say or choice in the partner they marry (Erulkar and Tamrat, 2014), while some fail to negotiate safe sex; thus, becoming powerless in exercising their sexual autonomy (Burns, 2002; Petroni et al., 2017). Undeniably, some child marriages come along with huge spousal age differences (Arab & Sagbakken, 2019; Dargahi, 2021). For example, in the memoir of Gabriella Gillespie, *A Father's Betrayal*, the author highlights how Muna, a 13-year-old girl, and her sisters were forced to marry by being sold off to older men who subsequently subjected them to physical and sexual abuse. Within this period, one of her sisters committed suicide to escape the difficult realities of being a child bride (Gillespie, 2014). This highlights the reality that girls succumb to as their rights are violated, their freedoms taken away, and as they get subjected to suffering. Another example comes from Kristof's (2017) work on child marriage. The author reports a case of a 11-year-old girl who was forced to marry a 20-year-old member of her church that had raped her before the arranged marriage. As a result of the rape, the victim gave birth at the age of 10 years, was forced to drop out of school, and had multiple pregnancies after the first incidence of rape. She also faced stigma and abandonment from her biological family. Kristof further reports that a judge approved of her marriage to end rape allegations. This supports the argument on how legal frameworks fail to protect vulnerable girls. When interviewed, the 11-year-old victim said the following:

They took the handcuffs from him (referring to the time her assaulter was arrested for rape) to handcuff me (by marrying her without her consent) (Kristof, 2017, p 4).

The extract above demonstrates with persuasive insight the extent of the violation of girls' rights to autonomy, safety, and protection. Baxter (2019) argues that allowing adults to marry minors violates the minors' right to bodily integrity while further depriving them of the protection that the law provides. As noted above, despite the existence of legal frameworks, there are incoherencies within the legal system that fails to protect children. It is imperative, therefore, to protect girls who are vulnerable so that they are not silenced. Rather, they should be given a voice to speak against any violation of their rights. This is done by giving adolescents a platform, such as through research studies, to voice out their opinions and enhance their decision-making capacity especially in the area of reproduction and sexuality (Ogu et al., 2016).

## **2.5. Addressing Child Marriage against Adolescent Girls**

Responses to child marriage should be viewed within the context of wider strategies based on action at international, national, and community levels (UNICEF, 2007). To eradicate the harmful practice of early marriage there is a need for meaningful investments in implementing government policies and programs (Yogi, 2020). Interventions at the global, national, and local levels have been directed at articulating and meeting the needs of adolescent girls living in various settings (Somefun & Odimegwu, 2018). For these interventions to be continually successful, political will is needed in the form of resources and accountability measures to ensure the effective implementation of laws and ameliorative programming (Velentza, 2020). Velentza (2020) argues that information campaigns on child marriage, the violation of children's rights, and gender-based violence need to occur repeatedly. Likewise, education, awareness, and counselling are also necessary to ensure that the safety and well-being of adolescent girls are upheld.

Civil society and international organisations such as the African Union (AU), UNICEF, World Health Organisation (WHO), and Plan International have doubled their efforts to make child marriage a human right priority (Bessa, 2018; Tisdall & Cuevas-Parra, 2020). Furthermore, International activists, researchers, and advocacy stakeholders have called for the establishment of frameworks that prohibit child marriage and for the elimination of loopholes that permit the persistence of such practices (Batra & Pesando, 2021). However, despite efforts to alleviate child marriage across Africa, girls are often overlooked and remain invisible in national and local policy legislation and program debates despite their vulnerability (Mbaku, 2020).

### **2.5.1. International Responses**

There is no global government that can enact laws against child marriage. However, for the enactment of international laws, governments have to domesticate treaties that they sign and ratify, which then create the rights to be justifiable in domestic courts (Mbaku, 2020). The global deliberations on child marriage have resulted in the emergence of various international instruments/conventions that are centred on the need to protect children's rights (Human Rights

Watch, 2016). International human rights conventions stress the need to take measures to address the problem of child marriage and the need to protect vulnerable girls (Horii, 2020; Fenton-Glynn, 2019; Chapman & Carbonetti, 2011; Machel et al., 2013).

Since 1948, the United Nations has pursued legal mechanisms and policies that alleviate child marriage (UNICEF, 2014). For example, Article 16 (3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1983) articulates the need for one to consent to the marriage (Addaney & Azubike, 2017). The 1990 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, and The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are among the most important instruments that condemn the practice of child marriage. These instruments both emphasise legislating a minimum age of marriage at 18 years (UN WOMEN, 2016; Scobie & Afia., 2020). There is consensus that the minimum age of marriage should be raised to 18 years and should be enforced locally (Arthur et al., 2018; Nour, 2006; Wodon, 2017). Therefore, laws, treaties, declarations, and acts have been passed to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable groups in society to address their interests and uphold their protection and involvement in decision-making about their livelihoods (Engdahl, 2019).

These conventions have managed to get various states to ratify these treaties and to vow to fight against child marriages while advancing the recognition of human rights (Ozler, 2018). For example, in many states; child marriage is considered an offense and a violation of children's rights (Gaffney-Rhys, 2019; Greene & Stiefvater, 2019). While the fight to eradicate child marriage is still ongoing the increased attention given to the practice is evidence of the progress that international responses are making. The eradication of child marriage is key to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) goals Three, Four, and Five by 2030 (Efevbera et al., 2019), and thus assisting in eliminating barriers to achieving social and physical development and gender equality (McCleary-Sills & Parsons, 2014), educational attainment, and economic independence (Anand & Singh, 2015).

### **2.5.2. Regional Responses**

Regionally, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) was passed as an instrument aimed at protecting children from any form of violence, exploitation, and abuse (Mbise, 2017). Article 21 of the Charter advocates for the protection of young girls

against harmful social and cultural practices. With regards to child marriage, Article 21(2) states the following:

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 18 years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory (UNICEF, 2020).

Moreover, Article 6 of the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People`s Rights (1981), and the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) warns that no marriage should occur unless there is free and full consent from both parties and given that the minimum age of those entering into a union is at least 18 years (Vega, 2018). The Protocol further upholds that every marriage should be recorded and registered (Yaya & Odusina, 2019). Further, Article 5 adds that women and girls who are at risk of being subject to harmful practices should be protected. Borrowing from these important instruments, the 2006 African Youth Charter in Article 20(1a) specifies the need to eliminate all traditional practices that undermine the physical integrity and dignity of girls and women (Mezmur, 2020). Furthermore, Article 25 stresses the need for the elimination of harmful social customs and practices that are gender and age discriminatory (Heise et al., 2019; McCauley & van den Broek, 2019). More so, the practices that harm the healthy life or dignity of the youth are to be eliminated (Raposa et al., 2019).

In 2014, the African Union (AU) launched a campaign to end child marriage in Africa by enhancing continental awareness of its harmful impacts. The Union also asked member states to take appropriate legal, social, and economic measures to address child marriage (Centre for Human Rights, 2018). In 2015, the Heads of State and Governments of the AU announced that they had formally adopted an African common position on the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa (the AU Common Position). The AU Common Position urges all member states to develop national strategies and action plans aimed at ending child marriage (Wodon et al., 2017). This is done through enacting and implementing laws that set the legal minimum age for marriage at 18 years or above, with no exceptions and applicable under all legal systems. There is a need to implement all continental policies and legal instruments relating to human rights, gender equality, maternal and child health, and harmful traditional practices, allowing for the empowerment and participation of girls and women. There is some progress made towards advancing girls' and women's rights and their political participation both at the

national and regional levels. For example, African nations have begun to report female participation in politics and governance, with Rwanda ranking highest in terms of political female representation in its national legislature (nearly 64 percent of the legislature are women) (Guariso et al., 2018; Nsanzimana et al., 2020). An additional 24 African countries now report having female participation in their law-making processes (Khan & Krishna, 2021). The inclusion of women in the legislature allows for the implementation of solutions to problems that affect girls and allow room for gender equality to be achieved.

With the increased prominence of child marriage on the international agenda, African countries such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe have taken legal reforms to end child marriage (AU, 2015; Svanemyr et al., 2015). The AU adopted a transformative program called ‘The Africa We Want’ (Agenda 2063) (Ntlama-Makhanya & Lubisi-Bizani, 2021, p.292), which is a "blueprint and a master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future". The aim is to deliver on its goal for inclusive and sustainable development to fight gender inequality, as well as to prevent and eliminate child marriage (African Union Commission, 2017; Addaney, 2018; DeGhetto et al., 2016).

### **2.5.3. Local (Zimbabwean) Responses**

Zimbabwe has made attempts to align itself with existing international and regional agreements to protect girls. For example, the Zimbabwean Constitution (20 of 2013) pronounces that the age of marriage is legally 18 years and above. The constitution defines marriage as the union by full consent between a male and female, who have reached the legal age of 18 years. Marrying anyone under the age of 18 years is a constitutional violation with a prison term enforced for those who disobey the law (Baxter, 2018). The constitution is inclusive of children`s rights, the right to education, and the right to protection against any harmful practices as stated in the Children`s Act Chapter 5:06.

The Zimbabwe National Council for the Welfare of Children (ZNCWC) is an umbrella body of the child rights sector. It coordinates children`s rights through the Children`s Act. The ZNCWC focuses on advocacy, quality assurance on child-oriented initiatives, child participation, and research that aims to protect children (Nyamangodo, 2020). In addition to the work done by ZNCWC, Childline Zimbabwe works in partnership with the government to



stop child abuse and provide a safe environment for all children (Childline Report, 2016). According to an All- Africa report (2021), in the Kariba District of Zimbabwe, local traditional leaders have put in place measures to limit cases of child marriage by imposing stiffer fines on people who fail to report and those that marry underage girls. The involvement of traditional leaders, who are the watch guards of rural communities, helps girls become less vulnerable as their rights and freedoms are protected by those that are the custodians of not only the law but also tradition. There are also advocacy efforts through organisations such as Plan International, Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE), UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), Girls Not Brides, and Save the Children Zimbabwe that support girls' rights and enables them to access education. According to a UNGEI report (2016), these institutions help in advocating for the equality of girls through policy development, and the need to deliver on the gender and education-related SDGs.

## **2.6. Interventions for Addressing Child Marriage against Adolescent Girls**

Child marriage affects agency (i.e., the capacity or state of acting or exerting power) (Horii, 2020; Abebe, 2019). Girls who marry early often have less decision-making ability in their households (Wodon et al., 2016). Thus, they have limited or no capabilities to resist the forms of abuse they encounter once they are married. Interventions, therefore, become crucial as they tackle problems faced by girls. To eradicate early marriage, it is necessary to promote girls' empowerment through education, institutional support, and community programs. More so, interventions should emphasize tailor-made goal-driven programs that should be intensified in areas where the practice is prominent (Dofe & Oduro, 2018).

### **2.6.1. Education-based Interventions**

Education has been identified as a powerful tool for deterring child marriage (Paul, 2019). Investing in education is considered the most significant factor delaying the age at which girls are married (Rasmussen et al., 2019; Male & Wodon, 2018). Interventions that are implemented to address child marriage focus on making young girls aware and agentic as they have the decision-making power regarding the choice of spouse and timing of marriage (Paul, 2019; Raj et al., 2019). Therefore, investing in education for girls is a significant factor in delaying the age at which girls are married.

Considering education as the best preventative measure, governments should support girls' education as means to promote economic growth and to prevent child marriages (Islam et al., 2016). For example, in Malawi, according to a Life Gate report (2019), local traditional leaders in the Karonga District have been trained to create stringent local by-laws around child marriage (Kachika, 2020; UNICEF, 2018). This involves a penalty fine for anyone forcing a child to marry before they have completed their education (Munthali & Kok, 2018; Maiden, 2021). These by-laws have not only been effective in deterring child marriage completely but the money from fines is donated to local schools, amplifying the positive impact of this intervention on girls' livelihoods (Ajoku, 2020; Life Gate Report, 2019). Moreover, in Malawi's Dedza district, a female Head Chief, Theresa Kachindamoto, requested 51 sub-chiefs to forbid the marriage of children under the age of 18 years (Chutel, 2016; Haworth, 2018). In 2016, she annulled 850 child marriages, suspended all village heads who refused to ban the practice and returned all former child brides to school (Muriaas et al., 2019). Girls that returned to school were able to complete secondary school and according to a World Bank (2018) report, completion of secondary school helps girls develop and gain economic independence and access to the labour force.

In Mozambique, a Gender Strategy for the Education Sector was adopted to create equal educational rights and opportunities for girls (Sawadogo-Lewis, 2018). The policy recognises the need to promote girls' secondary school attendance through the provision of scholarships and thematic campaigns that address barriers to girlhood education (Chibango & Silumba, 2018). Similarly, in the rural community of Mutoko in Zimbabwe, organizations such as Plan International, through the *Because I am a Girl* campaign, have had success in changing the community's negative attitudes towards the support of girls' education (Plan International, 2019). Moreover, the campaign has reported success in granting girls an opportunity to access quality primary and secondary education in a safe and supportive environment (Potvin, 2019). Indeed, education has been demonstrated to be an effective strategy in delaying the age at which girls and women get married. For example, a multi-nation study in South-West Asia, Bangladesh, and Nigeria report that girls' access to secondary education significantly delayed the time it took to get married (Delprato et al., 2015; Polyakova, 2018). In Zimbabwe, the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), an organisation dedicated to eradicating poverty in rural communities through the education of girls, has built hostels near schools to avoid girls walking long distances to reach their respective schools. The organisation also offers girls

financial assistance to further their education (Munosunama, 2018). Those girls who are part of this programme remain in school until they complete their secondary education. This not only empowers them but also reduces their chance of getting married early (Berliana et al., 2021; Santelli et al., 2019). Therefore, education-based interventions that are gender transformative are important in the fight to eradicate child marriage (Rumble et al., 2017).

### **2.6.2. Community-based Interventions**

Another set of interventions that report success in either halting or ending child marriage are those based at the community level. While not much is reported in the literature about community-based intervention in the context of addressing child marriage, these interventions are indeed important. For instance, community sensitisation and engagement programs that focus on the prevention of child marriages and target unmarried girls and their wider communities and families have shown success towards transforming dominant attitudes on child marriage (Malhotra et al., 2011). Moreover, programming that involves traditional and community leaders have been useful since several child marriages in rural communities are conducted under customary law and presided by a village head (Muriaas et al., 2019; Nyalapa & Conn, 2019). Such interventions have helped to tackle the problem effectively as it is dealt with at the grass-root level. The involvement of local leaders illustrates a dire commitment to investing in the lives of rural youth, improving their living conditions, and eradicating the practice of child marriage. For example, in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust uses mediation meetings with community leaders and relatives of complainants and defendants, as well as negotiation, discussion, and counselling, to settle the problem of child marriage, domestic violence, and family problems (Alam, 2020). The study author reports success in reducing child marriages and support for girls' education.

### **2.6.3. Psychosocial-based Responses**

When girls marry early, they are denied an appropriate childhood thus their psychological wellbeing suffers (WHO, 2012). Working towards reorienting a community's perceptions of the role and worth of girls and women could help prevent gender-based practices such as child marriage and the abuse of girls (Fordjour, 2020). This can be done by offering counselling services to those vulnerable and those affected (Hamad et al., 2021; Otondo, 2018). For example, a study from India, reports that mental health literacy is one of the tools that is used

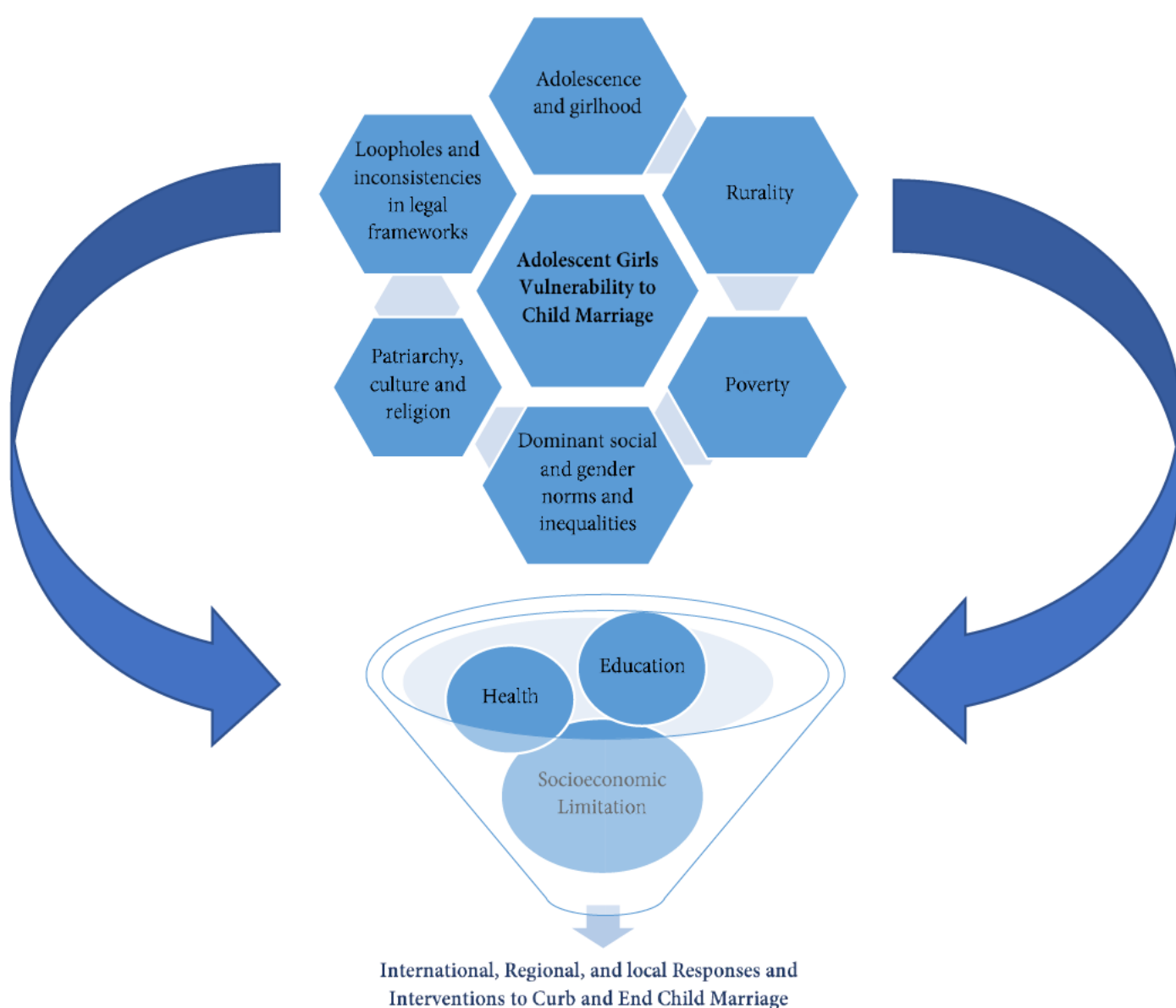
to prompt help-seeking knowledge and effective skills to psychological first aid for those at risk of early marriage (Saraf et al., 2018). However, John et al., (2019) argue that within the Sub-Saharan contexts not much is known about the relationship between child marriage and mental health issues. Despite there being limited research, some organisations offer psychological support to victims of gender-based violence. For example, in Zimbabwe, a non-profit organisation called MUSASA, offers counselling and psycho-social support to victims of gender-based violence and those who manage to escape from abusive marriages (Andrews et al., 2021; Magezi & Manzanga, 2020).

## **2.7. Conceptual Framework for Understanding Child Marriage in Rural Contexts**

Emerging from the literature reviewed in this dissertation is a conceptual framework for understanding adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage in resource-poor rural contexts. In particular, the conceptual framework is organised around two questions: *what explains adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage in resource-poor rural contexts?*; and *how might child marriage against adolescent girls in poor rural contexts be addressed?* Figure 2.1 presents the conceptual framework which guided analysis in this study.

The literature review suggests that child marriage is a human rights violation that continues to be a reality for many adolescents across the globe (Batrya & Pesando, 2021). The practice is more prevalent in global south settings, with the African continent reporting one of the highest incidences of children who marry before the age of 18 years. Indeed, there are gendered trends in the practice of child marriage, with girls more than boys likely to marry early, and largely under forced or coerced circumstances. Girls from resource-poor and distressed households and communities, particularly those situated in rural settings, are at an extended risk of early marriage due to prevailing social and gender norms that place them at a lower social position in comparison to boys. Moreover, heteropatriarchy, which upholds male supremacy and promotes gender inequality, plays a significant role in exposing adolescent girls to the risk of early marriage. Located within the system of heteropatriarchy are religious and cultural beliefs, attitudes, and practices that intersect to inform supportive attitudes towards girls' early marriage. From a patriarchal, religious, and cultural point of view, girls are socialised into marginal roles in their families and communities; roles that promote their sexual purity,

submissiveness, and subordination. Marriage in this context is understood as a means to ensure that girls do not transgress the sexual purity code. For example, the literature reviewed in this chapter suggests that, for girls, virginity is emphasised until they are married. Likewise, childbearing before marriage is regarded as a taboo for unmarried girls in impoverished and often isolated rural contexts. Thus, the decision to marry early, a decision that is rarely made by the concerned children, ensures that a family is protected from the stigma and shame related to knowledge about an adolescent girl's sexual practices.



**Figure 2.1:** Understanding adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage in resource-poor rural contexts

Several countries have provided laws to legislate against child marriage practices. These laws, while progressive in theory, are often peppered with ambiguous messaging. For example, there are notable challenges in providing consistent universal legal, technical, and concrete measures and legislation to address child marriages. Moreover, where legislation exists, there are often inconsistencies and loopholes that allow for the reproduction of child marriages. The limitations of legal frameworks to curb the practice of child marriage are concerning. The disparities between legal frameworks and customary laws lay a foundation for how societal norms and traditions continue to exercise a coercive form of control over girls' bodies and sexual autonomy (Kohn et al., 202; Chutel, 2016).

The literature review has revealed several implications of child marriage on the lives of adolescent girls. First, child marriage impacts negatively on girls' education since they are either denied access to education or are expected to drop out of school in cases where they are married. Education is an important tool for social mobility, independence, and economic security. When girls are denied the opportunity to learn, they are adversely trapped in a circle of poverty, dependency, and economic insecurity. Moreover, since marriage comes with the expectation of childbearing, young mothers are unable to provide for their children, which further pushes girls into a state of hopelessness. Thus, not only does child marriage affect girls' education, but it also limits their prospects of escaping poverty.

The literature also reports several health implications for adolescent girls who are married. These implications run on a spectrum from physical health, mental health, as well as socioeconomic hindrances. For example, adolescent girls are often married to men who are older in terms of age. This opens avenues for the physical, emotional, and sexual violations perpetrated by male partners against their young brides. Accompanying these violations are mental health associated effects such as depression, anxiety, fear, and suicide ideation. The literature reports that some adolescent girls have committed suicide to escape the experience of early marriage. This suggests that child marriage has fatal implications for adolescent girls.

Several measures have been put in place to curb and end cases of child marriage across the globe. Some of these measures include international and regional treaties, agreements, and programming. Moreover, there are local-based national-level measures reported in countries such as Zimbabwe, the focus of this dissertation. Measures range from legislative frameworks

to programming and interventions aimed at addressing child marriages. Moreover, there are context-specific ameliorative interventions that have been established to support vulnerable girls, as well as those who are married. These interventions range from educational programs to community-based, and psychosocial interventions.

The study analysed in this dissertation was at the intersection of child marriage, rurality, and adolescent girlhood in a poverty-stricken context. This area of research has received little attention from social geography and rural geography point of view. Child marriage indeed happens across diverse geographic contexts. However, the literature reviewed in this chapter and the previous chapter directs attention to rural socio-cultural and political geographic contexts. As evidenced by the literature reviewed in this dissertation, the experiences of adolescent girls from poor rural global south contexts are unique and merit targeted attention. Taking all of this into consideration, the study reported in this dissertation was premised on the assumption that being a girl and living in a resource-poor heteropatriarchal rural context that is rooted in religious, cultural, and unequal gender norms and ideologies renders adolescents vulnerable to child marriage. This study, therefore, examined how 20 adolescent girls from one resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe understood and communicated about their vulnerability to child marriage. Moreover, the study explored how these girls might exercise their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage. A unique aspect of the study is that it engages adolescent girls as both knowers and actors in their rural social geographies and the experiences incurred in these contexts.

The next chapter outlines the theoretical framework that provided the parameters and guided analysis in the study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORISING CHILD MARRIAGE IN RESOURCE-POOR RURAL COMMUNITIES: TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1 Introduction

The study reported in this dissertation examined adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage in a resource-poor rural community in Nyanga, Zimbabwe. To address the aim of the study, two critical research questions were posed:

- *How do adolescent girls living in a resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe understand and communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage practices?*
- *How do these adolescent girls negotiate their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage?*

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the literature focusing, in particular, on the factors associated with child marriage, as well as how this practice harms the lives of adolescent girls. The literature reviewed informed the conceptual framework developed to analyse how adolescent girls understood, communicated about, and negotiated their agency in addressing child marriage practices.

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framing of the study. Firstly, I locate the study within feminist theories. I do so by providing a brief history of feminism, and then I discuss the relevance of *radical* feminism in helping to analyse adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage. Thirdly, I use the social norms theory as a perspective to analyse how child marriage is located in and perpetuated by dominant social norms in rural communities. As I show, these norms fuel girls' vulnerability to child marriage. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a set of proportions that guided analysis in the study.

#### 3.2 Feminist Theories

Feminist theories informed analysis in this study. These theories provided a valuable lens for understanding child marriage as a challenge for adolescent girls in resource-poor rural communities. The origins, history, and different waves of feminism are well documented



(Marchand & Parpart, 2003; Delmar, 2018; Mitchelle, 2015). In this study, I try not to bring these aspects of feminism into the discussion. Rather, I locate the core values of these movements and align feminism within the global crisis of child marriage.

The term feminism originated from the Latina word '*Femina*', which pertains to women's issues (Ghorfati & Medina, 2015). It also has roots in the French term *feminist*, which is a belief in, and advocacy for equal rights for women based on the idea of equality of the sexes (McAfee, 2018). So, feminism is concerned with issues that affect women (including adolescent girls). While there is no single authoritative definition of feminism, in this study, I have grounded my analysis within bell hooks' (1984) conceptualisation of feminism. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre*, hooks (1984, p.31) suggests that feminism is a movement that fights to end sexist oppression and exploitation.

Extending bell hooks' theorisation, Biana (2020) points out advocacy beyond simply addressing inequality between women and men. She argues that there is a need to fight to end sexism and gendered oppression without neglecting other forms of oppression such as racism and imperialism (Biana, 2020). hooks proposed a framework that enables the evaluation of cultural presentation which reinforces systems of domination. Using this framework in this study, the research was particularly interested in and attuned to, issues of gender inequality that subordinates and disadvantages girls and other marginalised groups (Stamarski & Hing, 2015; Lei & Rhodes, 2021; Shannon et al., 2019). The framework enabled me, as a researcher, to evaluate the cultural norms and values that strip away the rights and freedoms of adolescent girls. The study sought to understand how adolescent girls understood and communicated their vulnerability to child marriages, and how they might negotiate their agency against the practice.

In *Feminism is for Everybody*, hooks (2000) outlines that from birth, boys and girls are socialised to accept sexist actions and thought. She further argues that feminism is not about being anti-male but against sexism<sup>11</sup>. Child marriage is a practice that disproportionately affects girls, with scholars highlighting it as a manifestation of gender inequality that stems from sexist ideologies (Melo, 2019; Cesario & Moran, 2017; Taefi, 2017). Globally, girls experience various forms of exploitation, marginalisation, and discrimination because of their gender

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<sup>11</sup> Sexism includes attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, and organizational, institutional, and cultural practices that either reflect negative evaluations of individuals based on their gender or support unequal status of women and men (Swim & Hyers, 2009).

identities (Young, 2011; Ayon et al., 2018). They are also accorded marginal social statuses in their families and communities. Extending on hooks' framing of feminism, Drucker (2018) suggests that feminism seeks to establish equal rights and legal protections for women and girls from dominant norms within their families and communities. As a theoretical framework, feminism encompasses multiple perspectives that address a variety of challenges that women and girls face. Feminism, therefore, is understood as an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks to achieve justice for girls and women by addressing sexism in all forms (Drucker, 2018; Gray & Boddy, 2010).

### **3.2.1. A Brief History of Feminist Theory**

Feminism is located within five schools of thought. These are *liberal feminism*, *Marxist feminism*, *socialist feminism*, *radical feminism*, and *postmodern feminism* (Policastro, 2016). Historically, these schools of thought emerged from the various waves that have shaped the notion of feminism. As such, feminist history can be divided into three waves. I outline these waves in the sub-sections below.

#### **a. The First Wave: The right to vote and the fight for equal contract and property rights**

The first wave of feminism, which focused on the achievement of basic and equal political rights occurred between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Pande, 2018; Sanders, 2004). This wave was largely concerned with the right of women to vote (Code, 2000). Likewise, first-wave feminists demanded the reforming of laws that had historically prevented women from entering contracts or for owning property (Paglia, 2008). Feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Cage became leading voices in advocating for women's rights by outlining the feminist movement's ideology and political strategies (Johnson, 2017). These women made the argument for the dismantling of discriminatory laws that facilitated women's oppression and suffrage. In America, the first wave of feminism successfully influenced the passage of the 19th Amendment into the United States Constitution. This legislation granted women their right to vote and to participate in politics (Potter & Munn, 2019. Johnson, 2017). Across the globe, first-wave feminists were further key in arguing for women's access to education, for married women to gain property rights, and for making improvements in women's rights to divorce, and to get child custody (Nehere, 2016).

## **b. The Second Wave: broadening the equality debate**

Contrary to first-wave feminism, the second wave, which is predominantly associated with *liberal feminism*, was centred on the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) that occurred between the 1960s and the 1970s (Pande, 2018; Prasad & Mooy, 2017). During this period, the movement pushed beyond political rights to advocate for greater equality that included gender justice for women in the workplace, family, and in terms of their sexuality (Williams, 2002; Raj et al., 2019; Cohen & Cajax, 2018). Significantly, the second wave drew in women of colour and further sought solidarity with women from global south nations. This was done to demonstrate that race, class, and gender oppression were all related and affected women across the global spectrum (Rampton, 2015).

Within this context, second-wave feminism emerged to prominence by focusing on issues of gender equality for all sexes, as well as advocating for an end to the discrimination of women (Lenipard, 2007; Foxworth, 2018). This wave was both an intellectual and advocacy platform that gave rise to the liberation movement for equal legal and social rights (Gosse, 2005). Moreover, it challenged prevailing notions of women's role in their families, the workplace, and the greater society by highlighting gender divisions of labour and household markets (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Accordingly, second-wave feminists argued that society restricted women's access and participation in the public sphere because of their biological sex and their gender identities (Sibani, 2007; Enyew & Mihrete, 2018). Essentially, women's educational and employment opportunities were limited by social, legal, and political barriers that favoured men (Policastro, 2015). Thus, *liberal* feminists fought for gender justice by arguing for women's access to, and involvement in, public and private institutions.

Second wave feminists lamented the idea that gender was used to denote that which is 'normal' (Elliot, 2008). Indeed, they cautioned that sex differences, relations between the sexes, and the very category of women itself are due to social arrangements and not necessarily to the biological makeup of individuals. In other words, gender identity and roles were questions of culture and not nature (Tuana & Tong, 2018). Therefore, the second wave of feminism held their central reasoning that sex differences were not an authentic ground for any form of exclusion or oppression (Diquinzio, 1993). Thus, the aspect of childcare, equal pay, educational opportunities, and reproductive rights were topics that were central to second-wave feminism.

### **c. The Third Wave: the micropolitics of gender inequality**

The third wave of feminism occurred in the early 1990s, by emphasizing identity as a gender struggle. It paid attention to women's issues in the context of their gendered, racial, and ethnic identities (McAfee, 2018). The third wave was a continuation of, and a reaction to, secondwave feminism as it grew out of the sex-positive debates of the second wave. The third wave saw women's lives as intersectional; thus, demonstrating how race, ethnicity, class, religion, gender, were all significant factors when discussing feminism (Synder, 2008). Within the third wave, an aspect of race became crucial, as women of colour argued that their experiences needed to be understood and addressed. It was during this wave that black feminism emerged as a subdiscipline of feminism (Brianne et al., 2020).

### **d. The Fourth Wave: women empowerment and intersectionality**

The fourth wave of feminism addressed the intersectionality of women's experiences and challenges faced by all people. It urged people to use social media to expose the discrimination they face (Brianne et al., 2020). One of the characteristics of the fourth wave has been its online presence. It opened up spaces for feminist debates and exposure of sexist and misogynist behaviour online (Day & Wray, 2018). For example, the #metoo movement and the #Bringbackourgirls campaign were key movements that emerged at the onset of the fourth wave of feminism. The application of internet tools has been used as a means for women's empowerment. Intersectionality has also been a major issue for this wave. Different social categories and identities were noted as different forms of oppression that intersect. Racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia are among the many forms of oppression that intersect (Zimmerman, 2017). Thus, the fourth wave rose to address these kinds of oppressions.

### **3.2.2. Feminist Schools of Thought**

Across all the different waves of feminism, there have emerged some pertinent schools of thought that have shaped society (Rampton, 2015; Burrell & Flood, 2019; Nott & Morris, 2018). These schools of thought are broadly conceived as *Marxist feminism*, *socialist feminism*, *radical feminism*, and *postmodern feminism*. They influenced the emergence of some waves of feminism. *Marxist* feminists focused specifically on inequalities embedded within the capitalist society and viewed the class system as the chief source of gender inequality (Armstrong, 2020).

Accordingly, Marxist feminists argue that a shift from a class-based economy rooted in capitalism to a society where the means of production are shared would reduce gender inequality (Mathews, 2018). They further maintain that gender equality is achieved by eliminating a capitalist society in the workplace and reducing women's economic dependence on men.

*Radical* and *socialist* feminism emerged in response to what was considered the limitations of *Marxist* feminism. While Marxism identified a capitalist society as the source of gender inequality, *radical* feminism, however, identified heteropatriarchy as the key source of gender inequities (Jeppesen, 2019; Taylor & Rupp, 1993; Rosewarne, 2020). As I pointed out in Chapter Two, heteropatriarchy refers to a male-dominated social structure in which men (often heterosexual) as individuals and as a collective govern social relations (Sultana, 2010; Mace, 2018; Nelson, 2021). *Radical* feminism called for the dismantling of heteropatriarchal structures. Bryson (1992) has long since argued that the oppression of women is a fundamental form of oppression, as it devalues them and hinders them from reaching their true potential since they are limited in decision-making (Gosse, 2005). Certainly, *radical* feminists emphasise the primacy of women's oppression and seek to end heteropatriarchal domination (Rubaya, 2021). Therefore, *radical* feminism argues for the deconstruction of heteropatriarchal social relations (Ollis, 2017).

Scholars argue that within the realm of feminism, intersectionality is a key aspect (Kim, 2021; Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Intersectionality highlights the interconnectedness of social categories, including race, class, and gender. Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) introduced the term intersectionality to contextualise the particular oppression and exclusion of black women. She argues that there is a need to recognise the importance of examining the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination that impact black women (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Within this context, *socialist* feminists also agree that both class and gender are important sources of women's oppression (Gelsthorpe, 2002). Moreover, they suggest that the family, reproduction, and unpaid work in the home are essential to heteropatriarchal capitalism (Bieler & Morton, 2021; Jarett, 2014). Further, this perspective links capitalism to heteropatriarchy by highlighting male control over female (re)production (Chesney-Lind & Faith, 2001). Given the dual influence of capitalism and heteropatriarchy, *socialist* feminists purport that women can

only achieve true freedom when working to end intersectional oppression (Shi, 2018; Gray & Cooke, 2018).

*Postmodern* feminism rose during the third wave of feminism to question the ability of previous feminist perspectives to fully account for women's oppression. More specifically, postmodernists argue that there is no universal “female experience” (Hennessy, 2010). Certainly, they argue that women’s experiences vary dramatically across categories of race, class, sexual orientation, and culture (Harris, 1990). Acknowledging that gender intersects with other characteristics suggests that the approach to reducing gender inequality is more complex. More so, *postmodern* feminists note that strategies that deal with gender inequality must consider multiple forms of oppression to be responsive to the needs of a diversity of women (Oslon, 1996; Wood, 2019).

The various schools of the feminist movement focus on the systematic disadvantages of girls and women as they seek ways in which equitable outcomes between genders can be achieved (Gray & Boddy, 2010). The founding principles of feminism are to achieve equality within social, geographic, and political spheres (Pasque & Wimmer, 2011). Indeed, feminism refutes the poor and low status accorded to women and girls in society (Mink, 2018; Rudin 2019). Consequently, feminist work, in a bid to challenge these social inequities, provides the basis for the active participation of women (Sultana, 2010)<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, the involvement of women in decision-making processes in the workplace and through social action is necessary for facilitating their recognition in society (Nehere, 2016). Therefore, giving the participants in this study a platform to speak on how they understood their vulnerability to child marriage assisted in upholding active participation.

### **3.2.3. Feminism in Understanding Perilous Gender Norms and Inequality**

Feminist theories challenge the authoritative accounts of the world written from the perspective of socially privileged men (Smith, 2019; Keddie & Bartel, 2021). Thus, it operates as a framework that challenges existing androcentric constructions of women’s lives (Jaggar, 2002; Fuller, 2015). On one hand, the constructions of female identity entail the enforcement of

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<sup>12</sup> So it is necessary to understand the system, which keeps women dominated and subordinate, and to unravel its workings in order to work for women’s development in a systematic way (Sultana, 2015).

passive forms of femininity, which are emphasised through culture, religion, politics, tradition, and other social institutions and belief systems (Policasto, 2016). In this regard, girls and women are socialised into becoming submissive and passive (Bhana, 2018; Bassey & Bubu, 2019). On the other hand, men and boys are encouraged to engage in behaviours that assert masculinity, autonomy, and assertiveness (Ganguly & Singh, 2021). In other words, women and girls are accorded an inferior social status to that of men and boys (Muhanguzi, 2011). Feminism, therefore, highlights the socially accepted norms that function through sociocultural systems to reinforce gender inequality. Scholars have made the link between gender inequality and violence against women. For example, in an earlier study on masculinity in KwaZuluNatal, South Africa, Sathipasard (2005) reported that men and boys believed that it was acceptable to beat a woman to correct her. According to the author, men in these communities shared the dominant ideas about masculinity that endorse violence as a means to exert and exercise power on girls and women (see also, Bhana & Mayeza, 2016).

Feminist theories maintain that gendered sociocultural systems operate as a means of social stratification as roles, occupations, and attributes associated with being a woman are afforded less value in comparison to those of men (Matthews, 2018; Baldi, 2018). Certainly, the gendered structures that are prevalent in several societies disproportionately affect women and girls who then fail to exercise their agency (Dessalegn et al., 2020). Wilkinson (1996), therefore, argues that research located in feminism seeks to unearth the experiences of those who are marginalised and often silenced. In this study, particular focus was given to adolescent girls from a resource-poor rural community as a marginalised group operating within hegemonic systems of heteropatriarchy. According to Crow (2000), *radical* feminism has made a lasting impression on understanding male privilege and the power imbalances that exist between men and women. This study was thus guided by and drew from the ideas of *radical* feminism to understand how heteropatriarchy rendered adolescent girls vulnerable and, in turn, limited their agency in addressing this vulnerability in the context of child marriage. According to Shamase (2017), feminism has always sought to disturb the culture of heteropatriarchy and eradicate sexist domination. *Radical* feminism thus has remained tied to real issues that concern women rather than being used for theory's sake (Thompson, 2001). Using radical feminism in this study helped me to understand how gender inequality affects girls from marginalised rural communities by exposing them to perilous practices such as child marriage.

### **3.3.4. Feminist Theories in Framing Adolescent Girls Vulnerability to Child Marriage**

Feminist theories locate the practice of child marriage within the full spectrum of gender inequality and the violation of girls' human rights. Child marriage threatens the lives, freedom, and prospects of adolescent girls (Maina, 2020, Harper et al., 2018; UNICEF, 2019). It further robs them of their dignity and the agency they need to make their own decisions about their bodies and the choice to get married (McCleary-Sills et al., 2015; Chitemba, 2018; Longwe, 2020). Consequently, this prevents their full participation in the economic, political, and social spheres of life (Wood, 2019; Bako & Syed, 2018). Such outcomes hinder girls' development (Tefere et al., 2020). Child marriage is also a symptom of rural marginalisation and the dominant sociocultural attitudes and practices that exist in these geographic areas (Moletsane, 2014; Reid, 2017; Ritcher, 2019). According to Mitchell and Rentschler (2016), social geography is key in shaping children's socio-cultural and political lives. Existing within a prevailing culture of heteropatriarchy, rural social ecologies are therefore important for analysing adolescent girls' livelihoods. Feminism, thus, puts into focus the depth of inequality that is centred on male power and how it trickles down to affect girls and women (Becker, 1999; Lawless, 2019).

### **3.4 The Social Norms Theory**

Analysis in this study was also informed by the social norms theory. Linked to feminist theories, social norms theory is multi-faceted and provides several explanations about how dominant norms influence and shape social beliefs, attitudes, practices, and behaviours (Fang et al., 2017; Heinen & Handy, 2012). The social norms theory suggests that behaviour is influenced by the perception of how other members of a social group think and act (Berkowitz, 2004). In other words, as Bicchieri (2006) argues, social norms are common practices that hold social groups together. These norms are the unwritten rules and laws about acceptable behaviours that govern groups, individuals, and communities (Cislaghi et al., 2020; Cislaghi & Bhattacharjee, 2017). Moreover, social norms are the social, psychological, cultural, and behavioural practices that most people adapt to (Cislaghi & Shakya, 2018). These norms are idealised and become embedded and nested in their minds to the extent that they influence ways of thinking and acting (Sharma et al., 2020). These norms may not be written or codified, and they can either be formal or informal (Fleetwood, 2021). Accordingly, the basis of a norm



is that it is prescriptive of behaviour<sup>13</sup> as it enforces how people should behave (Bicchieri et al., 2014).

### 3.5 Social Norms in the context of Child Marriages

Robert Cialdini (1991; 2007) advances the idea of two types of social norms that I used to understand how child marriage continues to happen despite its negative consequences. Cialdini argues that *descriptive norms* are people's beliefs about what other people do. Certainly, *descriptive norms* influence or motivate behaviours by providing evidence as to what is likely to be effective (Cislaghi & Shakya, 2018, Cialdini et al., 1991). This notion is what is mostly used by advertisers; when they advertise a product, they convince viewers that a majority of people use and approve of the product, thus the viewers will be compelled to use the product only because other people are doing it. *Injunctive norms*, on the other hand, are what others approve and disapprove of (Mackie & Moneti, 2014). *Injunctive norms* are those beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours that are considered to be socially acceptable. Therefore, individuals are motivated to conform to certain behaviours because those behaviours fall within what is approved within a reference group (Gockeritz et al., 2010).

*Injunctive norms* specify what which is ought to be done. They constitute moral values and motivate action by promising social rewards or punishments (Cialdini et al., 1991). They are more relevant in the building and maintaining of social relationships. Based on research done in Somaliland, researchers reported that child marriage results from *injunctive norms* (Kenny et al., 2019). Indeed, researchers found prevailing and acceptable norms that were upheld to condemn premarital sex, while assigning greater social status to adolescents who were married (Kenny et al., 2019). The same study also revealed that adolescent girls married early because they feared the shame associated with premarital sex and for getting pregnant out of wedlock. Child marriage was also a means to gain social respect and status. Mackie and Moneti (2014) argue that a social norm evolves around beliefs about the social expectations within a social group. These norms are thus sustained by social approval and disapproval. So, the need to get married early stems from the need to preserve individual and family honour that is linked to

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<sup>13</sup> One important aspect of people's behaviour is that it is often influenced by what other people do and by what other people think should be done. When behaviour is influenced in that manner it is called a social norm (Bicchieri et al., 2014).

good social standing. As a means to refrain from shame, girls get married early despite the negative consequences of child marriage. However, as studies report, girls might be more concerned about their good social standing in the eyes of their society (Ardener, 2020; Lanngner, 2019). This is mostly because a girls' virginity at the time of marriage is highly valued in diverse communities; it is regarded as a sign that the young woman is virtuous and respectable (Chisale & Moyo, 2016). The need for women and girls to be approved and respected within their reference groups has perpetuated early marriages for girls to gain honour and respect.

Chung & Rimal (2016) argue that social norms constrain behaviour by eliciting conformity. Bicchieri (2006) adds that norms refer to various behaviours accompanied by expectations; beliefs, behaviours, and expectations have made young girls susceptible to child marriage. It should be noted that decisions taken by girls may not only depend on the knowledge they have but may be influenced by contextual factors like what is expected and considered appropriate within their societal groups (Niinsima et al., 2018). This can be linked to Cialdini's theory of *injunctive norms*, that some behaviours are motivated by what is socially approved. Cleuziou (2019) argues that marriage has served as a traditional demarcation of womanhood. As mentioned above, those that are married enjoy a higher social status, which makes marriage more desirable (Tang et al., 2020).

### **3.6 Framework for Analysing Adolescent Girls Vulnerability to Child Marriage in Resource-Poor Rural Contexts**

This study examined how adolescent girls living in a resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe understood and communicated about their vulnerability to child marriage. Data analysis in this study was informed by feminist theories and the social norms theory. In particular, the work of feminist scholar bell hooks was a critical component of the analysis. Using both feminist theories and the social norms theory as a framework, in addition to developing a deeper theoretical understanding of vulnerability to child marriage from the perspectives of adolescent girls from a resource-poor rural community, this study examined how the participants themselves understood and communicated about child marriage. It also sought to explore how these girls negotiated their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage.

As argued throughout this dissertation, child marriage is a concern in the African continent as it renders adolescent girls susceptible to various social challenges. Girls' vulnerability to this practice is further exacerbated by the system of heteropatriarchy and its associated social, gender and cultural norms that place girls on the margins of society. Research located within feminism and social norms theory places girlhood vulnerability, oppression, and human rights violation at the centre of social analysis. It challenges researchers to trouble the taken-for-granted normalised status order that privileges men/boys while subordinating girls. Underlying bell hooks' theorisation is the idea of gender equality and girls' empowerment in decision-making about their bodies, identities, and futures. Feminism and social norms in this study have been key in locating girls' vulnerability within a sociocultural geographic system that normalises oppressive and violent gendered hierarchies. Moreover, these theories have further contributed to expanding understanding of how social forces around child marriage impact adolescent girls.

Central to my study was the need to create a space where adolescent girls could communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage. Adopting this theoretical framework, in this study, I draw on the understanding and contexts of adolescent girls to examine their vulnerability to child marriage in their resource-poor and heteropatriarchal rural community. To analyse data responding to the two research questions posed in this study, two propositions for data analysis in this dissertation were formulated. The first research question that I sought to address was: *How do adolescent girls living in a resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe understand and communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage practices?* The second research question was: *How do these adolescent girls negotiate their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage?* Informed by feminist theories, analysis in this study was premised on the assumption that adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage is located within an oppressive system of heteropatriarchy, rurality, and enduring poverty, which relegate girls into low social positions in their households and communities. This system further works to silence girls on important issues that impact their lives, including decisions about when and to whom they desire to marry. Informed by the social norms theory, analysis in the study was premised on the assumption that interlinked factors such as gender inequality, dominant cultural and religious norms, and ideas around heteropatriarchy feed into adolescent girls' inability to exercise their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage. Thus, dominant social norms, which are often gendered, conspire to create a socio-cultural

environment where girls are unable to speak out or act against practices that are imposed on their lives.

Guided by these propositions, data analysis focused on adolescent girls' understanding of their vulnerability to child marriage, and on how they might negotiate their agency in addressing their vulnerability in their resource-poor rural community.

### **3.7 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have presented the theoretical framework which informed this study, which are feminist theories and the social norms theory. The theoretical framework developed from these theories provided a lens for analysing adolescent girls' vulnerability and their agency in the context of child marriage in their resource-poor rural community. The chapter concluded with a set of two propositions that were developed from the two theoretical frames which guided this research. The two propositions developed in the chapter were used to guide data analysis for this study.

In the next chapter, I outline the research design and methodology used to address the research question, as well as the research approaches employed for generating data in the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ENGAGING ADOLESCENT GIRLS TO UNDERSTAND THEIR VULNERABILITY TO CHILD MARRIAGE IN A RESOURCE- POOR RURAL COMMUNITY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss the research design and methodology applied in the study. The chapter is organised as follows. In the next section, I outline the research paradigm used to guide the methodology that was used for generating data. This is followed by a description of the research design, the study site, and how I gained access to the study community. Sections that detail the study participants and their recruitment procedures, data collection processes, and data analysis precede a final section where I address questions around the study's trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

#### **4.2 Research Paradigm**

The study's methodology was guided by the critical research paradigm. Research within the critical paradigm is predominantly interested in issues of power, and the promotion of wellbeing among those who are vulnerable, oppressed, or exploited (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Located within the critical paradigm, I was able to design and ask culturally sensitive questions that did not further victimise the participants. The questions I posed included the intersection of social, cultural, political, geographic, and historical factors that rendered adolescent girls vulnerable to early marriage. Locating the study's methodology within the critical paradigm was also useful for engaging vulnerable adolescent girls living in a heteropatriarchal community (Woods, 2009). Therefore, this research probed how social power, dominance, inequality, and suppression rendered girls vulnerable (Rahi, 2017). Moreover, the research was designed such that it did not reproduce oppressive practices that render adolescent girls as passive. Thus, using the critical paradigm promoted a congenial environment in which the participants could speak about their experiences and describe their understanding of their vulnerability to child marriage. Informed by the critical paradigm, the study used in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD) to generate data. The critical paradigm further influenced all aspects of the research

process, including the research questions, the methodology employed, analysis, and the writeup process.

### **4.3 Research Design**

Research design is a system of choices that are taken by a researcher to conduct their study in an orderly and effective manner (Geoffrey, 2019; Panke, 2018). It allows the investigator to address their research questions effectively and efficiently (Chenail, 2011). In this study, I chose a qualitative research design to generate and analyse data. According to Maxwell (2008), a qualitative research design is a reflexive process operating through every stage of a project. Qualitative research informs the “activities of generating and analysing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing the research questions, as well as identifying and dealing with the questions around trustworthiness” (Maxwell, 2008, p. 215).

This study was concerned with documenting the perspectives of adolescent girls about how they understood and communicated their vulnerability to child marriage practices in a resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe. I used a qualitative research approach because of its ability to capture broader contextual explanations when compared to quantitative methods that are more inclined towards objective measurements and the statistical analysis of data (Rananga & Gumbo, 2015). Using a qualitative research approach helped me to analyse in detail the social environment, individual and collective perspectives, and social processes that were communicated by the participants about their vulnerability to child marriage (Hay, 2000; Maree, 2015; Molausi, 2020). Moreover, conducting a qualitative study helped to specifically ask the ‘how and why’ questions, rather than the ‘how many’ questions, within the context of the topic under study. In this study, I sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of the participants’ perspectives; thus, qualitative methods became a significant mode of inquiry. I, therefore, used both IDIs and FGDs. I elaborate on how these methods were used in the sections below.

#### **4.4 Research Site and Study Context**

The study site for this research was a resource-poor rural community called Nyamazuwa (not its real name). Nyamazuwa is located in Ward 29 of the Nyanga Rural District in the Manicaland Province on the north-eastern side of Zimbabwe (closer to the Mozambican border) (Maponde, 2018). Specifically, Nyanga District is in the North-Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe. It falls under a rural administrative district that is divided into administrative wards, which are presided over by a district council (Mutandwa, 2017). The rural district council is led by a District Development Chairperson. The area hosts people of diverse political inclinations.

Nyamazuwa is located 100-kilometres from the nearest towns, which are Mutare and Rusape. These towns are the only available economic hubs within a 100-kilometre stretch. Both towns host social and economic institutions such as banks, government departments, parastatals, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), hotels, and a few lodges. The nearest general hospital and police headquarters to Nyamazuwa are found in a different ward that is located approximately five kilometers away from the community. While some roads are tarred, there is a need for rehabilitation of the tar and the many gravel roads in this area (Gohori & van der Merwe, 2021). Further, public transport is available, albeit, very limited.

The rural community of Nyamazuwa is largely religious, with most residents following the Christian faith (Tsara, 2019; Sibanda, 2018). Moreover, in the community, cultural and religious practices are enforced among all residents and strongly defended (Tsara, 2019; Gohori & van der Merwe, 2021). This limits the rights and freedoms of women and children. For example, religion and culture in this community are intertwined and govern girls' developmental and livelihood trajectories (Achen et al., 2021; Idoko, 2021). Adolescent girls are reared towards marrying potential partners within their respective churches (Nhamo & Murire, 2021; Mwambene, 2018; Le Roux & Palm, 2018). This is considered a supreme instruction from the Holy Spirit (Sayi & Sibanda, 2018).

Available research conducted among residents of this community suggests that girls' sexual rights are limited by an unwritten rule that emphasises their purity or virginity until they get married (Stevenson & Hiebert, 2019; Ramanaik et al., 2018). Religious beliefs also shape the

attitudes and behaviours of the community (Ives & Kidwell, 2019; Xie & Peng, 2018). For example, leadership positions in the community are reserved for men only, with women and girls allocated to low positions (Chimbera, 2017). Indeed, these sociocultural attitudes transcend into other domains that involve girls' lives and identities. For instance, these attitudes direct how and what girls could wear (UNICEF, 2001). However, this is not unique and these conservative and heteropatriarchal ideals extend beyond the community. One study done in Harare revealed that religious and cultural traditions tended to restrict women and girls' expression of sexuality by policing how they dress (Mapuranga, 2020). Furthermore, in the greater Nyanga district, patriarchal hegemony continues relentlessly, resulting in less than 30 percent of women participating in community dialogue meetings, community health clubs, and other types of educational training (Maponde, 2018). As Nyahunda et al., (2021) contend, Nyanga and the communities it houses are patriarchal by orientation and operation.

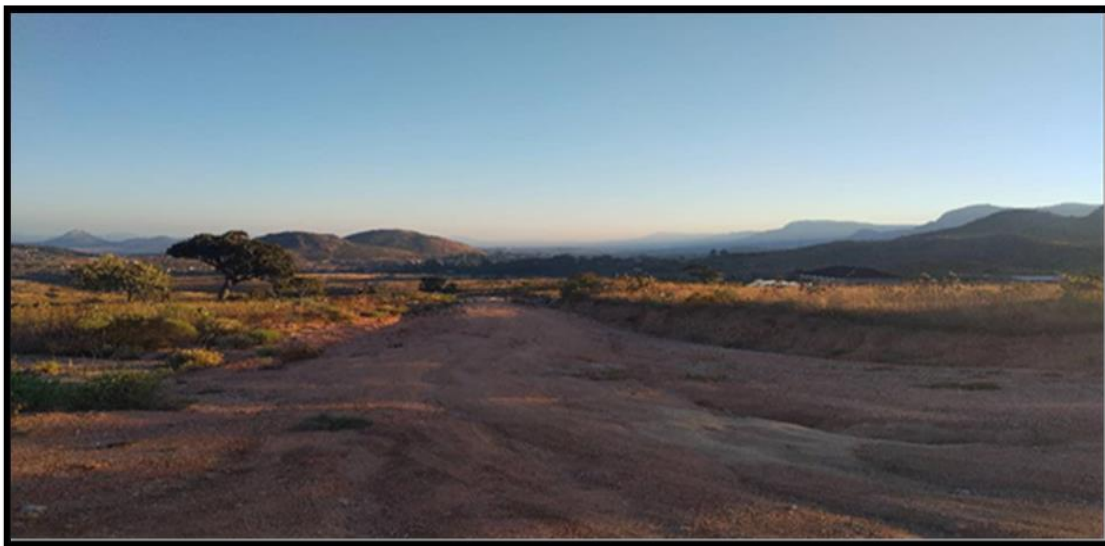
Nyanga rural district is a densely populated area, which according to the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) (2012), houses an estimated 126 599 individuals. The most recent ZIMSTAT (2012) census data reports that 67 percent of the housing units are traditional settlements that do not have electricity. Moreover, over 22 percent of households in the area rely on unsafe water that is sourced from streams, rivers, and dams. The census data (ZIMSTAT, 2012) on education reveals that over 26 percent of the adult population has never attended primary school. Likewise, over 30 percent of adult women report that they had dropped out of primary school, some due to the cost and financing of education, which was too high and could not afford, while some dropped out to get married (Chiduuro et al., 2013; Louis et al., 2021; Matsa 2020). This is higher in comparison to 24 percent of men who reported that they dropped out of primary school.





**Figure 4.1:** Mount Nyangani

According to Shenjere-Nyabezi (2021), Nyanga is a tourist destination area that offers natural attractions such as the Mtarazi falls, Mount Nyangani (the tallest mountain in Zimbabwe, pictured in Figure 4.2, above), the Nyanga National Park, and several heritage sites (Chirenje et al., 2013). Figure 4.3, below, shows the Nyangani hillsides that surround Nyanga.



**Figure 4.2:** Nyangani Mountain hillsides

Nyanga is classified as a resource-poor district (Louis et al., 2021; Nyahunda et al., 2021). The poor economic conditions in the district have had an impact on livelihoods and wellbeing

because of tourism leakages in the area. Tourism leakage refers to a situation where tourism expenditure leaks out of the host community into other communities (Thath, 2021). This phenomenon does not contribute much direct employment for the local population, and it fails to alleviate them from poverty. In the Nyanga District, Chirenje et al., (2013) report that very little revenue trickles down to the locals, with every US\$187 spent by a tourist per day locals only get 13 percent of the profit. Therefore, 87 percent goes to service providers who are nonlocals. This has resulted in the majority of community members resorting to engaging in the low-income informal sector, which includes such activities as flea market trading and street vending (Chirenje, 2017). Thus, the adolescent girls who participated in this study come from a rural district that is characterised by systemic poverty (Chipanga et al., 2021; Madzivire & Masunda, 2021). Finally, available epidemiological research reports high rates of child marriages that are prevalent in the Nyanga rural district (Duri, 2019; Kanjanda & Chiparange, 2016). Approximately, 30 percent of girls in this area are married by the time they reach 18 years (Eissa, 2019; Kanjanda & Chipangare, 2016).



**Figure 4.3:** Nyamazuwa Marketplace

The research site was selected based on three criteria. First, the research focused on a rural area where child marriage was still in practice and adolescent girls were vulnerable to this act. Given the context outlined above, this province was significant for the research that is reported in this dissertation. Second, I sought to conduct this research in an area classified as a resource-poor

rural community. According to Gohori & Van der Marwe (2021), while tourism in the Nyanga Rural District had significant developmental aspects, there still exists signs of poverty, with the majority of residents engaging in the informal economy as traders (or street vendors) as shown in Figure 4.3 above. Chirenje (2017) reports that selling fruits, vegetables, flea market trading, and subsistence farming are the major income-generating activities in the area, and more women than men partaking in this informal sector. Third, and heeding the call by Moletsane and Ntombela (2010), there is a need to focus on rural communities because they are often marginalised, isolated, and neglected. Furthermore, rural areas are still characterised by and are associated with poverty, slow or under development, infrastructural problems, and slow to no service delivery (Mboumboue & Njomo 2016). It was within this broad context that the participants lived, and within which the study was conducted.

#### **4.4.1 Waterford High School**

The main setting for data generation for the study was Waterford High School (not its real name), a mixed-sex school that enrolled both boys and girls from Nyamazuwa. At the time of data generation, Waterford High School enrolled over 700 boys and girls who came from surrounding communities. The school offered classes from Form One (Grade Eight) to Form Six (Grade 13). The Zimbabwean secondary education system (within which the participants were recruited) is phased into a six-year period that is divided into two portions (Kanyongo, 2005). First, the Ordinary ‘O’ Level is a four-year phase that starts from Form One (Grade Eight) to Form Four (Grade 11). Second, the Advanced ‘A’ Level is a two-year phase that starts from Form Five (Grade 12) to Form Six (Grade 13). Among the school’s premises was a boarding facility built by a non-governmental organisation called Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED). This organisation worked to eradicate poverty through the education of girls. One of their goals was to support underprivileged girls so that they could remain in school. The school was selected, first, on the basis that it was located within an area where the practice of child marriages was still advent and some girls had reportedly dropped out of school due to early marriage (Duri, 2019; Tsara; 2019; Chang et al., 2021; Chikova, 2020). Therefore, hearing from girls from this school was envisioned to provide rich contextual data for analysis. Secondly, the school was selected because it enrolled children from communities across the Manicaland province. This made it easy for me as a researcher to have access to girls coming from a broader community/provincial setting. Finally, as Moletsane (2014) notes, schools are

important social spaces for researching with young people. Therefore, Waterford High School was an important site for conducting the research described in this dissertation.

#### **4.5 Gaining access to Waterford High School**

Before identifying and gaining access to Waterford High School, I contacted Natasha (not her real name), the founder of a development Trust<sup>14</sup> located in Nyamazuwa. The Trust assists victims of gender-based violence in the Nyamazuwa area. At my meeting with Natasha, I first explained the nature of the research I wanted to undertake and subsequently asked her to assist me to identify an area within her organisation's jurisdiction where child marriage was still in practice. She identified Waterford High School in the Nyamazuwa area as a suitable site for the research. The school was identified because it was located within a community where child marriages were in practice, and girls were vulnerable to it. Since the research was located in a rural community, before approaching the school, I first sought and was subsequently granted gatekeeper permission by the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development of the Manicaland Province (Appendix B). This Ministry was relevant because they oversee any work that is done by any NGOs within the area and the Trust was an NGO that was operating within the community of Nyamazuwa. Once I had received permission to research in the Manicaland Province, I sought gatekeeper permission to research at Waterford High School from the Ministry of Education for the Nyanga Rural District (Appendix C). After receiving relevant gatekeeper permission, Natasha introduced me to the management of Waterford High School. At the meeting, I introduced myself, the institution I was registered under, and the type of research I aimed to conduct. Further, I explained the purpose of the research, the nature of the data generation process, the kind of participants I required, and how I would use and protect the data. I provided the school's management team with copies of permission letters I had obtained from relevant gatekeepers. Once the school's management had granted permission to conduct the research, I was appointed one female champion-teacher who assisted me with gaining access to, and the recruitment of the participants.

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<sup>14</sup> In keeping with ethical practices in research, I have withheld the name of the Trust.

#### **4.5.1 Participants and their Recruitment into the Study**

Convenience sampling (also referred to as availability sampling) was used to recruit the participants. This sampling method is a type of non-probability sampling that involves the selection of participants because they are easily accessible and convenient (Etikan et al., 2016; Sedgwick, 2013). Researchers use this technique to collect data from a conveniently available pool of informants (Speak et al., 2018). Considering that convenience sampling involves drawing research informants from the part of a community that is closer and easier to access, I recruited adolescent girls residing in the Waterford High School's boarding facilities. This made it convenient to have access to participants who stayed inside the school's boarding facilities even after academic hours.

The sampling criteria used to recruit participants into the study was adolescent girls in the age range 12-17 years, coming from resource-poor rural neighbourhoods where child marriages were practiced, enrolled in classes from Form Two to Form Six (Grades 9-13), and lived in the school's boarding facilities. In setting the sampling criteria, and for examining adolescent girls' understanding of their vulnerability to child marriage, I recruited participants who were not married. Due to the sensitive nature of the study topic, I deliberately excluded girls who had/were married or those who were in the process of getting married. My study only sought to examine unmarried adolescent girls' perspectives about how they understood and spoke about their vulnerability to child marriage. In other words, I was interested in analysing unmarried girls' vulnerability to marriage. Moreover, in the build-up to the study, I held several engagements with some community stakeholders where it emerged that those girls who were already married and those who were in the process of getting married would be denied consent to participate in the study by their husbands and/or families. This was another important reason for excluding adolescent girls who were married or those who were getting ready to marry. Using the criteria outlined above, I recruited a total of 20 adolescent girls as participants in the study. First, with the help of the champion teacher, a message about my research was sent out across the relevant Grades in the school, and those girls who were interested in participating were asked to meet the researcher at a mutual venue inside the school, after hours. While, I had initially aimed to recruit 16 participants, when 20 girls showed interest in participating in the study, I allowed them. Table 4.1, below, provides a snapshot of the participants' biographical information. To protect their identities, I have used pseudonyms instead of their real names.



The sample consisted of four girls who were in Form Two, five girls from Form Three, four girls who attended Form Four, another four girls from Form Five, and three girls who were in Form Six. As per the recruitment criteria, none of the participants were ever married or in the process of getting married at the time of the research.

**Table 4.1: Participants Biographical Information**

Participant's Name	Age	Form/Grade at School
Rejoice	12	Form Two (Grade 9)
Tendai	12	Form Two (Grade 9)
Kudzai	12	Form Two (Grade 9)
Tatenda	13	Form Two (Grade 9)
Tinotenda	13	Form Three (Grade 10)
Lina	13	Form Three (Grade 10)
Nobuhle	14	Form Three (Grade 10)
Kundai	14	Form Three (Grade 10)
Edna	15	Form Three (Grade 10)
Mellissa	14	Form Four (Grade 11)
Audrey	15	Form Four (Grade 11)
Chipo	15	Form Four (Grade 11)
Thelma	15	Form Four (Grade 11)
Princess	16	Form Five (Grade 12)
Rutendo	17	Form Five (Grade 12)
Lindiwe	16	Form Five (Grade 12)
Edelin	16	Form Five (Grade 12)
Christine	17	Form Six (Grade 13)
Memory	17	Form Six (Grade 13)
Petronella	17	Form Six (Grade 13)

Outside of school days, the participants lived in communities where child marriage was permissive and still practiced. Thus, their insight about their vulnerability to child marriage practices was envisioned to offer rich data for analysis. Given the nature of the research and the depth of the data generated, 20 participants were sufficient so as not to compromise the

richness of the data (Saunders et al., 2017). Likewise, 20 participants were not so small a number that informational redundancy or theory saturation could occur (Sim et al., 2018; Vasileiou et al., 2018).

#### **4.5.2 Getting to know the participants**

Once the participants were recruited, I spent some time getting to know them. This was done in response to scholars (O'Brien & Dadwell, 2020) who advocate for the creation of safe research environments between the researcher and participants, especially when the study topic is sensitive. The school's management had allocated us one classroom to use for all research activities. At the first engagement with all the participants, I re-introduced myself, including supplying them with relevant details such as the institution I was registered in, and the nature of the research I intended to conduct. Further, I re-emphasised the purpose of the research and the nature of the data generation process. I further explained why they were recruited to participate in the study, and how I would use and protect the data generated. I emphasised their protection, including protecting their identities. Moreover, I emphasised the idea of a safe space where they could participate freely without fear or intimidation. Finally, I assured the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to pull out of the study whenever they wanted to. To further protect the participants, and for the free flow of information, no educator was present or involved throughout the data generation processes. To avoid any miscommunication, and the possibility of my words being lost in translation, all our engagements, including the data generation processes, were conducted in Shona (the local language of the area).

After I had introduced myself, I took the opportunity to ask the participants about their wellbeing and their lives in general. This interaction was lengthy and interesting because the participants were fully engaged and asked me several pertinent questions about education and life at university. A few of the participants were puzzled by the fact that I was not married at my age. They highlighted that, in their communities, girls were expected to get married before or immediately after completing high school. I used this opportunity to explain the context of my research and to respond to all their questions regarding my research, the institution I was registered in, and how it felt to be young and educated. The participants' remarks and their curiosity about further education and training highlighted the fact that they were keen on pursuing an education after high school. However, this was a decision largely made by their

parents. These initial interactions with the participants created a safe space within which we would further engage on the topic of child marriage. Thus, they felt less intimidated to participate in the research (Neeley & Cronley, 2004).

## **4.6 Data Generation**

Informed by the critical paradigm, the study employed a qualitative research approach to examine how adolescent girls from a resource-poor rural community understood and communicated about their vulnerability to child marriage. The study also explored these girls' agencies in addressing child marriage. To generate data, the participants were engaged in FGD and IDI. To get rich data, both IDI and FGD were conducted in Shona, the local language of the area. Using the participant's home language gave them the ability to freely express their perspectives in their own words and from their contextual understandings. I am also a first language Shona speaker, which made it easy to engage with the participants. Both IDI and FGD were digitally recorded using a voice recorder, transcribed verbatim, and later translated into English for analysis.

### **4.6.1 In-depth Interviews**

The first method used to generate data in the study were IDI. These are face-to-face conversations between the researcher and an informant (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). They are qualitative research approaches that aim to extract detailed information from the informants concerning the study being undertaken (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). Furthermore, IDI are used to provide context to the topic under study, and they are significant for obtaining in-depth information on a particular topic (Johnstone, 2017). The advantage of using IDI is that they provide and uncover details of the participants' experiences that would be undisclosed if other data collection methods, such as questionnaires and surveys, were used. Further, IDI are appropriate for eliciting individual experiences and opinions, and for allowing the participants to explain the ways they view particular events, phenomena, and beliefs. The interviews are often semi-structured and the interviewer has open-ended questions that they use to probe during the interview (Allmark et al., 2009; Eppich et al., 2019). Using IDI, I considered the participants in this study as experts about their lives and experiences. My role as the researcher was to learn from their perspectives.



A key reason for using IDI in this study was to allow the participants to share their understanding of their vulnerability to child marriage and to locate this understanding within their contextual frames of reference (Cridland et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2015). The IDI took the form of conversations, where I had a one-on-one discussion with each of the participants. This approach was suitable in making the participants feel comfortable, and for sharing their perspectives openly outside of possible intimidation from a group context (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Thus, using IDI provided a conducive environment for participants to share their perspectives. I came to the study site armed with open-ended questions that were written down on a notepad. These questions became my guide for probing the participants about their perspectives regarding their vulnerability to child marriage. This allowed for a naturally free flow of information. I did not pressure the participants to give perfect answers but I used open-ended questions to probe them. I allowed participants to be interactive and to share as much as they could. Moreover, as mentioned above, IDI created a sense of safety for participants to openly share their views and understanding of the topic of child marriage (Taylors et al., 2015). Thus, I asked them to choose where I could conduct the interview. Since we had been allocated a classroom, all participants preferred to sit outside the classroom, where all the interviews were held. Interview data was generated in February 2021. To respond to the research questions that the study addressed, I probed around two key areas. First, I probed the participants about their understanding of child marriage practices and their vulnerability to this practice within the context of their resource-poor rural community. Second, I probed about their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage. Each in-depth interview lasted approximately one-hour long.

#### **a. The Process of Generating Data using In-depth Interviews**

Due to time constraints, mainly because participants had to attend classes and write assessments, I conducted interviews either after school hours in the afternoon or over the weekends. The after-school engagements only gave me a time frame of two hours to engage with each participant before they had to go commit to other school activities in their boarding facilities. I, therefore, conducted two in-depth interviews per day. Overall, 20 IDI were undertaken over ten days. Indeed, before each interview, I allowed the participants to select a place/space where they wanted to be interviewed and where they felt most comfortable. As I noted above, all the participants chose to sit outside the allocated research classroom, as they

preferred a different setting than their daily classroom setting. To begin each interview, I asked the participants about their well-being and probed around the living conditions in their community. I then asked them to share their perspectives on child marriage practices in their rural socio-cultural geographical contexts. Next, I invited them to reflect on their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage. The participants openly shared their views and highlighted examples of child marriage cases that had occurred in their schools and communities, and the courses of action that were taken. The participants did not struggle with the topic. Rather, they expressed their concerns on the alarming rate of girls they knew who were getting married early due to reasons that included economic instability at home, peer pressure, and family and community persuasion. Their main concern was the failure of law enforcement to address the problem of child marriage in their communities. I discuss findings in the next two chapters.

#### **4.7.2 Focus Group Discussions**

The second set of data was generated using FDG (Hennink, 2013). FGD are used by researchers to identify a wide range of collective perspectives from participants since the method elicits group opinion (Nyumba et al., 2018). They are structured conversations between a group of individuals that are selected by researchers to discuss and comment from personal viewpoints on a topic that is the subject of a research project (Johnstone, 2017). The researcher facilitates the discussion by asking participants to respond to open-ended questions (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Thus, FGD seeks to expose underlying attitudes and beliefs about a topic under investigation. This technique is used when existing knowledge is inadequate, in which this approach fills in the gap and allows the researcher to access a broad range of views from the participants in a short period (Gammie et al., 2017). FGD usually comprises four to ten participants and often involves more than one group session, which allows the researcher to capture adequate information on the topic under study (Guest et al., 2017).

I used FGD in a group setting with the participants because I had envisioned that this approach would encourage them to comment about their collective perspectives and attitudes regarding vulnerability to child marriage practices in their rural settings. This process further encouraged participants to engage one another in the group setting. Moreover, I approached this phase of the research armed with the knowledge that participants tend to engage fully when surrounded by others who share similar viewpoints and experiences (Levinson, 2017). FGD was therefore

useful for generating collective sentiments from the participants to complement the richness of the in-depth interviews. In other words, FGD used together with the interviews, gave a sort of data triangulation (Hennink, 2013). I reflect on this aspect of the research in Chapter Seven.

#### **b. The Process of Generating Data through the use of FGD**

FGD took the form of unstructured conversations between myself and the participants. In these discussions, I assumed the role of a facilitator. In total, four FGD, encompassing five adolescent girls in each group, were conducted. FGD constituted girls who attended different grades in the school. This helped me to obtain varying perspectives. It also allowed me to acquire information that is not redundant but has different opinions put across. I conducted one FGD per day. Overall, I completed all FGD over one week. This also allowed me time to go back to the participants when I needed clarity on certain concepts or emerging issues. To avoid taking too much time from the participants' school engagements, I limited my FGD to one per day. The FGD were conducted after school hours in a classroom. This allowed privacy among myself and the participants. We occupied an empty classroom and sat around a desk and I welcomed everyone. I introduced an icebreaker activity to create a cordial environment for free speech and less intimidation (Norris, 2017). After the ice breaker, I reminded everyone of the research objectives and research questions that I intended to address. I re-emphasised the issue of confidentiality among themselves as the participants and between them and myself. In particular, I emphasised values such as mutual respect, empathy, and non-judgmental attitudes. This was to ensure that they remembered all ethical considerations that guided the research. The FGD started with the participants being asked to comment on their views about child marriages practices. Each FGD was approximately one-hour long.

There is a possibility that some meanings contained in both IDI and FGD data may have been lost in translation during transcription. For example, I recognise the possibility that the participants' views, narratives, and descriptions might have been lost or distorted in the translation process. To mitigate this possibility, I listened to the original audio recordings several times and re-read the transcripts to make sure that I had captured the participants' narratives as accurately as possible. Moreover, I am fluent in Shona, the language used to generate data, thus the analysis of transcripts relied heavily on my translation. At the end of

each session, I thanked the participants for their willingness to participate and engage in the research.

#### **4.8 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is aimed at making meaning from the overwhelming data that is collected from the fieldwork. The data is transformed into substantive and actionable conclusions (Raskind et al., 2019). Large amounts of data were generated from both the IDI and FGD engagements. To manage this voluminous amount of information, I organised the data by saving them into small and manageable chunks for easy access. All the data were digitised and stored electronically. I started by creating folders inside a universal serial bus (USB) device. I labelled each folder according to each of the research methods I had used for generating data (i.e., IDI and FGD) and saved each dataset into its respective folder. I also created a Google Drive file to store all the data as a backup for safekeeping. I further saved all transcriptions in these folders.

Transcribed data were useful for the analysis phases.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis; a method that helps researchers to identify and report patterns within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Raskind et al., 2019). Specifically, thematic analysis is the process of identifying, analysing, and reporting themes that emerge from a dataset (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). When conducting thematic analysis, the researcher becomes the instrument for analysis, making judgments about the coding, theming, decontextualising, and recontextualising of the data. Thematic analysis helps summarise key features of large data sets. It further provides a flexible and valuable research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used thematic analysis to search for common themes that emerged from the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). To fully capture the participants' perspectives about how they understood their vulnerability to, as well as their agency in addressing child marriage, I had to pay full attention to the details in the generated data and become familiar with it. Since I was the primary researcher in the study, I was present in all the data generation processes. I also transcribed and translated data from the recorded audio. All these phases helped me to become well acquainted with the data.

In analysing data for this study, I was guided by Braun and Clark's (2006) six phases of analysis. To fully understand the perspectives of the participants, as the primary researcher, I

had to fully immerse myself in the data and familiarise myself with it. I organised the data generated, by gathering all audio files and transcribing them to textual data (Mack et al., 2005), then I translated them from Shona to English. The transcription and translation of data served as an opportunity for me to further familiarise myself with the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This process helped me to take note of the ideas that were described by the participants.

To find recurring themes from the data, I extracted rough phrases from the transcripts. These phrases carried significant meaning towards the research topic. Secondly, I extracted key phrases and statements that emerged from the data that addressed the research questions. Further, I generated categories from the data to formulate themes that were prominent in the data. For example, I extracted phrases such as “*we are confined in rural areas where there is limited freedom and no exposure to technology*” or “*there are limited employment opportunities in rural areas, so some girls from poor families end up getting married to be taken care of by their husbands who have money*”. By doing a close reading of the data, the phrases (such as the ones cited above), for example, became relevant for the analysis of the data, which addressed the first research question: *How do adolescent girls living in a resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe understand and communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage practices?* I followed a similar approach to analyse data which addressed the second research question.

Throughout my analysis, I identified and highlighted keywords, concepts, statements, and phrases that kept emerging from the rough phrases. For example, if the word “*rurality*” or the words “*poverty/poor*” appeared several times, I highlighted the word as a keyword. The process of identifying keywords, phrases, and statements as well as highlighting themes enabled me to create a narrative of the participants' perspectives about their vulnerability to child marriage. This process also allowed me to narrow down the ideas/keywords that were emerging from the data.

To identify key themes, I used the keywords and phrases I had highlighted. This process entailed identifying and naming themes which enabled me to create an insightful and in-depth narrative of the participants' perspectives from the data generated. I ensured that each emerging theme corresponded accurately with the participants' descriptions of their experiences by frequently reverting to the confirmation and clarification of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

Finally, I used existing literature, the conceptual framework, and the theoretical framework to guide analysis in this study. I discuss the study findings in the following two chapters (Chapter Five and Chapter Six). This process provided a linkage between the analytic narrative and themes extracted from the data.

#### **4.9 Ensuring Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the confidence that the findings are plausible and reliable (Petty, Thomson & Stew, 2012). This study ensured trustworthiness through data and method triangulation (Abdalla et al., 2018; Flick, 2018). In the study, I used two research approaches to generate data (namely, IDI and FGD). Using these approaches helped with the verification of the findings (Nowell et al., 2017). As the primary researcher, I was present when the data was generated, the time spent in the research site is considered good practice in qualitative research because it improves trustworthiness in the study (Abdalla et al., 2018). Being in the research site assisted me to observe the community in which the participants resided and being able to note that their descriptions of the living conditions were not different from the way they lived. Being able to communicate and be with participants allowed them to be comfortable around me, which resulted in the participants not changing their behaviours.

#### **4.10 Ethical Consideration**

Considering the sensitive nature of the topic under study (vulnerability to child marriage) and the participants involved (adolescent girls), ethical issues emerged that had to be mitigated. To conduct ethically sound research and protect the rights of the participants there were ethical steps I followed. First, ethical clearance to conduct this research was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Protocol number: HSSREC/00000916/2019) (Appendix A). Second, I sought gatekeeper approval and informed consent from all the research stakeholders. To obtain gatekeeper approval, I approached the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development of Manicaland Province (Appendix B) and the Ministry of Education in Nyanga Rural District in Zimbabwe (Appendix C), who permitted me to pursue the research. The participants in the study were minors between 12 and 17 years old, which meant that full written consent for their participation was requested and obtained from their caregivers.

Following this, the participants themselves gave written assent for their participation in the study (Appendix E). To ensure that the research was ethically sound, the participants and all gatekeepers, including the participants' caregivers, received sufficient information about the objectives of the study. I further informed the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, to protect their identities, I have used pseudonyms throughout this dissertation.

#### **4. 11 Synthesis**

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology employed in the study, and the research approaches used for generating data. I also provided details of the study site and context, the participants, their recruitment procedure, data generation processes, and the data analysis strategy that I employed. Finally, I addressed questions about trustworthiness and ethical considerations in the study.

In the next chapter, I present findings in response to the first research question: *How do adolescent girls living in a resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe understand and communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage practices?*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ADOLESCENT GIRLS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR VULNERABILITY TO MARRIAGE IN A RESOURCE-POOR RURAL COMMUNITY

#### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described the research design, the methodology, and the research approach used for generating data in the study. In this chapter, I present findings that addressed the first research question: *How do adolescent girls living in a resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe understand and communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage practices?* I respond to the second research question in Chapter Six. In this chapter, I discuss how 20 adolescent girls from a resource-poor rural community understood and spoke about their vulnerability to child marriage. Analysis revealed two central themes which addressed the first critical research question. That is, how rurality and poverty played a significant role in the creation of adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage. I expand on these themes in the sections that follow.

#### 5.2. Rural Sociocultural Norms and Adolescent Girls' Vulnerability to Marriage

How did the adolescent girls in this study understand and communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage from the vantage point of their resource-poor rural community? In essence, the participants understood their vulnerability to child marriage as a phenomenon that is embedded in their rural socio-economic, environmental, and cultural contexts. They spoke of rurality as a major factor in making them vulnerable. Things such as a lack of resources (for example information technology, access to social media), poverty, as well as socio-cultural and religious beliefs/norms were important factors that the participants cited in response to the first research posed in this study. In this major theme, I draw on notions of rurality as a significant aspect in rendering adolescent girls vulnerable to early marriage.

##### 5.2.1 The *Adultification* of Rural Adolescent Girls

According to the participants, their vulnerability to child marriage was rooted in the complex matrix of socio-cultural norms and practices in their rural community. These norms and



practices constructed child marriage as something acceptable, and which girls had to aspire to (Lal, 2015; Parsons et al., 2015). Among these norms was the *adultification* of adolescent girls. According to Burton (2007), *adultification* is a process that involves the incorporation of contextual, social, and developmental processes where children and adolescents are often prematurely or inappropriately exposed to adult knowledge, or are expected, or assigned to take on one or multiple adult roles and responsibilities within their families and communities. In this study, adolescent girls cited marriage as one of the ways they were *adultified*.

*Often girls are married early sometimes to older men so that they may have financial security, this is common in poor families, that have limited resources and do not value education. Girls are forced to drop out of school and become wives.* (Lindiwe, 16 years, IDI, 23 February 2021).

Epstein et al., (2017) argue that *adultification* is a socialisation process in which children function at a more mature developmental stage because of situational contexts and necessity, especially in poorly resource communities. Becoming a wife thus moves adolescent girls from being seen as children to being seen as adults. *Adultification* is often interwoven with household strains and premature adoptions of adult roles that girls are not prepared for, such as caregiving (Kennedy et al., 2010; Schmitz & Tyler, 2016). Another participant highlighted the following:

*Girls get married in polygamous marriages and assume most of the domestic roles that are often too straining. girls that are married early take on responsibilities that they are not ready for such as giving birth* (Princess, 16 years, Form Five, IDI, 23 February 2021).

Within the context of this study, child marriage is one of the manifestations of the *adultification* of rural adolescent girls. There are gendered attributes to the action of *adultifying* children. For example, American gender scholar, Monique W. Morris (2015), in her ground-breaking book titled *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, argues that it is girls who are positioned within hegemonic notions of *adultification*. In the converse, boys do not receive this sort of pressure, and they are expected to live out their childhood as ‘children’ (Morris, 2015). Epstein et al., (2017) also highlight *adultification* as a burden that befalls black girls exclusively (participants in this study were black adolescent girls). This suggests that the act of *adultification* of children is both gendered and racialised, with black adolescent girls located at

the receiving end of this process. In line with the available literature (Morris, 2015, Epstein et al., 2017), findings in this study suggest that black rural adolescent girls are likened more to adults than to children. This was highlighted by 14-year-old Kundai who had the following to say:

*There are names that one is given when they become a teenager, such as 'tete vemusha' (aunty or ancestor of the house). This indicates that you are too old to not have been married, and no one will love you and marry you. These words are very hurtful to us and they are disrespectful (Kudzai, 14 years, Form Three, FGD, 10 February 2021).*

This form of socialisation typically occurs from the onset of puberty as girls are expected to engage in so-called adult-centric behaviours (Alison et al., 2021; Walinga & Stangor, 2014). Further, through *adultification*, some expectations are placed on girls that characterise them as developmentally older (Hlass, 2019). For example, adolescent girls who are married early assume roles of motherhood, wifhood, and caregivers (Watson, 2018, Beguy & Ndugwa, 2013). These are roles they are not fully prepared to undertake (Mumah et al., 2020; Choi, 2018). Often, these roles are imposed on girls without their consent.

*Most girls are influenced by their surroundings especially from the church that sometimes encourages them to marry older men and have a family. It is often difficult to refuse especially for those that are orphans, they are often told that they are being protected, even if they do not and to get married their options are limited so they get married anyway (Nobuhle, 12 years, Form Three, FGD, 10 February 2021).*

As illustrated below, participants referred to attitudes, norms, and utterances that fueled the process of their *adultification* in their households and communities. For example, they suggested that adolescent girls' marriageability was tied to their age; meaning that the older a girl becomes the less likely that she will be marriage desirable. These sentiments were shared in the same FGD where Kudzai, above, was cited. Generally, during this FGD participants lamented on how girls are name-called or bullied in their families and community if they are not married at a certain age in their adolescence.

*If you do not get married, they say that since no one will marry you, it is better for the girl to harbour ancestral spirit, because if you are not married you are not valued.*

*Marriage is held in high regard in our community, it is seen as a good thing (Edeline, 16, Form Five, FGD, 10 February 2021).*

*Once your body starts developing and your breasts start showing, people start commenting that you are ripe for marriage. They say that if you don't get married early no one will love you (Princess, 16 years, IDI, 4 February 2021).*

Curry & Chaote (2010) note that young girls are exposed to sexualised ideas that portray and determine how they should behave. Thus, in the context of the community where this research was undertaken, the participants highlighted that girls marrying early was common, high, and desirable not only in their families but among girls too. Participants cited the desire to get married as an important step towards avoiding shame and stigma and becoming adults. The expectation was that girls needed to be married early lest they become older and not desirable to their prospective male partners (Sheehan, 2019). This put pressure on the participants, which was highlighted by 15-year-old Edna:

*It is difficult for us girls, once you reach puberty elders start asking you when are you getting married? They emphasise that a girl cannot stay unmarried, “zvinonyadzisa” (it is shameful). In some cases, other girls just elope to stay with their boyfriends to avoid the stigma (Edna, 15 years, FGD, 12 February 2021).*

It seems that age and not developmental maturity was an important socio-cultural determinant of marriageability for girls in this rural community. The norm and expectation were those adolescent girls needed to be married even though they were still in a childhood stage of development. The use of derogatory terms such as ‘*tete vemusha*’ signifies the *adulthood* of girls in this community. It highlights an aspect of respect and visibility within the community only when a girl is married. The term ‘*tete vemusha*’ (ancestor of the house) highlights how pressure is often exerted on adolescent girls and the bad connotations that come with it. This term is usually used to refer to an older person who has no purpose and all they can do is to protect the household. In this context, participants suggested that their communities considered unmarried girls as having no purpose. This reveals the gendered discrimination experienced by adolescent girls, whose social standing is often linked to their marital status. This also reveals how gender roles and expectations are socially constructed to work against girls. The social norms theory highlights how such social expectations exert a strong influence on how

individuals behave (Cislaghi et al., 2019). For example, the derogatory terms that are uttered to adolescents' pressure them to desire early marriage as a way to avoid any humiliation. Further, social norms theory highlights that individuals comply with social norms despite the consequences so that they can have a sense of belonging and identity while avoiding being social outcasts.

*If you are beyond 21 years old, you are often told that no one will love and marry you. So, girls want to marry early to avoid humiliation. In the community, some believe that if you do not get married early, since no one will love you, ancestral spirits should be put in you, this indicates that if you are not married you have no purpose (Memory, 16 years, Form Six, FGD, 12 February 2021).*

*Once you reach a certain age, for example, 21 years, you are labeled 'tete vemusha' (the aunt of the house). This statement refers to an old woman who has never been married. Such a statement has pushed a lot of girls to get married to men they do not love, but rather they get married than be called hurtful words (Christine, 16 years, FGD, 11 February 2021).*

*It is difficult for most of us. You cannot go beyond the age of 21 without getting married. You will be told that you are old, and no one will marry you, so many girls marry early to avoid shame (Petronella, 17 years, Form Six, FGD, 11 February 2021)*

Through the *adultification* of rural girls comes the erasure of their childhoods. *Adultification* robs girls the very essence of what makes childhood distinct from all other developmental periods (Chen, 2015). Available literature suggests that the process of *adultification* of girls is often taxing, and fuels psychological strain as girls struggle to cope with the burden of greater responsibilities they are assigned (Hussain, 2020; Schmitz & Tyler, 2016). Through *adultification*, rural girls are condemned to powerlessness, poor personal development, and a high risk of physical and mental illnesses (Heidari & Dastgiri, 2020). More so, as Crann (2021) argues, *adultification* results in some girls not being allowed to make common childhood mistakes, or to learn, grow, and benefit from correction for youthful missteps. Such burdens on girls take away their growth and development.

The findings under this sub-theme point to the socialisation of rural girls into bridal aspirations. For example, rural girls in the community I studied were reared early to take up marital (domestic) roles. These findings affirm available studies. For example, Ramanaik et al., (2018) argue that rural girls are expected to do domestic chores and to take on caring responsibilities in their households. As discussed in Chapter Two, the findings further suggest that adolescent girls' lives are centred around heteropatriarchal beliefs and attitudes regarding female desirability and marriageability. Smith (2016) argues that heterosexual men are assumed to have power and legitimacy over women and girls. Thus, how gender and sexuality are performed across social interactions is shaped by heteropatriarchy and the institutions (such as marriage) that it governs. The *adultification* of adolescent girls in the context of this study is thus a symptom of heteropatriarchal ideals that see girls as marriage-worthy (Singh & Vennam, 2016).

### **5.2.2 Religion, Gender Norms, and Girls' Vulnerability to Child Marriage**

Tied to the *adultification* of adolescent girls were religious beliefs and practices that governed everyday life. Attitudes towards and messages about the acceptability of girls' early marriage were rooted in hegemonic religious beliefs. In turn, these beliefs were tied to the heteropatriarchy that was prevalent in this rural area. Religious beliefs around girls' sexuality, their sexual conduct, and marriageability dominated conversations with the adolescent participants in this study. According to the participants, religious beliefs played a central role in shaping how they behaved and how they perceived child marriage. For example, the churches they attended did not approve of sexual activity before marriage. In instances where girls had sexual intercourse before marriage, they were coerced into marrying their sexual partners.

*In our church sexual intercourse before marriage is not permitted. It is believed that once a girl and boy have sex, they have to get married. Sex, before you get married as a girl, is not allowed. Some girls in the church have sexual intercourse with older men, so they end up marrying them (Kudzai, 12 years, Form Two, IDI, 19 February 2021).*

*In the church, we are told to stay pure (not to engage in any sexual relations). The elders in the church always say that if a girl sleeps around (i.e. have sex with multiple*

*men or boys) she is not desirable and might not find a man willing to marry her* (Memory, 17 years, Form Six, IDI, 22 February 2021).

Indeed, these messages on unmarried girls' sexual purity were gendered. They were targeted only at girls and not their male counterparts. This suggests that the pressure to have girls married (and their vulnerability to child marriage) at a young age is tied to religious beliefs around virginity and sexual purity. Out of fear that girls might engage in premarital sexual activities, adults used religion as a stepping-stone for canvassing a gendered type of moral behaviour; that is to get girls married early. Consequently, child marriage becomes something that is a norm and a reward for 'good' girls who manage to stay pure. Msuya (2020) argues that moral and religious beliefs in rural communities often justify the early marriage of adolescent girls. In some instances, parents marry their daughters to prevent them from engaging in any form of sexual behaviour (Human Rights Watch, 2015); an act that goes against religious standards. This notion is justified by the need to promote purity and good behaviour, which are both embedded in religious beliefs about girls' sexuality (Azizi et al., 2021).

A rather surprising finding for me was that adolescent girls were also pressured to marry older men. According to the participants, these men were often religious leaders from their churches. In several instances, participants reported that adolescent girls married their older male church leaders. These arranged marriages were done in response to prophecies that were encountered by certain religious leaders. For example, as Thelma (cited below) noted, marriages occurred in response to prophetic dreams that a church leader would have. In these prophetic dreams, the holy spirit directs a male church leader to marry an adolescent girl from his church. Thus, at the command of the holy spirit, girls are expected to accept this marriage proposal without question. Moreover, church congregants do not object to these marriages. The following extracts demonstrate:

*In the Apostolic Church, often girls marry the leaders of the church, especially the prophet. There is a loose saying called 'ndarota ndinewe' (I had a dream of being married to you). Often prophets/leaders of the church use this phrase to marry girls, arguing that he is being guided by the holy spirit to identify his wife* (Thelma, 15 years, Form Four, FGD, 13 February 2021).

*This is very common. When a leader in the church says he dreamt of marrying a girl, the girl will marry him no matter how young she is. Often, the church congregation does not object, because they believe the prophet will protect the girl and there will not be any promiscuity (Mellisa, 14 years, Form Four, FGD, 13 February 2021).*

Gender inequality, religion, and heteropatriarchy culminated in such a way that these prophetic marriages went unquestioned and were accepted without opposition. Strikingly, it was only older men (especially those in positions of power) who received prophetic dreams about marrying adolescent girls. Older women, and girls, in particular, did not receive these dreams. It is also noteworthy that prophetic dreams occurred among men with power in the church. This suggests that child marriage is not only facilitated through heteropatriarchal religious beliefs, but also further sustained through gender power. In other words, the vulnerability of adolescent girls to child marriage emerges from a merger of traditional religious beliefs, male power, and gender inequality. In this way, adolescent girls are objects of male power, where the decision to get married is a privilege only afforded to men. Feminists have long criticised the institution of marriage as a fundamental site of female oppression, where girls/women have no independence, voice, and human rights (Dobbins Baxter & Nev, 2018; Farooq, 2020). The findings in this study affirm feminist proclamations regarding girls' vulnerability to early marriage.

Concerning these findings, Zimunya and Gwara (2019) argue that religious leaders have influence over their congregants and sometimes they abuse the authority they have. These scholars report a case of one local prophet in a rural Zimbabwean community who was arrested for multiple accounts of the rape of girls in his church. According to these authors, the prophet, in his defense, claimed that “he had not raped the girls in question, but was just following the will of the spirit, which directed him to ‘heal’ the girls in a sexual way” (Zimunya & Gwara, 2019. P. 117). According to Maguranyanga (2011), gendered religious doctrines continue to exert influence on the behaviour of women and adolescent girls in rural Zimbabwe. These doctrines also pressure girls to marry early in response to prophetic dreams by church leaders (see also, Chamisa et al., 2019).

Besides religion, prevailing gender norms and beliefs in the community also heightened adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage. According to the participants, as adolescent

girls, they were constantly bombarded with messages about marriage being a passageway into a respectable life (see also, Susanti et al., 2018; Cleuziou, 2019). Participants reported unwanted comments about getting married. These comments came from adults in their families and the greater community. According to the participants, once physical signs of puberty emerged, girls were constantly flooded with verbal comments about preparing for marriage. What is more, as reported by Christine (cited below), once girls reach puberty, they were discouraged from attending school. Instead, they were encouraged to find a suitable partner for marital purposes. The following two extracts illustrate:

*Within the community, once you start developing breasts, and your body starts to mature, you receive comments that sometimes make you feel uncomfortable. For example, bus conductors will start shouting that, you are now ripe and ready for marriage, go and find a husband. This is quite upsetting (Tendai, 12 years, Form Two, FGD, 13 February 2021).*

*Sometimes even our grandmothers ask when are we getting married? and always reminds us that a girl should not spend a lot of time in school because she will fail to find a suitor to marry her. They always ask “ndiani anoda kuroora chembere?” (who wants to marry an old lady?) (Christine, 17 years, Form Six, IDI, 24 February 2021).*

These findings are in line with available literature. For example, in one study in a rural community in Indonesia, researchers found that girls were constantly pressured to get married (Kartika et al., 2021). Moreover, adolescent girls as young as 15 years old were often encouraged by their adult family members and other people in the community to get married early (Kartika et al., 2021). In an earlier study In Indonesia, girls were frequently asked about when they intended to get married (Tatira, 2016). The literature and findings from this study suggest that adolescent girls are reared in their families to become brides. Indeed, the onset of puberty rendered girls vulnerable to child marriage.

Since the community I studied was heteropatriarchal, the participants reported that they were discouraged from voicing their opinions or even questioning their families' decision to have girls married early. The participants spoke about their difficulty in confronting the adults in their lives. This made it difficult to resist early marriage. The gendered ideas about respect, obedience, and listening were enforced on adolescent girls. Ironically, girls were *adultified*



whenever the decision to get married submerged, yet they were treated like children when they questioned or opposed the marriage. In other words, adolescent girls were expected to accept marriage completely, and accept the roles and responsibilities that are imposed on them through marriage. In instances where they opposed the marriage, participants reported that they were socially sanctioned, punished, and even chased out of their homes. Audrey and Edna, below, clarified:

*It is difficult for girls to speak up, especially when talking to adults. Girls are always told that they should be respectful and listen to what they are told by adults. It is difficult to go against an adult as you might get a punishment or be chased away from the homestead (Audrey, 15 years, Form Four, FGD, 12 February 2021).*

*One of the major problem we face as girls is that our fathers are the ones that make decisions and their decision is final. In some instances, mothers or aunts within the family may try to persuade the father to consider their decisions but sometimes they fail (Edna 15 years, Form Three, FGD, 13 February 2021).*

These findings illustrate the coming together of heteropatriarchy, gender norms, and religion in rendering adolescent girls vulnerable to child marriage. These beliefs and institutions hold a tight grip on the lives of girls and dictate how and when they can do certain things, such as getting married. In this study, perilous gender norms that emanated from the system of heteropatriarchy, compounded by the institution of religion, pressured girls into early marriage. Moreover, religious leaders as well as other adults in the community and adolescent girls' homes pressured girls into desiring marriage. In this regard, the choice to marry was relegated to people other than the girls in question. This means that the intertwined relationship that exists between heteropatriarchy, religion, and culture reduced adolescent girls into bystander roles regarding their sexuality and other important aspects that shape their lives such as marriage. The constant messages for adolescent girls to marry early takes away their freedom of choice, robs them of their childhood, and pushes them into early wifehood. What is worrying is that push factors such as heteropatriarchy, religion, and prevailing gender norms continue to shape the day-to-day lives of adolescent girls.

### **5.3 Gender, Poverty and Child Marriage in a Rural Community**

In this theme, I draw on participants' understanding of their vulnerability to child marriage as a product of their gender identities and the poverty that was embedded in their families and communities. According to Gaidzanwa (2019), poverty emanates when people lack access to essential services such as health, food, shelter, any form of development, or a decent living. As discussed in previous chapters, the study reported in this dissertation was located in a rural community that was characterised by poverty. Thus, poor economic conditions played a significant role in contributing to the susceptibility of adolescents to child marriage practices. As discussed in Chapter Two, poverty is one of the drivers of child marriage, especially in rural communities and households (Malhotra, 2012; Paul, 2019). Available literature shows that girls from impoverished households are more likely to get married early when compared to those from more affluent households (UNFPA, Amoo, 2017; 2018; Sayi & Sibanda, 2018; Abu Hamad et al., 2020; Kumala Dewi & Dartanto, 2019). Therefore, child marriages are seen as means for financial gain and for escaping poverty (Nyandoro & Hatti, 2019).

#### **5.3.1. Marriage for Escaping Individual and Household Poverty**

In resonance with available literature (Ahonsi, 2019; Paul, 2020, Psaki et al., 2021), the participants in this study cited poverty as an important driver of adolescent girls to marry early. In this context, child marriage was a means to escape from poverty. In other words, as revealed in the extracts below, marriage was perceived to offer adolescent girls financial and material security.

*When one comes from a poor family, and they lack essentials if there is a man that can afford or offers such goods it is better to marry that person so he can continue to provide the necessities that girls do not receive at home (Rejoice, 12 years, Form Two, IDI, 4 February 2021).*

*There is a belief that once a girl is married, her husband will provide for her and she can get anything she wants to eat or drink without being questioned. This is because the husband has got money, so if a girl is married to someone who has money she can afford to buy anything and she will be well taken care of (Tatenda, 13 years, Form three, IDI, 6 February 2021).*

*Most parents are struggling to support their children financially because they do not have jobs, some are vendors and their incomes are not stable. Parents fail to pay school fees for their children and, provide adequate food. Girls often date or sleep with touts (bus conductors) or blessers (rich older men) so that they can marry them or give them money to buy food, clothes, and even cell phones (Tendai, 12 years, Form two, IDI, 6 February 2021).*

*Girls sometimes are forced to marry men that give them money. Often you cannot say no to having sex because you already spent his money (regarding blessers who will be demanding unprotected sex). Once you fall pregnant it becomes difficult to stay at home, one is forced to marry the man so he can take care of his wife and the child (Nobuhle, 14 years, Form three, FGD, 10 February).*

The gendered nature of poverty in rural communities makes marriage a viable option for adolescent girls to escape systemic poverty. In this regard, poverty is gendered because it is girls who are pressured to find the means to escape it. This burden is seldom placed on the lives of boys (Kumala, Dewi & Dartanto, 2019). Moreover, tied to heteropatriarchy, and the knowledge that adolescent girls are both sexualised and objectified (Du Plooy & Coetzee, 2018; Amankavicitse & Pringle, 2021), girls shoulder the responsibility to alleviate their poverty by offering themselves to the institution of marriage. These findings may also affirm the idea that in poor households, girls are perceived as a financial burden. Thus, they engage in intergenerational sex with the hope of getting married to their sexual partners to unburden their families from poverty and the responsibility of catering to the needs of adolescent girls. Indeed, the literature reviewed in Chapter Two revealed that adolescent girls are regarded as an expense and a burden in their poor rural households. This fact might render adolescent girls vulnerable to unsafe sexual practices with older men as well as early marriage (Stark, 2018; Irani & Latifnejad Roudsari, 2019). Similar findings are shared by Tsekpo et al. (2016) who report that girls in their study in rural South Africa were lured into early marriage with older male partners with the hope that they (girls) will be well catered for financially. Findings suggest that the participants held the misconception that marriage ends poverty among adolescent girls. Chenge and Maunganidze (2017) refute these misconceptions. Rather, these scholars argue child marriage reinforces poverty for girls as they are denied economic opportunities such as completing school and finding meaningful employment (see also, Musiiwa, 2018; Msuya, 2020; Rembe et al, 2011).

Besides adolescent girls perceiving marriage as a means to escape their poverty, participants suggested that their families also used child marriage to escape broader household poverty. The participants lamented how families pushed girls into early marriage to curb household poverty. In essence, the thinking in this regard was that limited household resources could be spared if girls got married and lived with their marital families. In the rural community I studied, participants suggested that adolescent girls were sent to get married to gain monetary incentives. For example, Linah, spoke of instances where poor families sought financial assistance from the more well-off families in exchange for a girl's hand in marriage.

*Poor families often seek assistance from anyone who can afford it in form of money or livestock, and in return family members pay back or thank them by marrying off their daughters to the family that gave them money or livestock. This is a practice that we are told has been in existence for a long time (Linah, 13 years, Form three, IDI, 17 February 2021).*

*Girls from poor families get married early as a means of survival. Families that often fail to provide for their children marry off their daughters, in exchange for money, food such as maize, and other necessities. This usually lessens the burden as the girl gets taken care of by her husband (Lindiwe, 16 years, Form Five, IDI, 17 February 2021).*

Yet, as Thelma noted, some poor families encourage their adolescent girls to get married to secure the girl a better livelihood.

*Within the community some families are poor, so if a girl has a boyfriend that has money, parents or family members encourage her to get married, because the boyfriend will be able to provide for her (Thelma, 15 years, Form Four, IDI, 18 February 2021).*

These findings are in line with available literature. For example, Abu Hamad et al., (2021) reports that in poor rural households the child marriage of adolescent girls is considered an important step towards escaping poverty. These findings suggest that the blending of poverty and gender influences the vulnerability of girls to child marriage practices. Scholars attest to the claim that poverty has led families to the belief that child marriages are a means to escape poverty (Ahonsi et al., 2019; Nour, 2009; Paul, 2019; Singh & Vennam, 2016). It seems that girls too share in the belief that early marriage will help them escape poverty and provide essential economic and material security.

Participants acknowledged that poverty was a daily burden that they faced, which plunged them into perceiving child marriage as desirable. Indeed, Kumala, Dewi & Dartanto (2019) argue that households often cut their expenditure by marrying their daughters and not their sons. Often boys are sent to school or are not regarded as financial burdens. Abu Hamad et al., (2021) affirms this argument by suggesting that parents consider their daughters as an economic burden. This further adds to the argument is seen as a gendered problem whose solution lies in gendered practices such as marrying adolescent girls.

### **5.3.2 Rural Resource Poverty and Girls' Vulnerability to Child Marriage**

The analysis also revealed resource poverty and girls' gender identities merged to create a conducive environment in which child marriage was a possibility. Available literature has also linked resource poverty and the risk of early marriage (Mehra et al., 2018). The participants suggested that those adolescent girls who live in rural communities are vulnerable to child marriage because of a lack of resources, such as internet and social media access. Resource poverty resulted from being confined in a rural community that limited their mobility and exposure to experiences outside the borders of their community. Moreover, human rights education as well as information about the dangers of child marriage were cited as other factors that made rural adolescent girls vulnerable to child marriage. The following extracts illuminate.

*We are confined in rural areas where there is limited freedom or new experiences. We do not have exposure or access to the internet. We also do not have access to media which can teach us the disadvantages of child marriage. That is why as girls we are easily taken advantage of because of lack of adequate information about our rights (Chipo, 15 years, Form Five, FGD, 13 February 2021).*

*In rural areas, we lack adequate teachings on human rights and the dangers of child marriage. There is also limited access to information as to what is happening in other countries around the world (Tinotenda, 13, form three, IDI, 18 February 2021).*

*In our community, we do not have enough information on certain laws despite the information we are told by organisations that do campaigns within the community. Due to limited exposure, often girls are easily taken advantage of because they are not aware*

*of their rights and cannot protect themselves* (Memory, 16 years, form six, IDI, 19 February 2021).

Available literature affirms what the participants reported in this research. For example, Moletsane and Ntombela (2011) report that rurality is associated with resource poverty and isolation; both of which add to gender inequality that renders girls vulnerable to early marriage. In agreement, Mwambene (2018) maintains that child marriage is a symptom of resource poverty in rural communities. Often, girls are the ones that suffer the most as they often have limited resources, skills, and knowledge to access the labour force, which is at most not available in marginalised rural areas. Resource poverty meant that girls in this study had no avenues to access important information about child marriage. They also had no understanding of the protective laws and other legal routes they could leverage to insulate themselves from marriage. In concluding their study, Kartika et al., (2021) argue that the prevalence of child marriages in rural communities emanates from resource poverty in these geographic contexts. Participants highlighted that they were ‘*confined*’ and had ‘*limited freedom*’ in rural communities. This confinement and limitations to their freedom suggest a form of restrictions faced by adolescent girls in terms of accessing protective information and solutions (Ingutia et al., 2020). As I argue in Chapter Six, girlhood restrictions come in the form of limited to no available opportunities for decision-making prospects as well as being denied agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage (Efevbra et al., 2019).

## **5.6 Discussion**

Findings in this chapter suggest that adolescent girls are vulnerable to child marriage. Moreover, the findings suggest that the adolescent girls who participated in this study understood and communicated about their vulnerability to child marriage in several ways. First, their vulnerability was located in rural gender norms that perceived adolescent girls as adults who are ready to get married. The process of *adulthood* denied girls the opportunity to live out their childhoods to the fullest. Rather, even in their upbringing, girls were being prepared for marriage. According to the participants, marriage was perceived as the only way that girls can attain a high social status that makes them respectable in their communities and their households.

Rurality, religion, and dominant social norms also influenced how adolescent girls understood and communicated about their vulnerability to child marriage. Religious beliefs played a role in shaping the behaviours and attitudes that the adolescent participants held towards child marriage. These beliefs influenced the acceptability of early marriage across their social environment, which in turn influenced some girls' desire to marry early. Indeed, through religious norms, girls were denied the opportunity to make decisions about their sexualities, getting married, and the type of partner they wanted to marry. In essence decisions on who and when to marry were made for them largely by their families. Further, the emphasis on girls' sexual purity served as a means to control their sexuality and dictate when they should get married. In the rural community I studied, religious and cultural norms, heteropatriarchy, gender inequality, and its associated perilous gender norms had a gripping power on the lives of adolescent girls. The culmination of these social factors transformed girls into young brides.

Systemic poverty also played a key role in shaping vulnerability to early marriage among adolescent girls in the rural community I studied. Findings suggest that adolescent girls were persuaded into getting married as a means to alleviate both personal and household poverty. In some households, as the participants reported, girls were considered a financial burden. Thus, getting them married at a young age brought the hope that a family would have one less individual to feed and shelter. Combined with existing social norms, poverty in this context is gendered and places enormous pressure on girls. It also works to further reduce girls to objects in their families. Overall, this study provides evidence that adolescent girls in resource-poor rural contexts are made vulnerable to child marriage through an entanglement of several socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural factors.

In the next chapter, I provide a discussion of findings that addressed the second research question: *How do these adolescent girls negotiate their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage?*

## CHAPTER SIX

### ADOLESCENT GIRLS' AGENCY IN ADDRESSING THEIR VULNERABILITY TO CHILD MARRIAGE

#### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed how adolescent girls from a resource-poor rural community understood and communicated about their vulnerability to child marriage. This chapter discusses findings that addressed the second research question: *How do these adolescent girls negotiate their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage?* The discussion in this chapter is organized around three key themes, namely: 1) Rural girlhood in limiting agency against marriage; 2) Parent to child (mis)communication as a barrier towards girls' agency; and 3) Rurality as an impediment in exercising personal agency.

#### 6.2 Rural Girlhood in Limiting Agency against Marriage

Analysis in this study revealed that being a rural adolescent girl limited agency in addressing vulnerability to child marriage. Agency refers to the capacity of an individual to act independently in making their own decisions and choices (Campbell, 2009; Browning et al., 2014; Parag & Janda, 2014). Further, it is the ability to overcome social barriers to confront and question social structures and situations of oppression (McCleary-Sills et al., 2015). Addressing child marriage requires that socio-cultural norms and attitudes be transformed (Bouman et al., 2017). Likewise, those that are made vulnerable to child marriage need to have the capacity to resist early marriage. Yet, analysis in this study suggests that adolescent girls were denied the ability and agency to address their vulnerability to child marriage. Participants felt a sense of powerlessness, defeat, and fear in refusing to get married early. They cited social norms that placed girls at a low social status in their rural areas as an impediment towards resisting or even addressing their vulnerability. For example, 16-year-old Princess noted that:

*I am scared to talk and open up that I am not interested in getting married early. I am scared that there may be fights in the family or I may be cut out from the family. Where will I go if they cut me out?* (Princess, 16 years, Form five, IDI, 4 February 2021).



The fear of neglect and homelessness seems to have been an important factor in limiting Princess' agency to resist child marriage. For her, there was no possibility of escaping this practice as an adolescent girl living in a rural community. Rather, she submitted to the inevitability of early marriage. As I argue throughout this dissertation, social norms that construct girls as social subordinates are a factor in Princess' inability to refuse to get married early. These hegemonic social norms make adolescent girls afraid to express their attitudes towards child marriage. The fear of being cut out from their families and becoming homeless speaks to how rural poverty affects adolescent girls' behaviour around child marriage. That is, it forces them to make impossible choices between getting married early without their consent or facing homelessness.

Other participants, such as 15-year-old Audrey (cited below), made dramatic comparisons between sexual abuse and child marriage. Audrey believed that since nothing was being done to curb sexual violence in her community, then it was unlikely that anything could be done to end child marriage practices. In other words, participants resigned themselves to the inevitability of getting married early even if they did not want to. Moreover, Audrey suggested that refusing to get married landed girls in trouble. Likewise, she suggested that girls struggled to report to local law enforcement when they were forced or coerced into unwanted practices such as marriage because, as Audrey explained, "*no one will believe us*".

*If nothing can be done about sexual abuse, then nothing can be done about child marriage. Saying no to getting married can get you in trouble and you cannot even report. In some instances, as children, we are often forced to do some things we do not like by relatives and we cannot report them because no one will believe us* (Audrey, 15 years, Form four, IDI, 24 February 2021).

The rural community I studied was saturated with messages about girls' fragility in the face of child marriage. Not only was this practice an expectation, but it was also enforced on girls. This made it difficult for adolescent girls to refuse to get married as children. The difficulty in exercising their agency in addressing vulnerability to child marriage was further made complicated by the fact that parents were supportive towards their daughters getting married early. Moreover, these child marriages that adolescent girls were vulnerable to were not considered a problem in their community. Rather, as 16-year-old Lindiwe noted, the community "*just turned a blind eye*" toward adolescent girls' early marriage.

*Some parents allow their children to get married early, it is difficult to go against what your parents decide. Also, community members are not taking the problem of child marriage seriously, they just turn a blind eye. Nothing is done concerning child marriages; it is of no use to talk about it (Lindiwe, 16, form five, IDI, 17 February 2021).*

Other participants reported that girls had no final say in the decision to get married. A recurring attitude by the participants was that, for them, child marriage was something they did not want. However, since they were a marginalised group in their households and communities, they had neither the power nor the means to negotiate their way out of getting married.

*There are organisations within the community that educates girls, but even if we have the knowledge we fail to tell our parents, they do not understand it. Further, not all children have a final say on whom they marry, and parents say organisations will not take care of them, so it is better to get married. So some get married because they are told to get married by either family members or parents even when they do not want to. (Thelma, 15 years, Form four, FGD, 26 February 2021).*

As I discussed in Chapter Three, feminism illuminates how adolescent girls are subjected to the enforcement of passive forms of femininity, which are emphasised through pervasive sociocultural norms that are rooted in heteropatriarchy and other social institutions and belief systems. Within this context, girls have been cast aside in decision-making about their livelihoods (Rembe et al., 2011). Their lives are governed by and through social ideas about what it means to be a girl. In this regard, they are expected to be non-questioning individuals who heed the call to get married. The theoretical framework that informed this study illustrates how gendered sociocultural norms conspire to create an environment where girls are unable to speak out or act against their vulnerability to child marriage. To speak out against and address their vulnerability towards marriage would require girls to have power and authority. Yet, as I argue in this dissertation, girls operate under oppressive conditions that are informed by poverty, gender inequality, heteropatriarchy, and coercive sociocultural norms. The culmination of these factors means that girls are powerless agents in their communities and households.

Available literature affirms the findings in this chapter. For example, Haffejee et al., (2020) argue that in traditional rural communities, when girls voice their opinions about social issues they are considered inappropriate and disrespectful. Likewise, Moletsane (2018) maintains that girls are often silenced in decisions about their wellbeing and livelihoods. Moreover, girls are often met with disapproval when they attempt to exercise their agency against coercive practices (Marcus & Page, 2014). Thus, the findings in this study add to the scholarship that suggests that girls are denied autonomy and agency. While Moletsane (2018) indicates that girls need to play a central role in decision making about issues that affect them such as early marriage, their choices, freedom, and decision making are limited by existing structures, systems, institutions, and prevailing norms in their social environments.

### **6.3 Parent to Child (Mis)communication as a Barrier towards Girls' Agency**

The findings revealed a communication barrier between rural adolescent girls and their parents. These communication barriers were cited as another hindrance for girls to exercise their agency against early marriage. The participants argued that it was difficult for them as girls to communicate with their parents; even more so when the issue of marriage was tabled. They felt that their parents misunderstood and ignored girls' attitudes about marriage. Moreover, when girls tried to communicate their discomfort in getting married, parents often perceived them as rude.

*We struggle to communicate, share, and talk about our problems with our parents and they are not friendly and open to talk, thus we are not comfortable discussing anything about marriage. Also, they do not believe that there can be anything that can bother young girls because we do not have any responsibilities (Kudzai, 12 years, Form two, FGD, 11 February 2021).*

*We are scared to talk to our parents because if you talk about someone abusing you, they do not believe us. Issues concerning marriage are not seen as a problem, so it becomes pointless to discuss those issues (Audrey, 14 years, Form three, FGD, 11 February 2021).*

The participants also cited a lack of confidentiality and safe spaces to address their parents. For example, the participants felt that their parents would discuss girls' unwillingness to marry other members of the community. 15-year-old Chipso elaborated:

*There is a lack of confidentiality to those we confide in like our parents. If you tell them about problems 'vanoudza village rese' (they will tell the whole village). There are no safe spaces to talk about the experience we encounter as girls (Chipo, 15, form four, 13 February 2021).*

The lack of reliable individuals (including their parents) and safe spaces to confidently articulate their unwillingness to marry early left girls feeling hopeless and afraid. A recurring feeling was that girls would get into trouble if they dared communicate their disapproval of child marriage. Thus, the participants felt that it was better to not communicate with their parents as this would get girls into further trouble. Available research supports these findings. For example, Haffejee et al., (2020) argue that parents and other older members of rural communities do not always welcome girls who challenge gender norms and other traditional practices. Gendered social norms, as the participants suggested, left no room for rural girls to negotiate and communicate their desires and express agency in refusing to get married. Within this context, girls are left to the dictates of their parents whom the participants cited as aloof. *No negotiations are done, that is how most adolescents get married young. Often girls fail to negotiate with their parents as they get chased away from their homes and get forced to get married (Petronellah, 17, form six IDI, 25 February 2021).*

*It is scary to tell adults that you do not want to get married, we do not know how they would react, and they might get angry and not talk to us. Talking to adults is very stressful, we fail to understand each other, and adults always say we are disrespectful (Edeline, 16, years, Form six, IDI, 25 February 2021).*

*In our households, parents do not value education, girls are given ultimatums from parents to either get married or drop out of school. There are no questions asked or any discussions heard. Often when you are given such an ultimatum it's a way to tell you it is time to get married (Mellisa, 14, Form four, 26 February 2021).*

These findings highlight the power of social norms that are compounded by gender socialisation in restricting rural adolescent girls' agency to refuse marriage. Taylor et al., (2019) highlighted that social norms regulate girls' acceptable actions. Feminist theories point to the adversarial social statuses that adolescent girls occupy. Because of their low positions

in their families and communities, the adolescent girls in this study found it difficult to communicate and express their needs and choices. Moreover, in instances where they summoned the will to communicate, they were cast aside as rude and disrespectful. This reflects the social norms that conspire to subordinate girls and silence their voices. Further, the theoretical framework illuminates the gender inequality that continually excludes adolescent girls in decision-making processes. The inability of girls to fully exercise their agency is rooted in the system of heteropatriarchal that upholds the submissiveness of girls. Child marriage reflects a notion of gender inequality that is further perpetuated by institutions such as family (Ellsberg et al., 2015). Such institutions play a role in controlling the lives of adolescents; an aspect that was reflected in the authority parents exerted on the lives of girls through encouraging or forcing them into marriage while denying them a space to negotiate their agency.

#### **6.4 Rurality as an Impediment in Exercising Personal Agency**

Rurality and rural norms were also cited as a limiting factor towards adolescent girls' ability to negotiate their agency against child marriage (Cislaghi & Heise, 2018). Participants reported that through rural norms, adolescent girls were expected to marry since this practice was prevalent and unquestioned. As reported in other research (Arafat et al., 2021), the participants found it difficult to go against a practice that is exercised widely in their community. As 12-year-old Rejoice attested, it was hard for girls to oppose a practice that was widespread and accepted across the community.

*In our community, parents marry their children because that is what everyone is doing, it is acceptable no one will question them. It is difficult to be the only one against a practice that is widely accepted within the community (Rejoice, 12 years, Form two, IDI, 4 February 2021).*

*In our area, community members do not see child marriage as a problem, it is normal for children to get married early. So, nothing is done about the problems of child marriages within this area and you can't be the alone one who does not want to get married (Nobuhle, 14 years, Form three, IDI, February 2021).*

Moreover, the participants reported that being confined into their rural community made it difficult to be agentic against child marriage. Rurality, according to 13-year-old Tatenda,

limited their freedom and new experiences. In this context, adolescent girls have no power to escape the prospect of early marriage.

*There is no exposure to the internet or technology that can teach us the disadvantages of child marriage or how best we can protect ourselves. So often we do not have enough information to take any action against the practice, so girls just do what is normal around here, that is getting married (Lindiwe, 16 years, Form five, IDI, 25 February 2021).*

*We have limited knowledge or teaching on human rights and the dangers of child marriage. A limited number of people come to educate us on child marriages. Some of the information we learn as we go or through other people's experiences. There is limited access to the internet so we cannot find information on social media platforms (Christine, 16 years old, Form Six, IDI, 26 February 2021)*

Chowdhury & Morium (2018) posits that rural inhabitation presents a barrier to girls' agency. Likewise, as 16-year-old Lindiwe, cited above, suggested, rurality limited girls' exposure to modern sources of information they severely needed for their empowerment. This meant that the adolescent girls had limited knowledge about possible strategies and avenues to take to escape early marriage. According to Raj (2020), the lack of information sources in rural communities impedes adolescent girls' ability to exercise agency. Moreover, Cardenas (2020) argues that rural communities lack the digital sophistication often available in urban areas. The author further contends that girls and women in rural areas are less likely to have access to information and communication technologies even in instances where these resources are available at the community level. This means that rural adolescent girls are denied the sort of information they need to resist child marriage since they are not fully informed about the perils of this practice.

## **6.5 Discussion**

The findings in this chapter revealed that the participants struggled to negotiate their agency against the practice of child marriage. Dominant social norms that are rooted in gender inequality, rurality, and age-based hierarchies were cited as key factors that limited adolescent girls' agency to refuse early marriage. The findings suggest that social norms that limit the ability of adolescents to speak out made them feel powerless and scared to express their

concerns because they were mostly silenced and ignored (Moletsane, 2018). The miscommunication between parents and children highlighted the power structures and statuses that are being afforded to girls in this community. As argued in this chapter, girls' concerns about child marriage were not taken into consideration. Findings revealed that girls were not given a platform to speak or raise their concerns, which became a hindrance to their ability to exercise their agency. Consequently, the findings further illustrate that communication and confidentiality between adolescents and adults in the community presented a challenge for them to speak out against marriage, and for exercising their agency. The participants revealed that they did not have support from the adults in their homes and the greater community. Also, when girls spoke out about their feelings towards marriage they were criticised. Thus, the lack of support rendered adolescents vulnerable to a practice that hinders their wellbeing.

In the rural community I studied, the intersection of gender, age, and social norms threatened the ability of adolescents to exercise and negotiate their agency. These factors created a pathway to adolescent girl's vulnerability to child marriage practice, while promoting the exclusion of girls through the reinforcement of their subordination (Sighn & Vennam, 2016). Sighn and Vennam (2016) argue that the exclusion of girls and a low status accorded to them within societies robbed them of the capacity to make their own decisions and act independently.

Rurality was also associated with lack of access to technology and marginalisation which is detrimental to the access of information by adolescents (Graves et al., 2021). Klugman et al., (2014) highlights that access to technologies such as the internet and social media can help with girls' agency. These technologies play a role in amplifying the voices of girls resourcepoor communities. The use of technologies would be helpful since there are communication barriers and lack of support within the community. Thus, social media would assist in amplifying the voice of the adolescent girls. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the #MeToo movement for example played a part in amplifying the voices of victims of sexual violence.

In the following chapter, I reflect on the study's methodology, findings, as well as providing its contribution.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **ADOLESCENT GIRLS VULNERABILITY TO CHILD MARRIAGE IN RESOURCE-POOR RURAL CONTEXTS: REFLECTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The research I describe in this dissertation emanated from my upbringing in a resource-poor rural community in Zimbabwe. In particular, as a young girl growing up in such a community, I witnessed several girls my age getting married. Growing up under the protection of my parents who insisted that I complete secondary and post-secondary education, I began to note with great concern some of the spectacular ways in which girls in my rural neighborhoods were made vulnerable and coerced into early marriages. Thus, as I discussed in Chapter One, child marriage, particularly as it is experienced by adolescent girls, has long been a topic of both concern and interest for me. I walked into this study armed with the experience of having lived in a rural community that supported child marriage, and where culture and religion provided supportive attitudes towards the acceptability of child marriage.

In preparation for this research, I began to read several studies that confirmed to me that child marriage was a global concern and that girls were more vulnerable to getting married earlier than boys (Nash et al., 2019; Chae et al., 2020; Glynn et al., 2018; Gatson et al., 2018). Moreover, the literature provided evidence that child marriages are more prevalent in rural communities that are largely characterised by enduring poverty, social isolation, heteropatriarchy, as well as socio-cultural and religious norms, beliefs, and attitudes (Oludayo, 2019; Mhlambo et al., 2019; Chamisa et al., 2019; Dery & Bawa, 2021). While the literature reports some dramatic declines in child marriages in global north contexts (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2020; Onyeaka et al., 2021; Paul, 2019), this practice continues relentlessly in the global south (Arthur et al., 2017; Curwen et al., 2019; Yaya et al., 2019). Moreover, in Africa, and particularly in the sub-Saharan region of the continent, child marriage is a major public concern that takes away individuals' childhoods (Boyce et al., 2018; Tobing, 2018). Indeed, it is in the rural communities of Africa where child marriages continue unabated even in the presence of legislations that outlaw these practices (Rhaeim, 2021; Baumann et al., 2021).



As I discussed in Chapter Two, several international, regional, and local frameworks have been passed to address children's vulnerability to child marriage. Zimbabwe, the country I grew up, and where this study was located, is among countries that support the criminalisation of child marriage (Mwambene, 2018; Ndlovu & Olaborede, 2018; Sithole & Dziva, 2019), with hefty penalties for those who are culpable in the marriages of children under 18 years old (Sayi, 2018; Msuya, 2019; Feltoe, 2018). However, as my experience, coupled with the many studies I reviewed for this research, Zimbabwe continues to experience pockets of cases of child marriage (Ncube, 2018; Thupayagale-Tshweneagae et al., 2019). These marriages occur largely in the county's most isolated and poor rural communities where the culmination of gender inequality, dominant socio-cultural norms, religious beliefs, and the system of heteropatriarchy renders girls vulnerable (Ngema, 2021; Agere et al., 2018). While available scholarship has focused on child marriage (Taylor et al., 2019; Mulenga et al., 2019; Chirongoma, n.d; Appiah-Kubi, 2019; Chakraborty, 2019), it has done so from the perspectives of girls and women who are already married (Tenkorang, 2019; de Groot & Kuunyem, 2018). Within this context, studies have also examined the impact of child marriage among girls who are married (Kohno et al., 2019; John et al., 2019). I found this to be a limiting form of representation in that it excludes adolescent girls who are not married but are vulnerable to this practice. Thus, my interest in pursuing this study was to understand vulnerability to child marriage from the viewpoints of rural adolescent girls who had never been married. So, my research sought to examine how adolescent girls from a resource-poor community in Zimbabwe understood and communicated about their vulnerability to child marriage. Moreover, I set up to explore how these girls negotiated their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the voices of unmarried adolescent girls are missing in the literature. To meet these objectives, I approached this study armed with the following research questions:

- *How do adolescent girls living in a resource-poor rural community understand and communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage practices?*
- *How do these adolescent girls negotiate their agency in addressing their vulnerability to child marriage?*

This study used a qualitative approach to engage 20 adolescent girls who were conveniently sampled from the resource-poor Nyanga rural community in the Manicaland Province of

Zimbabwe. To generate data, I used FGD and IDIs. These methods were appropriate for the participants' self-representation, engagement, and knowledge production (du Plessis & Ahmed, 2020; O'Donovan et al., 2020). I reflect on the study's methodology and theoretical framework in the following section.

## **7.2 Methodological Reflection**

This study was predicated on the assumption that adolescent girls from impoverished rural communities are vulnerable to child marriage. Rural communities, as the literature indicates, are often marginalised, neglected, and they continue to be characterised by limited services and access to resources (Nyawo & Mashau, 2019; Sewell et al., 2019). The literature reviewed in this dissertation suggests that living in a resource-poor rural community makes adolescent girls vulnerable to child marriage practices. To understand the vulnerability that girls face, the literature suggests that research must provide rural participants with spaces to voice their perspectives (Raj et al., 2019).

Both IDI and FGD provided a safe approach for engaging the participants. In the process of generating data for this study, the participants opened up about their vulnerability to child marriage, and further shared their contextual experiences as adolescent girls living in a poor rural community where child marriages were prevalent. Using a qualitative research approach helped me gather rich contextual data from participants. IDI allowed participants to share their experiences and knowledge about child marriages without fear or shame of who was around them as they shared only with me. More so, FGD also gave participants a platform to not hold back their experiences as they were surrounded by their peers who also had similar experiences. These methods allowed me to gather in-depth contextual data. I also recruited a small number of participants (20), to obtain an in-depth understanding of the participants to child marriage rather generalized responses. I was not interested in generalising my findings. I wanted to understand the ways and contexts in which girls were made vulnerable to early marriage.

While using IDI and FGD provided contextual data for my analysis, there were notable limitations in the study. For example, data generation coincided with national lockdowns that were enforced to slow the spread and impact of the novel coronavirus of 2019 (also called covid-19); an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (Wu et al., 2020; Chalraborty & Maity, 2020).

While this study did not focus on this infectious virus, it still begs a passing mention since it affected some aspects of my research. Covid-19 spreads from an infected person's mouth or nose in small liquid particles when they cough, sneeze, speak, sing, or breathe (Galbadage & Peterson, 2020; Dhand & Li, 2020). These particles range from large respiratory droplets to smaller aerosols (Zhao et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021). Infection occurs if an individual is in close contact with someone who is already infected by the virus. It is also spread by the touching of contaminated surfaces, and the subsequent touching of one's face (including eyes, nose, and mouth). The virus spreads much easier in closed spaces that have little to no ventilation (Bhagat et al., 2020, WHO, 2021). Given the discovery of covid-19 and knowledge about its transmission, the World Health Organisation (WHO) tabled recommendations to slow down infections so as not to overwhelm health systems.

To protect individuals from a possible covid-19 infection, state health departments, at the directive of the WHO, enforced health-related non-pharmaceutical interventions on individuals, such as keeping a safe distance between people (what is called social distancing), hand hygiene, and the wearing of face masks that covers the mouth and nose (Guner, 2020). Moreover, there were limitations in the number of people who could gather indoors and outdoors including in schools and their classrooms (Liang, 2020; Pradhan et al., 2020). Armed with this knowledge, and in respect of national covid-19 regulations, I needed to find ways to conduct research that was safer for both me and the participants. The health-aware restrictions I speak about limited the process of data gathering in several ways. First, there were high chances of infecting one another (myself and the participants) with Covid 19 if many of us gathered in a single room. This meant that I needed to keep the FGD at a minimum of 5 participants per group, and further keep to social distancing arrangements. This created a tense environment that was charged with fear of infection. To mitigate the possibility of spreading infection, we exercised social distancing, and the wearing of face masks. Moreover, it helped that the participant opted to do interviews outside their classrooms, which further lowered risk. Yet, being outside meant that we had to contend with various sounds from the school and the community, including school children playing in the school's playground. The number of participants I had to engage in each FGD was limited to a small number of five per day to avoid gathering with a bigger crowd. Secondly, time was restricted. I only had one hour after school to conduct interviews. This was also in response to health protocols about shortening the time spent with individuals. The spread of covid-19 is further catalysed by the amount of time that

individuals spend in proximity to each other (i.e., the longer they spend time together, the likelier the chances of an infection). Thus, while interviews were rich in the discussion, there were several other questions I wanted to ask from the participants to strengthen the analysis in the study. Nonetheless, I used the time available at our disposal to maximise the discussions with the participants. Finally, another challenge was facilitating interviews and group discussions with the wearing of face masks. There were some instances where it was difficult to hear or understand what participants were saying. This meant that some questions had to be asked several times for clarity and to ensure that I did not misquote the participants.

Despite these limitations, my research was able to raise awareness about adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage in their resource-poor rural community. As such, this study contributes to the scholarship on girls' vulnerability, and their limited agency, in the context of child marriage. I discuss the study's implications later in this chapter.

### **7.3 Reflecting on the Findings**

The findings suggest that the adolescent girls who participated in this study were vulnerable to child marriage in their poor rural community and that this vulnerability emerged as a symptom of several intersecting factors. An important finding from the analysis was that being an adolescent and living in a heteropatriarchal rural community that is characterised by poverty, gender inequality, and prevailing social norms made girls vulnerable to marriage. The participants argued cited early marriage as something they did not want. They pointed to how they were pressured, forced, or coerced into early marriage to escape the poverty that was endemic in their households and communities. Further, the participants suggested that religion and religious beliefs about girls' sexual purity were used to defend the acceptability of child marriage. In terms of exercising their agency against early marriage, the participants suggested that they were limited because of dominant socio-cultural norms, age hierarchies, gender inequalities, and the system of heteropatriarchy that governed their daily lives. These factors combined to create a barrier towards girls' agentic practices such as refusing to get married or choosing a partner they wanted to marry (Saul et al., 2020; McDougal & Jackson, 2018; Crivello et al., 2019). In other words, existing social norms regulated girls' behaviours while limiting them from being empowered against marriage (Jones & Tefera, 2014; Bukuluki et al., 2021). The findings highlight the extent of adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage in

a rural community. However, two key findings that responded directly to the research questions posed in this study were centred on: 1) the *adultification* and infantilisation of adolescent girls; and, 2) the reinforcement of girl's docility. It was in these ways that the participants understood and communicated about their vulnerability to child marriage, and within which their agency against this practice was negotiated. In the two sub-sections that follow, I reflect on the key findings that addressed both the research question that was posed in this study.

### **7.3.1 The *Adultification* and Infantilisation of Rural Adolescent Girls**

A key finding was how marriage was used to turn adolescent girls into both children and adults. While the girls who participated in this study spoke about experiences that forced them into adulthood (i.e., early marriage and its associated roles and responsibilities), they were also infantilised in their homes and communities by being refused to make important decisions about their lives. While girls were considered as children when it came to participating in decision-making, they were ironically and problematically perceived as adults where marriage was concerned. Both the infantilisation and *adultification* of adolescent girls were a form of social control exerted on their lives. These controlling mechanisms left girls feeling oppressed and without agency. Thus, adolescent girls were expected to take on adult roles by getting married, but they were also treated as children in that they were denied agency to self-represent. Rather, girls were controlled and exposed to lifelong decisions that were generally imposed on them. In the rural community where this study was based, puberty that was characterised by bodily changes was considered an indication that girls were ready for marriage; thus, girls were taken to be adults because of their physical maturity. This means that adolescent girls' marriageability was located not in their age and mental maturity, but their physical development. Yet, age was used as a factor in denying girls the agency to speak and act against early marriage.

### **7.3.2 Reinforcing Adolescent Girls Docility through Child Marriage**

Another key finding pointed to how girls were socialised into docility, and that marriage was an institution that continued to reinforce their passivity. Indeed, findings support the argument that rural girls are socialised to be obedient and conforming individuals whose livelihoods are dictated by others (mostly adults in their families and communities). Through their socialisation, girls learn early to be passive, docile, submissive, and obedient.

Moreover, their passivity and docility are strengthened through gendered power structures and age-based social hierarchies that position girls into low statuses. By coercing, forcing, or pressuring girls into early marriage, they were further being pushed into a state of docility and obedience. Social, gender, and cultural norms that are compounded by heteropatriarchy, poverty, and rurality rendered girls obsolete and objectified. These norms further made it impossible for adolescent girls to negotiate their agency and address their vulnerability to child marriage. Therefore, the findings suggest that child marriage is another layer of social subordination of rural adolescent girls. In other words, child marriage was used as a tool to control and maintain the subordination of rural adolescent girls. In particular, the need to control girls' sexuality perpetuated child marriage while upholding the system of heteropatriarchal.

#### **7.4 Contributions of the Study**

Addressing the two research questions posed, this dissertation makes important contributions to scholarship. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, while the topic of child marriage is well documented and literature on how early marriage affects the lives of young brides, scholarship that examines unmarried adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage in resource-poor rural communities is still in its infancy. Therefore, my study adds to the research scholarship on the vulnerability of unmarried adolescent girls to child marriage. The use of qualitative interviews and group discussions was resourceful in unearthing girls' vulnerabilities and how their agency was limited and challenged. This study provided a map that delineates the oppressive ways in which girls are exposed to harmful practices that are located in rural social norms. The findings have implications for adolescent girls and communities in similar contexts.

Second, the findings suggest that the participants understood their vulnerability to marriage in particular ways. Their vulnerability was influenced and shaped by their rural sociocultural geography, their low social positions in their households and community, their gender identity and age-based hierarchies, religion and culture, heteropatriarchy, gender inequality, and the dominant social norms prevalent in poor rural communities. The findings reveal a form of heteropatriarchal obsession with girls' sexuality. In particular, and within the context of child marriage, there is a spectacular fascination with upholding girls' sexual purity and moral behaviours.

Thus, marriage is used as an acceptable tool to shield girls from unwanted sexual behaviours. In tandem, the conceptual framework I developed in Chapter Two suggested several important issues, which, in combination with the study findings, extends understandings about rural adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage, and why they struggle to exercise their agency against this practice. Likewise, the conceptual framework illuminated an understanding of how rural girlhood marginalisation influenced, shaped, and made girls vulnerable to early marriage.

This study proposes that we start looking carefully at the gendered factors that tend to make rural girls invisible and objectified in the broader society. To successfully eliminate the perilous practice of child marriage there is a need to give girls safe spaces and platforms to speak about their vulnerability, and how they might address it. There is also a need to pay attention to rural communities that continue to uphold pervasive gender unequal practices that place the lives of girls in danger. Rural marginalisation, poverty, and isolation continue to harbour child marriages, and there is a need to expose these practices. Therefore, the study proposes that research and programming start turning the gaze on rural communities and the lives of girls who live in these sociocultural geographic locations.

## **7.5 Study Implications**

This study has the following implications. First, since adolescent girls are exposed to harmful cultural practices that make them vulnerable to child marriage, future programming, interventions, research needs to engage communities, households, and other key institutions that shape the lives of girls. Important establishments such as religious institutions, traditional and religious leaders, and heads of families need to be sensitised about the perilous effects that child marriage has on the lives of girls. Likewise, since girls are denied education in favour of early marriage, community-based interventions that conscientise about the importance of girls' education are necessary. These interventions must be located within a human rights framework, and make available international examples about the contributions of educated girls in society.

The study examined adolescent girls understanding of their vulnerability to child marriage, and how within this context they negotiated their agency. While the findings revealed that adolescent girls understood their vulnerability to marriage, their ability to negotiate their agency was limited by many factors I have discussed throughout this dissertation. Given that adolescent girls are constrained from exercising their agency, there is a need for safer spaces

and platforms where girls can engage with significant and supportive adults to communicate about their needs. In these spaces, girls' voices must be privileged, listened to, and heard. Moreover, platforms must be created to educate girls about their human rights and how they could exercise them. One of the ways to engage girls is to inspire a sense of political activism in them. Political activism might call for gender equality in rural communities, and that girls are treated with dignity, humanity, and respect.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

I entered this study with a childhood experience of witnessing girls who were my age at the time getting married. Based on this experience, I wanted to understand what made girls in rural communities vulnerable to early marriage. The girls from my childhood had nobody to advocate for their right to refuse marriage. For them, early marriage was inevitable and inescapable. Two decades later, I would still hear stories of adolescent girls getting married in mine and other rural communities in Zimbabwe. As a university student, I spent time reflecting on my childhood and the girls who continue to be made disposable through child marriage. From this reflection, and through engaging with the available literature, community-based organisations, community members, and the girls who participated in this research, I came to understand why adolescent girls were vulnerable to child marriage, and why they struggled to resist this institution.

As I conclude this dissertation, I have come to understand how sociocultural norms and social ecologies conspire against adolescent girls in rural contexts. The findings from this study suggest that even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the practice of child marriage remains a concern and a reality for many girls across the globe (Chowdury & Morium, 2018). Consequently, they grow up believing that early marriage is an inevitable reality that they cannot run away from. Despite the attention given to curb the practice, child marriage continues to disproportionately affect adolescent girls. This practice reveals the gendered ways in which girls are pushed to the margins of society. It mirrors how social, cultural, religious norms that continue to perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality positions girls as submissive and docile individuals who are not capable of making informed decisions about marriage. Child marriage is rooted in the system of heteropatriarchy which structures gendered relations in society. Rooted in hegemonic masculinities, this system works to privilege male domination over women and girls. While rurality in this study played a significant role in heightening the vulnerability of adolescents,



poverty and associated social norms exacerbated a trend where girls were social outcasts whose bodies were objects of community and family domination. The need to escape poverty and to earn respectability placed girls at risk while denying them their very humanity. The knowledge produced in this dissertation can be used to engage significant stakeholders towards the elimination of child marriages in impoverished rural settings. Unless we begin to understand girls' vulnerability from their perspective, and used their voices to shape tailored programming and interventions to curtail child marriage, girls' vulnerability will continue unchallenged.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### LETTER OF ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL



UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL

INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

01 June 2020

Miss Tsitsi Dube (214584729)  
School Of Agri Earth & Env Sc  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Miss Dube,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00000916/2019  
Project title: ADOLESCENT GIRLS UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR VULNERABILITY TO CHILD MARRIAGE PRACTICES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY IN NYANGA, MANICALAND PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE  
Degree: Masters

**Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol**

This letter serves to notify you that your response received on 12 May 2020 to our letter of 13 February 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid for one year until 01 June 2021  
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours faithfully



.....  
Professor Dipane Hialele (Chair)

/dd

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000  
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587  
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

**INSPIRING GREATNESS**

## APPENDIX B

### GATEKEEPER'S LETTER

GOVERNMENT COMPOSITE BUILDING  
BLOCK B, FIRST FLOOR  
Robert Mugabe Street  
Telephone: 66794/60579



ZIMBABWE

MINISTRY OF WOMEN AFFAIRS,  
COMMUNITY, SMALL AND MEDIUM  
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT  
MANICALAND PROVINCE  
P.O. BOX 669  
MUTARE

04 July 2019

Miss Tsitsi Dube  
4091 Mkoba 17  
Gweru

**REF: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEACH WITH KUNDAI RUTENDO  
TRUST (KRT)**

The above subject matter refers.

This minute serves to inform you that permission to conduct your research  
has been granted.





Upon completion of your research furnish the provincial office with a copy of  
your research findings as well as the tools you have used to conduct your  
research.

Yours Faithfully

Provincial Development Officer (Mr. Rubaya)



**APPENDIX C**  
**GATEKEEPER'S LETTER**

<p>GOVERNMENT OF KENYA MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND CULTURE Nairobi Telephone: 254 20 271111</p>	 KENYA	<p>MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND CULTURE COMMUNITY, HERITAGE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT Nairobi P.O. Box 10000 Nairobi</p>
<p>04 July 2019</p> <p>Miss Tsitsi Dube 4091 Mkoa 17 Gweru</p>		
<p><b>REF: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH KUNDU RUTENDO TRUST (KRT)</b></p>		
<p>The above subject matter <i>refers</i>.</p> <p>This minute serves to inform you that permission to conduct your research has been granted.</p> <p>Upon completion of your research furnish the provincial office with a copy of your research findings as well as the tools you have used to conduct your research.</p>		
<p>Yours Faithfully</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> Provincial Development Officer (Ms. Rubaya)</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND CULTURE COMMUNITY, HERITAGE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT Nairobi</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND CULTURE COMMUNITY, HERITAGE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT Nairobi</div>		

## APPENDIX D

### CLINICAL LETTER



Date: 15 JULY 2019

To: Ethics Committee Members College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

REF: CLINICAL/COUNSELING SUPPORT FOR TSITSI DUBE AND STUDY PARTICIPANTS

I hereby wish to express my willingness to offer psycho-social support to Miss Tsitsi Dube and the study participants as they undertake the project in the chosen field of research.

My expertise in the helping profession stems from almost close to 20 years of experience in the field of counselling and support to survivors and victims of gender-based violence and early child marriages. Leading sessions that enable participant's movement and focus away from life destructive realities and choices towards more life-giving experiences, choices, and decisions.

The above-mentioned experience has been an accumulation of knowledge and experience gained from various institutions that I have been involved with namely: Ebenezer College Nyanga, Honde Mission, and Apostolic Faith Mission Churches in Manicaland Province in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe.

KRT values: Respect for Human, Dignity, Solidarity, Responsibility, Ubuntu, and Empathy. It will be my pleasure to offer both psychosocial support as well as counselling when required to empirical research support.

The research to be undertaken will also be mutually beneficial to the work that I am currently undertaking in respect to survivors of gender-based violence and early child marriages who have been successfully reintegrated and reunited with their families. Looking forward to a mutually beneficial project whose intentions are based on real developmental principles and redressing our communities' social contrast.

Yours Faithfully

Dr. C. Nyakutya.  
Counselor

+263772708153/+263719708153

## **APPENDIX E**

### **EXAMPLE OF CONSENT FORM GIVEN TO PARTICIPANTS**

#### **Informed Consent Letter to Participants**

Date:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Tsitsi Dube. I am a Master's student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) South Africa. I am conducting a study looking at the Adolescent girls understanding of their vulnerability to child marriage practices in rural communities, supervised by Dr. N.D. Ngidi.

Reports have shown that child marriage is still very common in sub-Saharan Africa and Zimbabwe is part of the statistics. Rural spaces are said to be affected much by such a practice and it affects young girls. The research aims to examine how adolescent girls understand and communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage practices in their rural communities.

The project will involve interviews with you individually and as a group (Focus group discussions). Interview sessions will each be a maximum of 45 minutes to an hour respectively. With your permission, the interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed. The tapes and transcripts will be kept in a safe place. These will be destroyed when the research ends. Your identity will remain anonymous throughout the study. Your real name will not be used. In addition, your participation in the study is voluntary and you may decide not to participate without any penalty. You are also free to withdraw from the project at any time during or after data collection, without penalty.

Whilst every precaution will be taken to maintain the confidentiality of the participants in every group. Should there be a disclosure/s that indicate that your or someone else's well-being is being compromised or at risk, the researcher will seek your/their consent in addressing the matter?

#### **DECLARATION**

I..... (full name of the participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participate in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.  
Additional consent, where applicable I hereby  
provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview/focus group discussion   YES/NO

## APPENDIX F

### EXAMPLE OF TRANSLATED CONSENT GIVEN TO PARTICIPANTS

#### **Tsamba yechiziviso chokutenderana kumwanasikana:**

Mudiwa \_\_\_\_\_ Zuva: \_\_\_\_\_

Vanodiwa \_\_\_\_\_

Ini ndinonzi Tsitsi Dube. Ndiri mudzidzi weMasters kuUniversity yeKwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Chamhembe Afrika. Ndiri kuita ongororo ndichitarisa nezveyaruko yemwana uye newanano munharaunda dzekumaruwa, inotungamirirwa naDr N.D. Ngidi.

Mishumo yakaratidza kuti rwanano yevana ichiri yakajairika muSub-Saharan Africa uye Zimbabwe chikamu chehuwandu uhu. Nzvimbo dzekumaruwa dzinonzi dzinokanganiswa zvakanyanya nematambudziko akadai uye zvinokanganisa vasikana vadiki. Tsvagurudzo iyi ine chinangwa chekuongorora vasikana vari kuyaruka uye nekunzwisisa wanano yevana. Chinangwa ndechekuwana maonero evanasikana pane tsika dzewanano yevana vanonetsekana nayo.

Purojekiti iyi inosanganisira kukubvunzurudza sedungamunhu uye seboka. Kubvunzana kumwe nakumwe kunotori maminetsi gumi nemashanu. Kubudikiddza nemvumo yanyu, mibvunzo achaitwa nhaurwa-nyorwa. Matepi uye zvinyorwa zvinobva zvachengetwa munzvimbo yakachengeteka. Izvi zvichaparadzwa kana tsvakurudzo yapera. Ucharamba asingazivikanwe muchidzidzo chose. Zita rako chairo harishandiswe. Mukuwedzera, kuti chikamu kwako muchidzidzo ichi ndeekuzvisarudzura uye unogona kusiya chero nguva.

#### **Kuzivisa**

Ini ..... (mazita ako akazara) ndinobvuma kuti ndinonzwisisa zvirimugwaro iri nemhando yemapurojekiti, uye ndinobvuma kuti mwana wangu atore chikamu mukutsigira purojekiti iyi. Ini ndinonzwisisa kuti ndakasununguka kubuda mupurojekiti chero nguva, uye ndingafarire kudaro. Ndinobvumirana nechirongwa ichi.

Ndinopa mvumo kune:

Radio-rekodha kubvunzurudza kwangu / tarisa boka rekurukurirano [Hongu / Kwete]

## **APPENDIX G**

### **EXAMPLE OF CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS**

#### **Informed Consent Letter to Parents/ Guardian**

Date:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Tsitsi Dube. I am a Master's student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) South Africa. I am conducting a study looking at the Adolescent girls understanding of their vulnerability to child marriage practices in rural communities, supervised by Dr. N.D. Ngidi.

Reports have shown that child marriage is still very common in sub-Saharan Africa and Zimbabwe is part of the statistics. Rural spaces are said to be affected much by such a practice and it affects young girls. The research aims to examine how adolescent girls understand and communicate about their vulnerability to child marriage practices in their rural community

The project will involve interviews with participants individually and as a group (Focus group discussions). Interview sessions will each be a maximum 45 minutes to 1 hour. With your permission, the interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed. The tapes and transcripts will be kept in a safe place. These will be destroyed when the research ends. The identity of your child will remain anonymous throughout the study. Their real name will not be used. In addition, the participation of your child in the study is voluntary and can withdraw at any time.

Whilst every precaution will be taken to maintain the confidentiality of the participants in every group. Should there be a disclosure/s that indicates that your child's well-being is being compromised or at risk, the researcher will seek your consent in addressing the matter?

#### **DECLARATION**

I..... (full

Names of parent /guardian) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to my child participating in the research project.

I understand that she is at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Additional consent, where applicable I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview/focus group discussion    YES/NO



## APPENDIX H

### EXAMPLE OF TRANSLATED LETTER OF CONSENT FOR PARENTS

Tsamba yechiziviso chokutenderana kuVabereki / Muchengeti

Zuva: \_\_\_\_\_

Vanodiwa \_\_\_\_\_

Ini ndinonzi Tsitsi Dube. Ndiri mudzidzi weMasters kuUniversity yeKwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Chamhembe Afrika. Ndiri kuita ongororo ndichitarisa nezvevaruko yemwana uye newanano munharaunda dzekumaruwa, inotungamirirwa naDr N.D. Ngidi.

Mishumo yakaratidza kuti rwanano yevana ichiri yakajairika muSub-Saharan Africa uye Zimbabwe chikamu chehuwandu uhu. Nzvimbo dzekumaruwa dzinonzi dzinokanganiswa zvakanyanya nematambudziko akadai uye zvinokanganisa vasikana vadiki. Tsvagurudzo iyi ine chinangwa chekuongorora vasikana vari kuyaruka uye nekunzwisisa wanano yevana.

Purojekiti iyi inosanganisira kubvunzurudza mwanasikana sedungamunhu uye seboka. Kubvunzana kumwe nakumwe kunotora maminetsi gumi nemashanu. Kubudikiddza nemvumo yenyu, mibvunzo achaitwa nhaurwa-nyorwa. Matepi uye zvinyorwa zvinobva zvachengetwa munzvimbo yakachengeteka. Izvi zvichaparadzwa kana tsvakurudzo yaperi. Mwana wenyu acharamba asingazivikanwe muchidzidzo chose. Zita rake chairi harizoshandiswe. Mukuwedzera, kutora chikamu chomwana wenyu muchidzidzo ichi ndeekuzvisarudzura uye anogona kusiya chero nguva.

Uye nguva dzose tinochengetedza zvakavanzika vana vari muboka rese. Panofanirwa kuve nekuburitswa / izvo zvinoratidza kuti hutano hwemwana wenyu hutaure nezvahwo, muongorori achatsvaga mvumo yenyu mukugadzirisa nyaya yacho.

Kuzivisa

Ini ..... (Mazita emubereki / muchengeti akazara) ndinobvuma kuti ndinonzwisisa zvirimugwaro iri nemhando yemapurojekiti ekutsvagira, uye ndinobvuma kuti mwana wangu atore chikamu mukutsigira purojekiti iyi.

Ini ndinonzwisisa kuti iye akasununguka kuti abude mupurojekiti chero nguva, uye ndingafarire kudaro. Ndinobvumirana nechirongwa ichi.

Ndinopa mvumo kune:

Radio-rekodha kubvunzurudza kwangu / tarisa boka rekurukurirano [Hongu /Kwete]

# APPENDIX I

## TURNIT REPORT

Masters			
ORIGINALITY REPORT			
7 %	%	2 %	5 %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS
PRIMARY SOURCES			
1	Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal Student Paper	5 %	
2	"Gender Equality", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2021 Publication	1 %	
3	Christina Policastro. "Feminist Theory", Wiley, 2015 Publication	1 %	
4	"Temporary and Child Marriages in Iran and Afghanistan", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2021 Publication	<1 %	
5	Submitted to Roedean School Student Paper	<1 %	
6	Bernard Gerbaka, Sami Richa, Roland Tomb. "Child Sexual Abuse, Exploitation and Trafficking in the Arab Region", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2021 Publication	<1 %	