

Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Uganda: A case study of Kasese District

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------|--|
| FGC | Female Genital Cutting |
| FGM | Female Genital Mutilation |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UPE | Universal Primary Education |
| SDSP | Social Development Sector Plan |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| CSOs | Civil Society Organizations |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus Disease of 2019 |
| KAP | Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices |
| LC1 | Local Council One |
| VHTs | Village Health Teams |
| STDs | Sexually Transmitted Diseases |
| SRH | Sexual Reproductive Health |
| SOPs | Standard Operating Procedures |
| HIV | Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| ICRW | International Centre for Research on Women |
| IEC | Information Education Communication |
| MoH | Ministry of Health |
| UBOS | Uganda Bureau of Statistics |
| UDHS | Uganda Demographic Health Survey |

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This survey was conducted in 2021 to assess the practice of, attitudes towards, and gaps in support needed to eliminate child marriage and teenage pregnancy in Kasese district and the nation. Over 400 respondents from different villages across seven administrative units of the district were interviewed, including victims of child marriage and teenage pregnancy as well as community members.

The survey consists of primary and secondary research findings on child marriage and teenage pregnancy in the Kasese district of Western Uganda. It compiled both quantitative and qualitative data using KAP methodology, and a thorough analysis was carried out to identify clear and distinctive trends in practice and behaviour. This survey explores the drivers of the issues and shows that the main causal factors are poverty, and lack of education and awareness accompanied by the existing gender inequality disparity. The results have been used to build recommendations at the national level, community level, and child-driven to guide governing institutions in the implementation of solutions to eliminate child marriages and teenage pregnancy in Ugandan communities.

INTRODUCTION

The normalization of child marriage and teenage pregnancy is not a recent issue but rather a problem that has been growing for years. Founded in 2020, the Casey Foundation is committed to protecting and safeguarding female adolescents against child marriages and teenage pregnancies. We believe ending child marriage, and adolescent pregnancies will remove a significant barrier to global progress and ensure a world where girls look forward to their future. Casey Foundation conducted this survey on child marriage and teenage pregnancy to gain a broader understanding of the status and formalities related to these two social issues that threaten young girls.

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, many communities have experienced worsening economic and financial conditions. In Uganda, approximately 355,000 teenage pregnancies were reported in 2020, and 196,500 were reported during the first six months of 2021 (UNFPA, 2021). Secondary data through media reports and results of this survey indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the involvement of teenagers in unprotected sexual intercourse, giving rise to teenage pregnancies.

This has been particularly difficult for low-income households. With more free time on hand, children seek other ways to keep themselves occupied and, given their lack of maturity and limited sexual education, these teenagers often find themselves in complicated situations and end up becoming pregnant. Once pregnant, many will also be married early in life. There is a need to establish more awareness and prevention programs in order to reduce the number of girls experiencing teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

The survey attempts to assess the attitudes and factors leading to the continued escalation in the rates of teenage pregnancy and child marriage. The survey was conducted from August to November 2021 in the district of Kasese, located in Western Uganda, Complying with COVID-19 guidelines. Over 400 respondents from different villages across seven administrative units of the district, with ten (10) respondents from each village in the selected administrative units of the district, participated in the survey. The respondents collectively represented victims of child marriage and teenage pregnancy, as well as males who are involved in addressing these issues within their community. All interviews were carried out in person, and all respondents remained anonymous. The survey and its recommendations aim to help Uganda build a better future for girls, providing a path forward for them to reach their significant potential.

THE PROBLEM OF CHILD MARRIAGE

The right to family and marriage is provided for in the Uganda 1995 Constitution, with the age of consent (minimum legal age for marriage) set at 18 years for both males and females (the Republic of Uganda, 1995). Despite the lawful provision, the traditional practice of child marriage persists among many ethnic groups in Uganda. The latter is justified largely by parents as protection of their daughters against premarital sex and pregnancy, thus keeping the family's dignity/honor and offering the young girls lifelong security (Rubin, Green, and Mukurla 2009). A study by Jain and Kurz (2007: 14) ranked Uganda 9th among the top 20 'hotspot' countries for child marriage. In 2013, Uganda was ranked 16th among 25 countries with the highest rates of early marriages, with 46% of girls marrying before 18 years and 12% before 15 years (World Vision, 2013).

A recent Population census and UNICEF-supported study (Amin et al., 2013) position Uganda in the middle of the range, with over 20% of girls aged 15 -19 categorized as ever married. Warner et al. (2013) noted that 10% of 20-24-year-old females were married before the age of 15, and 40% of 20-24-year-old females married before the age of 18. The above situation is supported by statistical evidence (UDHS 2011, UBOS 2011), which indicates that over 15% of ever-married women aged 20-49 were married by the age of 15, and 49% were married by age 18, with a decline from 56% (1996) for women aged 20-49 married below the age of 18, and 19.6% for women married below the age of 15. The Uganda Demographic Health Survey (UDHS) data further shows that men tend to marry at much older ages (four years older) than women, with a median age at first marriage of 22.3 years old than women in the same age range (25-49); only 9% of the men were married by age 18, and 25% by age 20.

The challenge of child marriages, teenage pregnancies, and high levels of girl school dropouts are closely interlinked. Many adolescent girls continue to be subjected to marriage at an early age; in marriages arranged by parents, leaving them little choice in either timing of pregnancy or getting a marriage partner (Rutaremwa 2013; Jensen and Thornton 2003; International Federation for Human Rights and Foundation for Human Rights Initiative 2012). Furthermore, the practice of child marriage perpetuates the intergenerational cycle of poverty and acts as a break in development (International Centre for Research on Women 2010). A girl protected from child marriage is more likely to stay in school, work and reinvest income into her family, and help lead her family and eventually her community out of poverty. Crucially, a girl who marries later (after 19 years) or even after completing tertiary education is more empowered to control her fertility.

While there have been a number of interventions by government, civil society, development partners, and other stakeholders to address the problem of child marriage in the country, it has remained a major issue undermining girls' development and attainment of their full potential in all capability domains (Overseas Development Institute (ODI) 2012, 2013).

THE PROBLEM OF CHILD MARRIAGE (CONTINUED)

Whereas Uganda has committed to addressing all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls and ratified various global and regional conventions and declarations that prohibit such discrimination and violence (Convention on Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEDAW); the Beijing Platform Declaration and Platform of Action; the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Declaration; the Declaration on Violence Against Women; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights – Women's Rights Protocol; and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)) among others, not much has been done regarding putting in place practical initiatives that explicitly protect children from early marriage. This gap has persisted despite child protection being a core government responsibility as articulated in the National Development Plans (NDP 2010; 2015); the National Vision 2014 - 2020; the National Gender Policy (2007); and other sector policies and strategic plans.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Uganda is home to 5 million child brides. Of these, 1.3 million married before age 15*.



In Uganda, 8.9 million girls aged 10-19, especially those that live in rural areas and among less educated and low-income households, are at risk of harmful practices, including child marriage. Thirty-four percent of women aged 25-49 were married before the age of 18**.



The Uganda Constitution sets the age of marriage at 18 years. However, marriage formally or informally before the legal age, known as child marriage, is a common practice across the country. Arranged marriages for adolescent girls without their consent are also common in Uganda, especially in the rural areas (FIDH and FHRI 2012; Benschop 2002; Bantebya, Muhanguzi, and Watson 2013, 2014; MGLSD, 2011).

Evidence shows that poor health outcomes are associated with child marriage. This includes low nutrition status, high maternal mortality, and increased risk for HIV infection.



Progression to secondary school education is more limited for girls (46.6%) than boys (53.4%) (MoES 2012).

Uganda's adolescent fertility/birth rate is among the highest in the Eastern Africa region – estimated at 134 per 1000 women aged 15-19 years (UBOS 2011).

Reference:

*United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019)

**Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (2016)

SITUATION ANALYSIS (CONTINUED)

Age at first marriage varies by residence, educational level, wealth quartile, and across the country's different regions. Women aged 25-49 living in urban areas marry about two years later than rural women (20 years compared with 17.6 years). The median age at first marriage is higher among the better educated and the wealthier. The median age at first marriage for women living in northern Uganda is lower (16.9) compared to western and south western (18.1 and 19.9, respectively). However, the Eastern and East-Central Ugandan women engage in sexual relations much earlier (16.3 and 16.2, respectively). Roughly two years later, a UNFPA (2013) report also indicated that the prevalence of child marriages is highest in Northern Uganda, estimated at 59%, followed by the Western region (58%), Eastern region (52%), East-Central (52%), West Nile (50%), Central (41%), Southwest (37%), and lowest in Kampala (21%).

Regional differentials in trends by age at first marriage between 2006 and 2011 indicate that, while some regions (Kampala, Northern, and Western) showed a decline in very early marriages (below age 15), others showed either no change or an actual rise in the percentages of women who marry below age 15. In the East-Central region, for instance, the percentage of women who married below the age of 15 rose slightly from 25% in 2006 to 26% in 2011. There was a slightly more consistent downward regional trend in percentages of women between ages 15-17, except for the Northern region, where there was an increase from 40% to 45% of women marrying between the ages of 15-17.

Child marriages were reportedly more prevalent in war and conflict situations (internally displaced and refugee camps) (Schlecht, Rowley, and Babirye 2013).

FORCED MARRIAGES WERE REPORTEDLY COMMON IN NORTHERN UGANDA, WHERE YOUNG GIRLS AND WOMEN WERE ABDUCTED AND FORCED INTO MARRIAGE WITH THE REBELS (RUBIMBWA AND KOMUREMBE 2012).



Child marriage is also noted to be a significant contributor to the high levels of teenage pregnancy, fertility, and overall population growth in Uganda (Rutaremwa 2013, UBOS 2011).

TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND CHILD MOTHERHOOD

Teenage pregnancy has been persistently high over time, with a slight decline from 43% in 1995 to 31% in 2001, 25% in 2006 and 24% in 2011 (UBOS 1995; 2001; 2006, 2011). The 2011 UDHS statistics indicate that more than a third (39%) of women aged 20-49 years gave birth by age 18, and more than half (63%) have had their first birth by age 20; 30.7% were currently pregnant. The median age at first birth for women aged 20-49 years has been stable over the years ranging between 18.7 in 2006 and 18.9 years in 2011, varying by region and by urban/rural locality. Evidence shows that girls from rural areas (24%) give birth earlier than girls from urban areas (21%). Teenage pregnancies are high in the East-Central, Eastern, and Karamoja (North-Eastern) regions at 30%, compared to other regions, with the South-West region having the lowest (15%), and Central has the second-lowest at 19%. Statistics show a positive relationship between poverty, women's education, and teenage pregnancy, with girls from the poorest households and with no education having higher rates of pregnancy (34% and 45%, respectively) compared to those from the wealthiest households and with secondary education (16% and 16% respectively).

CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Child marriage affects all aspects of a child's life and violates children's rights, as recognized globally and nationally. It exposes children, especially girls, to multiple vulnerabilities and significantly impacts the development of their capabilities. Child marriage and adolescent pregnancies are interlinked with significant negative consequences on girls' physical and psychological wellbeing; and the general development of girls, including their education opportunities and outcomes. Evidence shows that despite the Government's support and implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE), which has expanded access to education for Ugandans, many girls are increasingly dropping out of school.

**WOMEN WHO MARRIED BEFORE THE AGE OF 14
WERE LESS LIKELY TO MAKE DECISIONS IN THEIR
HOUSEHOLDS COMPARED TO THOSE WHO MARRIED
AT THE AGE OF 15 OR OLDER.
UDHS DATA, RUBIN ET AL. (2009)**

CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND TEENAGE PREGNANCY (CONTINUED)

The UDHS (2006 and 2011) indicate a slightly higher proportion of ever-married women who married before the age of 18 years who had experienced physical violence since age 15 compared to those who married at age 18 or older (UBOS 2006; 2011).

GIRLS WHO MARRY YOUNG ENTER INTO INFORMAL UNIONS, WHICH DENY THEM BASIC PROTECTION AND SOCIAL STATUS AND LEAD TO ISOLATION WITH LIMITED SUPPORT STRUCTURES (BANTEBYA ET AL., 2014; SCHLECHT ET AL., 2013).

Evidence shows that poor health outcomes are associated with child marriage. The poor health outcomes include; low nutrition status, high maternal mortality, and increased risk for HIV infection (Rubin et al., 2009). Married women aged 15-24 are five times more likely to have HIV/AIDS than those who are not married (Ministry of Health [MOH] and ORC Macro 2006).

WOMEN WHO MARRY EARLY ARE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE PREGNANCY COMPLICATIONS THAT LEAD TO DEATH OR DISABILITY - OBSTRUCTED LABOR AND OBSTETRIC FISTULA (BANTEBYA ET AL., 2013; SCHLECHT ET AL., 2013).

Child marriage is closely linked to teenage pregnancies since the young brides are expected to get pregnant soon after marriage (MGLSD 2011). All of these negatively affect the economic progress of adolescent girls in terms of unhealthy and less productive human resources and the necessity for increased health expenditure. Child marriage has implications for fertility and population growth, and the latter, in turn, have negative consequences on economic growth (UDHS 2006; 2011).

CHILD MARRIAGE HAS IMPLICATIONS FOR FERTILITY AND POPULATION GROWTH, AND THE LATTER, IN TURN, HAVE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES ON ECONOMIC GROWTH (UDHS 2006; 2011).

Teenage pregnancy is an indicator of unprotected sex and hence exposure to the risk of HIV infection (Sekiwungu and Whyte 2009). According to the UDHS 2011, about 44.4% of girls and 34.9% of boys aged 15-19 years in Uganda have already had sexual relations. Adolescents with no education (56%) are more likely to have had sex and to engage in high-risk sex (16.6%) than those with education. Among adolescents aged 15-19 years who have ever had sex, half of the boys (50.4%) reported using a condom at the last sex episode compared with just 27.5% of the girls (Amin et al. 2013).

CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND TEENAGE PREGNANCY (CONTINUED)

The negative consequences of teenage motherhood are well documented. Evidence shows that adolescent mothers are twice as likely to die from pregnancy and delivery complications compared to those who are older, have high fertility rates and their babies or children have higher chances of dying (UWONET 2010; FIDH and FHRI 2012; Sekiwungu and Whyte, 2009). In addition, teenage motherhood negatively affects the mother's socioeconomic status and the child because it inhibits girls' participation in education and limits their economic opportunities (FIDH and FHRI 2012). Unmarried adolescent mothers often experience stigma, shame, rejection, and exclusion in their community during reintegration and can become destitute (Murungi, 2011).

IMPACT OF CHILD MARRIAGE ON BOYS' CAPABILITIES

There is limited literature and studies on how child marriage affects young boys. However, anecdotal evidence reveals that child marriage negatively affects boys' achievement in different capability domains. A study conducted in the Mayuge district revealed that boys are negatively affected by premature nuptials as they are forced to drop out of school and take up menial jobs to support their young families (Batenbya et al. 2014). According to Lubaale (2013), child marriage also prevents boys from obtaining an education, enjoying optimal health, and bonding with others of their age. This perpetuates the cycle of poverty from one generation to another. Diana Santillan (2013) argues that boys are equally impacted by the practice of child marriage and have an important role in ending child marriage.



SURVEY OBJECTIVES

The Casey Foundation conducted this survey with the objectives below:

- To unpack social norms and identify drivers of child marriage and teenage pregnancy at community, household, and individual levels;
- To make recommendations and define key indicators for monitoring progress in ending child marriage and teenage pregnancy practices in the affected communities;
- To understand who decides when girls should get married; and
- To identify the cultural and social norms that promote child marriage.

METHODOLOGY

This evaluation relied on a KAP (Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices) methodology and collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The KAP approach is a descriptive research method that can be applied to understand the dominant behaviours and attitudes within a community. This methodology has been used in the current study to assess the levels of self-awareness individuals have around certain behaviours and their attitudes toward them. In the case where behaviours are harmful and constitute a risk to individuals or society, the method can also be applied to understand whether there is a gap between attitudes and actions which prevents the development of suitable solutions.

The study assistants carried out field visits to collect data in villages of the selected administrative units of the Kasere district. Casey Foundation ensured that the required health measures and COVID-19 guidelines were followed in order to protect the safety of all participants during the interactions. The study assistants ensured that the process was carried out ethically and respondents' information remained confidential. All respondents were asked to sign a consent form, and for the minors (below 18 years), their parents or guardian signed on their behalf after the consent form was read and explained to them.

DATA COLLECTION

Three questionnaires were utilized in this study. Questionnaires were designed for women/girl respondents, to determine the age at which they got married and their first pregnancy, and to collect information on their perceptions and experiences related to early marriage and teenage pregnancy. Other questions were designed to discover KAPs towards child marriage and teenage pregnancy from men, given that fathers and brothers have the ultimate say when it comes to marriage. The three groups of respondents in this study are:

1. Married women/girls at the reproductive ages of 15-49 years
2. Women/girls who experienced teenage pregnancy at the reproductive ages of 15-49 years
3. Men from the age of 18-60 years

SELECTION OF RESPONDENTS

This section presents the process used to select participants in the survey. Ten (10) respondents were selected from each village within the sampled administrative areas of the Kasese district to assess the prevalence of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, practices, and community viewpoints in relation to them. The following general groups of respondents were interviewed from each village for the survey:

- Three (3) females who have been victims of child marriages: Two (2) of ages (15 – 17) and one (1) female adult aged (18 – 49), who was married before the age of 18.
- Two (2) female teenagers who have experienced teenage pregnancy at the ages of (15 – 17), along with one (1) female adult of age (18 – 49), who experienced pregnancy at the age of (13 – 19).
- Four (4) male community members the ages (18 – 60), one (1) of them was the Local Council one (LC1) chairperson or a member of the LC1 committee. The remaining three (3) are religious leaders, teachers, community leaders, and individuals of sound mind with an understanding of their communities

SURVEY RESULTS

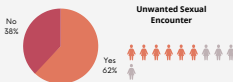
DATA 1

The survey reflected that 28.6% of the girls' respondents did not receive any prior information on sex education and pregnancy prevention. The other respondents received information through either a friend, parent, school nurse, or someone else.



DATA 2

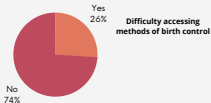
Of the respondents who reported becoming pregnant, 62% said the pregnancy was the result of an unwanted sexual encounter, pointing out the need to acquire basic needs while only 38% said their pregnancy resulted from a desired sexual encounter for pleasure most highlighted the need to satisfy their personal body demands.



SURVEY RESULTS

DATA 3

Respondents reported that neither they nor their partners used any method of birth control. Most of them said that they preferred to have sex without the use of protection for real enjoyment. 74% of respondents said they had no trouble getting birth control while 26% of respondents said getting birth control was difficult.



DATA 4

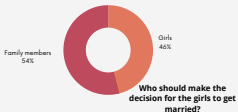
Of the respondents who reported becoming pregnant, 76% reported living with their parents at the time they became pregnant while 24% said they were not living with their parents.



SURVEY RESULTS

DATA 5

46% of the respondents believed that girls should be allowed to make their own decisions when it comes to marriage, and 54% do not believe that girls are competent enough to make the decision to get married and their families should be making these decisions.



QUALITATIVE RESULTS

DRIVERS OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY

One of the drivers leading to teenage pregnancy is the lack of sexual education amongst adolescents both in schools and in communities, among others, as stated below:

- Some girls engage in sex as a means to survive causing them to become pregnant
- Some girls are forced and influenced by their parents to get married causing them to get pregnant when still children
- Girls are not being guided well by parents/caregivers, or guardians.
- Peer pressure
- Poverty and the need for money to meet needs, poor livelihoods
- Early/forced marriage
- No caretaker or breadwinner
- Poverty and need for necessities, so sexual relations are demanded to obtain essentials from men.
- Reaching puberty and the urge for motherhood.
- Lack of emphasis on the importance of pursuing education for a self-sufficient future
- Involvement in intimate relationships

PREVALENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Understanding the scale of practices on the ground is not an easy task while conducting field surveys, especially with regard to social phenomena that respondents may feel as undesirable or have a negative effect. Therefore, we started with indirect questions such as "When do girls usually get married in your community" and then moved to ask directly about the prevalent age at which girls get married and their personal experiences. Also, a direct question was asked about the age at which the respondents got married. Results show that the highest number of respondents were married at the age of 16 years. There are cases of women who got married at a very early age of 13, 14, and 15. However, there are those who got married at the age of 17 and 18.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

As per the survey, the majority of the respondents suggested that implementing the following interventions could work toward addressing the problem of child marriage:

- The fight against child marriage should involve both parents and the community, and the legal systems should punish everyone who is involved with marrying a child.
- Empower out-of-school girls with hands-on activities to earn them a livelihood (support vocational education for girls)
- Support girls' education through the provision of scholarships and loan schemes (support girls to complete secondary education)
- Use of peer education to reach out to the youth – Young people advise each other on marriage and pregnancy issues.
- Parents should keep close to their children and provide sexual education, particularly focusing on the dangers of early sex and childbirth.
- Restrict children's mobility – limit visits to relatives during holidays and the kind of events they attend.
- Provide guidance and counselling for young people, especially the girls, on sexual and reproductive health issues; - marriage and sexuality, STDs, condom use for those who cannot abstain; family life, and job opportunities.
- Giving girls advice on menstrual hygiene and sanitary ware would support their retention in school.
- Engage the young people in activities that will keep them occupied, such as drama groups, debate clubs, etc.

DRIVERS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

The main reason behind girls' child marriage as stated frequently by respondents is poverty and the need for money since dowries represent an important source of income for some parents as well as the following:

- Being a girl orphan or the death of the breadwinner
- Lack of awareness and education among parents on the effects of child marriage
- No access to Education
- Hunger
- Lack of emphasis on the importance of pursuing education
- Reaching puberty: What else are you waiting for... get married.
- Domestic violence
- Lack of sexual education
- Poverty and need for money (poor living conditions)
- Cultural norms and beliefs
- Dowry greediness
- Rich husband and the beauty of the girl both accelerate the process
- Customs and traditions that nourish the idea of saying "Nothing to be done by women other than getting married"

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

It is important to recognize that child marriage is not a one-dimensional issue. It is multi-faceted and there are multiple factors contributing to almost every case encountered during the survey.

To achieve a reduction in the number of child marriages, it's imperative that change takes place at all levels of society with the support of both the community and the government. Steps need to be taken to create more efficient communication, cooperation and support between all parties. The statistics displayed throughout this report prove that Uganda needs to do more and act immediately to mitigate the issue of child marriage in order to salvage and protect the future of young girls in the country.

This section presents recommendations based on the analysis of the survey data, taking into consideration the viewpoints of interviewees and other community members with a great understanding of their communities consulted during the course of this study.

AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

- Government should put strict regulations on the age group of attendees of dance halls, nightclubs, and music concerts. Children below 18 years of age should not be allowed in these happenings because the nature of content displayed is purely for adults.
- Government should improve Universal Primary Education (UPE) facilities to support the education of girl children. The more the girls stay in school and concentrate, the more child marriage is denied.
- Government should put strict age restrictions on who works in areas like nightclubs, dance halls, and bars. Girls (female children below 18 years) should not work in such risky jobs.
- Ensure effective enforcement of the defilement law and other laws associated with marrying a minor.
- Implement a policy for teenage mothers to return to school that specifies when the pregnant girl should be sent away and allowed back to school.
- Strengthen the existing local government structures such as the police, probation office, and community development to implement the laws and programs to end child marriage. The local structures offer great potential for local government leadership and sustainability of programs. However, this demands continuous capacity-building and support to enable them to monitor the programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD (CONTINUED)

AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

- Community coalitions which provide activities and programs designed to curb the phenomenon of early marriage should be established. Communities should engage heads of education, health and endowment officials, guidance offices, school principals, local authority officials, legal professionals and any other influential figures who have the potential to organize, rally support for and contribute to the coalitions. Program activities that are women-centred and focus on empowerment elements should be prioritized in these communities.
- Community leaders should advocate for the regulation of child marriage with the local authorities. Regulations which should be put in place include compulsory marriage registration and a requirement to provide legal proof of a bride's age by an identification card or birth certificate before the marriage registration can be finalized.
- Communities should approach Imams and other religious leaders and ask them to allocate time during their services to talk about child marriage and its destructive consequences on girls, their families, the nation, and the world.
- Child marriage should be continually monitored and interventions performed as necessary. Communities should cooperate with authorities who have legal arrest power, medical services (reproductive health centres), agencies and specialists involved in child protection such as the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, civil society organizations, and human rights activists.
- Regarding household poverty, economic/financial support to improve family livelihoods and enhance the ability to keep children in school is critical. This could include enrolling the specific vulnerable households in the social protection Programme, supporting income-generating activities, and provision of grants to girls' education – to cover school fees, scholastic materials, and sanitary ware.
- Provide both in and out of school girls and boys with sexual and reproductive health information to enable them to manage their growing bodies.
- On sexual and gender-based violence, counselling and sensitization should be offered to families to address the causes of violence in families. Parenting sessions should be conducted to enhance parents' skills to handle children's growth and development issues, including skills to communicate more with their children (boys and girls).
- There is a need to engage with parents concerning their responsibilities to children (care, support, and guidance) especially encouraging parents to support their children's education through providing basic necessities and following up on their education and academic progress.
- The community should undertake massive education about laws and policies on children's rights to dispel some of the misinterpretations around these laws. Children should be sensitized about their responsibilities and obligations.
- There should be specific interventions targeting men and boys enlisting their support as partners in ending the practice of child marriage. These may include supporting and encouraging the establishment of boys' and men's clubs and male champions.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD (CONTINUED)

AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

- Examples of success stories of role models should be celebrated, shared, and made more visible to girls and boys to encourage them to raise their aspirations beyond marriage and stay in school. These could form the core system of mentors with mentorship Programmes established in schools and communities.
- There is a need for scaling up sexual and reproductive health education through the school system and the expanded work of the Village Health Team (VHTs). However, this requires sensitization of communities to address the social and religious norms and taboos about imparting sexual information and providing sexual and reproductive health services to girls and boys - in and out of school adolescents.
- Providing technical and vocational education for out-of-school adolescents provides an alternative to ending child marriage. This should be supplemented by other interventions such as integrating skills training in the school curriculum and establishing technical schools in the communities.
- Build the capacity of community, religious and cultural institutions to provide a platform for open discussion and public declarations in communities to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy.

EMPOWERING ADOLESCENTS

The establishment of capacity-building and income-generating opportunities is necessary to reduce widespread poverty and deteriorating economic and living conditions. Linking advocacy and outreach activities focused on the safe age for marriage with meaningful activities, including health services, vocational training, loans, and economic empowerment projects, will increase community engagement during the implementation process. Adolescent girls and boys need specifically to be empowered in a way that allows girls to have more input regarding their reproductive health and other life choices such as education, work, marriage, and more.

Some general examples of ways to empower young girls and boys include:

- Educating adolescent girls and boys on sexual and reproductive issues
- Teaching girls and boys to be agents of change in their community
- Training girls and boys in life skills
- Provide technical and vocational training for those who cannot continue with secondary education

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD (CONTINUED)

EMPOWERING ADOLESCENTS

Casey Foundation recommends the following specific actions in order to Empower Adolescents:

- Introduce adolescent-friendly health consulting services in health facilities or girl- or youth-friendly spaces. Schools can be mobilized to provide such spaces.
- Provide skills training for adolescent married girls to support community needs and then seed funding to start small income-generating projects.
- Focus on re-enrolling girls who stopped schooling or dropped out of school through the assistance of teachers and school social workers. Uneducated or undereducated girls are more likely to marry younger than their educated peers, so reintegrating unmarried girls into schools could delay child marriage.

INDICATORS TO MONITOR PROGRESS IN ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

Several indicators to monitor progress have been suggested for effective action planning and implementation. The indicators are both quantitative and qualitative (Source: Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Uganda. A Formative Research to Guide the Implementation of the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Uganda by UNICEF)

| Key focus area | Indicator |
|----------------------------|--|
| SOCIAL NORMS CHANGE | |
| Social Norms and practices | Definitions of childhood tally with the legal age of a child |
| | Changes in attitudes and beliefs – about the definition of a child and transition to adulthood -Marriage is no longer the singular ideal for women |
| | Passage of rites transformed into empowering processes that build girls' and boys' capacities |
| | Bridewealth made more symbolic |
| | The extent to which community perception of childhood definition tallies with the legal definition of a child |
| | Percentage of women 15-49 who have undergone FGM/C |
| | % of adolescents (girls & boys) who believe that it is harmful to get married before the legal age of 18 years |
| | % of key stakeholders (parents, community leaders, young people) who know about the harms of child marriage |
| | % of key stakeholders (parents, community leaders, religious leaders) who oppose the practice of bridewealth |
| | % of parents who say they will not marry off their sons and daughters younger than 18 |

INDICATORS TO MONITOR PROGRESS IN ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE (CONTINUED)

| STRUCTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DRIVERS | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Community level drivers | Control and efficient management of township entertainment venues; bi-laws banning young people below 18 years in video hall beyond 5 pm |
| | Number of youths in community youth groups for in-school and out of school |
| | The extent to which public entertainment venues have put in place measures to regulate the access and use by young people |
| | Number of adolescent peers/youth leaders engaged in activities to prevent child marriage in the community |
| Family/Household | Reduction in household poverty |
| | Reduction in GBV, alcoholism |
| | % of households living in poverty |
| | % of communities with public activities on child marriage, alcoholism, and GBV prevention |
| | Parents' perception of the value of girls' education |
| Individual | Percentage of families of unmarried adolescent girls who support their daughters staying in or returning to school |
| | % of adolescents with life skills level of knowledge about SRH issues – adults and adolescents |
| | The proportion of adolescent girls and boys who are members of peer groups and clubs that address life skills, protection, and SRH issues |

INDICATORS TO MONITOR PROGRESS IN ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE (CONTINUED)

| PLATFORMS AND INSTITUTIONS | |
|--|--|
| Legal and policy implementation for effective and efficient delivery of services | % of men, women, boys, and girls knowledgeable about the laws associated with child marriage |
| | Policy on girls' return to school after pregnancy and childbirth passed with clear guidelines spelling out when pregnant girls should be sent home and return to school |
| | The proportion of child marriages that were investigated by police/prosecuted by law/resulted in a conviction |
| | The extent to which policy on schoolgirl pregnancy has been implemented |
| Community | % of Teenage pregnancy |
| Schools | % enrolment of girls in schools % dropout rate % completion rate Number of schools accepting re-enrolment of girls after childbirth |
| Religious and cultural leaders | % of religious and cultural leaders campaigning against child marriage and promoting girls' education and delayed marriage |
| Role models advanced as a strategy for ending child marriage | % of role models recruited and actively promoting the end of child marriage and girls' education |
| | Number of role models and influential leaders and communicators (traditional, religious, cultural, political) who have made public declarations to end child marriage |
| Communication for change effected for end of child marriage | Number of communities, and schools, actively using different communication initiatives to end child marriage, promote girls' education, and delayed marriage for both girls and boys |

CONCLUSIONS

The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to information gathered, shows that the pandemic increased the number of cases in relation to both child marriage and teenage pregnancies. This was due to the restriction of movement, school closures, and lockdown imposed in different areas that gave teenagers more idle time, leading them to explore their curiosities and often getting themselves pregnant. However, respondents also indicated they were unaware of relief and support systems available to them. Although it is apparent that there is a law labelling these issues "criminal", the implementation of the law should be subjected to further improvement. It is notable that most teenagers become pregnant due to non-consensual sexual intercourse which constitutes "rape of a minor".

Answers by respondents about child marriage and associated risks indicate that community members are directly or indirectly aware of the scale of the phenomenon/problem. Therefore, when asked about the appropriate age for marriage, their estimates were ideal though at odds with practice on the ground. The majority of respondents replied saying that the appropriate age for marriage is at least 24 for boys and 20 for girls. Child marriage is more common in rural areas where men prefer young and uneducated women or those who received only a little bit of education. Educated women are perceived by some to pose a threat or, as someone said, "An open wife would undermine the stability of the family" while younger wives are easier to manage and control.

The lack of quality education for girls combined with the lack of jobs, training and qualification opportunities that improve women's skills and raise their productivity, economic capacities and subsequently their status within their families deepens the already entrenched community traditions in favour of child marriage for economic ends. Such practices stem from unwavering social norms and beliefs by community members who applaud and support marrying girls early, claiming that unless married they would continue to pose a burden on their families and may put their families' reputation at the stake.

When asked why some families marry off their daughters early, they cited poverty and the need for money, greed by fathers or exchange marriage as the main reasons. Additional social factors mentioned were lack of awareness, girls reaching puberty and chastity. These justifications hide negative social norms, negative attitudes and debasement of women within families who value women for their reproductive roles only. Often, girls are not consulted before marriage and all they can do is obey orders from their male relatives, such as fathers or brothers, cousins, uncles or grandfathers, who decide for them.

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRES USED IN THE STUDY

1.1 For child marriage

Date of interview: _____ Place of interview: _____

Interviewer Name: _____ Respondent age: _____

Age of spouse (male): _____

Language in which the interview was conducted: _____

At what age do girls usually get married in your community?

At what age did you marry? Was this in line with your expectations? Did anyone try to stop you from getting married?

Has anyone provided you with information or guidance on marriage and sexuality? If so, who? What sorts of things did you get information/guidance on? Are they helpful? What else would you like to know more about?

So, why did you marry? Was it out of your will or the will of your family? What is your experience?

Now, what could you do to prevent girls from marrying early?

1.2 For teenage pregnancy

Date of interview: _____ Place of interview: _____

Interviewer Name: _____ Respondent age: _____

Language in which the interview was conducted: _____

Is it common for girls in your community to have children before marriage? Do you know of girls who have?

Is this your first pregnancy? If not, what age was your first pregnancy?

Which do you think would be worse for you - getting married at a very early age or getting pregnant without being married?

Do you know of any method of birth control? If yes! Did you have difficulty accessing birth control? Specifically! Did you get any pregnancy prevention information in the past year?

Were you living with a parent/guardian when you became pregnant?

Were you in school when you got pregnant? If Not, have you ever been to school? Up to what level?

Alright, what caused you to be involved in this act that led you to become pregnant?

What can be done to avoid more girls getting pregnant as teenagers?

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRES USED IN THE STUDY

1.3 For community leaders @ male participation

Date of interview: _____ Place of interview: _____

Interviewer Name: _____ Respondent age: _____

Language in which the interview was conducted: _____

What communication strategies/approaches/activities are being used to address child marriage and teenage pregnancy in your community? How effectively are they addressing social norms around child marriage and teenage pregnancy?

Who should decide for the girls to get married?

How are you involved in the fight against child marriage and teenage pregnancy in your area?

How is your community involved in the efforts to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy?

How are the offenders involved in the acts of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy treated in your community? Do they face the law?

In your opinion, what causes child marriage and teenage pregnancy in your area?

According to you, what can be done to fight against child marriage and teenage pregnancy in your area?

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ANNEX: STORIES FROM KASESE

Story 1

Jovia grew up in a poor household where there was not enough income to provide steady meals. No one in her family or village had been educated in school, so she had no positive role models to encourage her. Jovia dropped out of school after primary two to earn money. Her boyfriend also provided gifts and food, and she decided to marry him hoping to escape poverty.

Jovia believes that if parents can better provide basic necessities and emotional support for their children to focus on positive aspects of their lives, child marriage will decrease.

Story 2

Praise was raised with her grandparents because her parents could not provide her with school fees or basic necessities. Unfortunately, they were not attentive to her, and she could do whatever she wanted, ending up pregnant.

She believes that Community leaders can help reduce child marriage by educating young girls and boys about the dangers of child pregnancy. She also believes that Skills training in tailoring and hairdressing would allow girls to earn money and support themselves without marriage.

STORIES FROM KASESE (CONTINUED)

Story 3

Bridget's father stopped paying her school fees in Senior one because he was unhappy with her academic performance. She stayed at home for one year before she married.

Bridget believes that educating girls to provide for themselves without depending solely on their parents will reduce the incidence of child marriage. If they are taught skills like tailoring, piggyery, or operating a shop, then if their parents cannot provide for them, they can live independently without needing to find a man to provide for their needs.

Story 4

Jennifer's story is all too familiar to us. She dropped out of school because her family could not afford her fees. Without her studies to focus on, she became involved in a sexual relationship and ended up getting pregnant and eventually married. Jennifer believes that if girls were taught vocational skills they need to be productive in life, such as hairdressing and tailoring, they would be less likely to marry early.

STORIES FROM KASESE (CONTINUED)

Story 5

Allen spent her days as a young girl at home doing domestic chores with her mother because her family could not afford to pay her school fees or buy her necessities like pads. Her life lacked excitement and comfort, so she looked for a man who would spend time with her and buy her things like dresses and cosmetics. When she got pregnant, her mother forced her to marry.

Allen believes that the Key to preventing child marriage is to empower and educate girls and families. She believes that if girls are taught skills, such as poultry keeping, they will be in a position where they can sustain themselves and not need to look for a man to provide for them. She also believes that social workers are a valuable resource to families. They can provide helpful advice to both parents and children on how to manage difficult times and continue toward their goals.

Story 6

Ronet was curious about sex. A handsome and well-behaved man bought her a mobile phone, and she offered to have sex in return to satisfy her urges. As a result, she became pregnant.

Ronet believes that if teenagers are educated in income-generating activities, they will be less dependent on others and will not offer sex in exchange for material things.

STORIES FROM KASESE (CONTINUED)

Story 7

Livenia's family could not afford to send her to school. She took a job, and at work, she met her boss's son. He bought her many gifts and demanded sex in return. When she became pregnant, her parents encouraged her to marry.

Livenia believes that teenage pregnancy can be reduced by teaching girls about family planning, empowering them to make decisions about when and who to marry, and providing them with training on income-generating activities so that they can provide for their own needs.

Story 8

Martin believes the two of the biggest causes of child marriage and teenage pregnancy are lack of education and lack of family support. In order to help his community, he works tirelessly to sensitize parents and girls about the dangers of teenage pregnancy and the importance of education. He encourages girls to exercise self-control and have self-esteem and teaches them about safe sex. To focus on the whole family, Martin encourages parents to be good role models and work hard to improve their living conditions. Martin believes that community leaders and parents can work with NGOs to sensitize the public about the dangers of child marriage.

STORIES FROM KASESE (CONTINUED)

Story 9

Tom advocates for the rights of girls through the legal system. He works with police to arrest parents who allow child marriage and simultaneously proposes the strengthening and more strictly enforcing the laws to prevent child marriage. Tom also holds meetings at school and within the community to discuss the safety of children and discourage child marriage. For those girls that already left school and married at a young age, he encourages them to train in work skills so that they can continually improve their lives. He states that more effort is needed to address the issue.

Story 10

Julius has seen over 10 cases of child marriage and more than 20 teenage pregnancies in his community over the past year alone. He believes there are many reasons for this, including domestic violence, idleness after dropping out of school, negative peer group influences, and hard labor at home, which results in girls running away. He works to educate his community on the dangers of child marriage and teenage pregnancy whenever he can, especially during school assemblies and parent meetings. Julius hopes that in the future, the government will implement stricter laws and heavy punishments, which will prompt parents to abide by the law and not participate in child marriage.

STORIES FROM KASESE (CONTINUED)

Story 11

Robert believes that child marriage and teenage pregnancy will be reduced if parents have more open and honest discussions with their children. To facilitate this, he works with teens and their parents to educate them on the effects of child marriage and teenage pregnancy. He encourages parents to be involved in their children's lives and advises teens on how to avoid negative influences. Robert hopes that laws will be strengthened in the future to reduce child marriage.

Story 12

John has seen that the period of idleness caused by covid-19 has increased the incidence of teenage pregnancy and child marriage. When girls do not have a purpose in life or feel that they are not cared for in the right way, they often seek out a man who will give them what they want. Because they are not educated in family planning, they often become pregnant.

John believes parents can play the biggest role in ending child marriage and teenage pregnancy. Being a parent means not only providing necessities for your child but also providing them with emotional support, encouragement, and wisdom, allowing kids to grow into successful adults. Parents should try to work as hard as they can, involve themselves in SACCOs, and even accept loans to pay for school and necessities so that their children understand how important and valuable their development and education are for the future.