



# Investigating the Lived Experiences of Teachers in Long Distance Marriages: A Case of Selected Secondary Schools of Choma District, Zambia

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**Abstract:** Distant marriage has widely been researched on in other professionals such as lawyers, doctors, soldiers. However, in the teaching fraternity, this phenomenon has not been widely studied. Thus, the lived experiences of teachers in long distant marriage are generally unknown. This study aimed to assess the lived experiences of teachers faced with long distant marriages and the dynamics on perceived marital as well as job fulfilment in Zambia. This study used ethnographic research methods to uncover the lived experiences of teachers in long distance Choma district of Zambia. Three schools were the primary focus of the study; St Mark's, Choma Boarding and Njase. Interview with open and closed questions and observation protocols were used to collect data. The study found that teachers on long distant marriage must prepare themselves adequately by adapting to it through, consulting with the Ministry of General Education on available payroll vacancies, family, visitation, proper planning, and management of their finances. Indeed, work presence and input/output as well as to engage in social activities were critical moments for the respondents. Respondents gave their concerns on their continued stay in long-distance marriages which may be useful for educational planners and implementers. The study recommends that the Zambian Ministry of Education should redesign the deployment policy of teachers to cater for those in long distance marriages. Finally, the study recommends additionally that the impact of long-distance marriage on a learner be investigated by other researchers.

**Keywords:** Long Distance Marriage, Deployment, Promotion, Transfers

## 1. Introduction

Despite the importance of family life in a society and the positive benefits that come with it, teachers who come from long distant married homes live unfulfilled professional and marital life. The Ministry of General Education has over the years not considered family issues as the base of teacher motivation when recruiting, transferring and promoting teachers to different stations. This, therefore, has had adverse effects on the performance of teachers in schools. If this situation is left to continue, it may result in lack of teacher preparedness, teacher absence to duty, low input/output, extramarital affairs and many others, which may lead to low work productivity. Teachers in long-distance marriage may have various experiences which may include those

mentioned above. However, incidents of teachers in long distant marriage in Choma secondary schools are not known. It is for this reason that it has become necessary to explore the lived experiences that secondary school teachers' face in long distant marriage, in selected secondary schools of Choma.

### 1.1. Research Objectives

The following research objectives guided the study.

1. To investigate the challenges faced by teachers on distant marriage in Choma district.
2. To explore the performance of secondary school teachers on long-distance marriage in Choma district.
3. To establish secondary school teachers' attitude towards long-distant marriage in Choma district.

## 1.2. Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may help the Ministry of General Education, co-operating partners, policymakers and implementers, the school organisations and other ministries at massive identify the effects of long-distant marriage on teachers' marital life and professional performance. Also, the findings of this study may also be used in devising acceptable measures to reduce long distant marriages to motivate teachers to produce satisfactory results in their professional expeditions. The research will also contribute to the body of existing knowledge and may further help the ministry of General Education and the Public Service Management Division in policy formulation. The research may also act as a motivation for further research on the topic.

## 2. Literature Review

Long-distance marriage has a background which is associated with the lifestyle and behaviour of people [15]. It has become common, however, with the high number of couples who have identified with travelling abroad or in diverse government locality for greener pastures. Some teachers of Choma work in rural schools to attract allowances such as rural hardship which helps them to accumulate better salaries. Also, teachers in rural schools engage themselves in farming activities that enable them to balance their food well and financial security. Teachers in these schools sell milk to processing plants, spread around their country as well as local co-operatives stationed around them. On the other hand, proceeds from these agriculture businesses support families financially while the surplus is invested in other areas for future use.

However, as much as working in rural areas attract lucrative salary most teachers opt to leave the rest of the family in townships reason being that their children are supposed to go to descent schools and grow in a modernised environment. In this scenario, long-distance marriage can be inevitable [7]. The situation, therefore, has made rural teachers fail to be present on duty on time or every day due to continuous mobility in the quest to balance family life and professional productivity.

Teacher absence is one of the contributing factors to low percentage rates in Choma secondary schools. This has reflected on the analysis of the results of grade 9 (nine) 2019 where school "A" secondary school recorded 85 per cent pass rate, secondary school "B" 100 percentage and school "C" secondary 80 percentage, respectively, [13]. The relationship between teacher presence and quality performance cannot be overemphasised; teachers who are present in schools can plan their work effectively and put their plans into action through teaching, assessment and evaluation. On the other hand, there is a link between work and family life, a satisfied teacher emotionally, physically and otherwise is a productive one professionally.

A family is a dynamic, multi-faceted entity hence the frequent change in meaning [11, 2, 16]. When two people are

in love, they come together and create a family. They publicly pledge to live together throughout their lives, ensuring that their lives are articulated. Family members are also inter-linked together, so much so that if anything happens to any member of the family, it has a direct bearing on the other members' as well [17]. A family is a fundamental social group consisting of one or two members and their children. These people live in the same house, share goals, values and have long term commitments [14]. Howell emphasises the importance of observational learning [10]. A distance marriage set up may not avail a child with such type of education. The results can be undesirable behaviour in children such as drug and substance abuse, truancy, among others [18].

There are a few studies that have been done on Long Distance Marriage on workers, but less or little has been done on lived experiences of secondary school teachers of Choma district in particular. Thus, this research endeavours to fill in the gap by carrying out a study on exploring the lived experiences of teachers in long-distance marriage in selected secondary schools of Choma District.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

A research design refers to a plan of how one intends to conduct research [12, 1, 3, 6]. For the purpose of achieving the objectives of the study, the researcher chose to use an ethnographic /phenomenological study research designs, which are qualitative in approach. The ethnographic approach was used to enable the researcher to closely examine the group within a specific context for one year at three schools in Choma District, where the researcher works. The researcher also used phenomenological design to collect data in all schools.

### 3.2. Sample and Sample Size

Target population refers to all members who meet the particular criterion specified for a research investigation [15, 8]. The study covered male (8) and two female (2) who were 25 years and above, three (3) Head Teachers, one (1) SHRO, one (1) DEBS and one (1) PESO. According to Kothari the sample size is defined as a group of a relatively smaller number of people selected from a population for investigating purpose [12]. The members of a group are called participants. This study consisted of, ten teachers who were 25 years and above, three Headteachers, one Senior Human Resource Officer, one District Education Board Secretary, and one Principle Education Standards Officer. Thus, this sample size that the research picked is sufficient to provide much-needed information for the study. This, according to Rwegoshora [15] and Chipindi [3], the researcher can choose the number that he or she feels sufficient to form a sample.

### 3.3. Research Instruments

The study used open and closed structured questions interview protocols for the phenomenological design method and observation checklist for the ethnographic design method as research instruments in data collection. The researchers used open and closed structured interview protocols to collect information from teachers who are in long distant marriage; the same was done to Headteachers, SHIRO, DEBS and PESO. Also, an observation checklist instrument was used to observe the lives of the teachers in long-distance marriage in the three schools. Interviews are a widely used tool to access people's experiences and their inner perceptions, attitudes, and feelings of reality. Based on the degree of structuring, interviews can be divided into three categories; structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews [9, 4, 19]. Indeed, observation checklist is another type of instrument which was used to help those who are being observed and those who are watching.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Data Analysis refers to examining what has been collected in surveying experiments and making deductions and inferences. It is a manipulation of collected data to draw conclusions that reflect on the interests, ideas and theories that initiated the study; it involves uncovering underlying structures, extracting important variables, detecting any variance and testing any underlying assumptions [5].

In this research, data were analysed qualitatively as the open and closed structured interview protocols, and observation checklists were used for data collections. Thematic analysis was used to organise common themes or patterns that emerged from the responses from the interview protocols and observation checklists from the participants and schools so that appropriate conclusions would be made.

### 3.5. Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured that the study was clearly explained and made known to the participants and that there were no emoluments or incentives attached to this study; thus, the research was purely academic. The researcher also assured that the participants of their confidentiality and anonymously as no names would be published and that their responses would only be known by the researcher and that no data provided would be attached to the respondents. The information obtained was solely for academic purposes. The researcher did not force participants to be part of the study; consent was sought from respondents to be involved in the research. Only those that were willing to participate in the study were engaged. Those who declined were respected too. There was no harm experienced by the respondents attributed to their participation in the research. This was so because the researcher made sure that the research topic was strategically selected to make sure that there was no harm whatsoever to the respondents.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

We asked our study participants, what, in their opinions, were the challenges faced by teachers in long-distance marriages (LDM) in selected secondary schools of Choma District. Varied responses were advanced. One administrator (Admin 1) stated:

I have two teachers, one male and one female at my schools that are on long-distance marriage. These teachers desire to join their partners, but the system has not yet availed them with a payroll vacancy as a result of overcrowded PMEC. This is as the result of deployment and challenging to facilitate the transfer of my teachers and their partners.

The sentiments of Admin 1 were echoed by teacher L, who had herself been in an LDM for five years:

Promotions, transfer, deployment, and marriage are the challenges of long-distance marriage because when one is transferred, that person will stay alone and for the partner to get a transfer is difficult. It is tough when a partner strives to join the husband or the wife but is hindered as a result of these barriers and remains at one station for as long as four years, while the husband is at another station.

Teacher M, similarly, stated that the pains of forced single parenthood were enormous:

LDM can affect the children upbringing because they are left to be taken care of by one parent. Other than children upbringing, it is cardinal to note that a woman has a specific timeframe to give birth (15-50). The process of staying apart might lead to the wife reaching menopause, making it difficult for her to bear any children.

Another study participant, Teacher W, related that the effect of LDM on children was quite huge. He stated that: "LDM, emotionally, physically and socially affect the parentage of children and the intimacy of couples. Often, children tend to behave strangely when both parents are not present at home. I am on long-distance marriage by employment and had no choice."

The testimonies continued to illustrate that the effects of LDM on family life could be colossal. Condemned to a life of involuntary loneliness, Teacher T surprisingly confessed infidelity:

I start to do evil things, and I may begin to admire other women who will lead me to *the* extramarital relationship that can result in breaking my marriage. This has led me to contract STIs, which has led to problems in my marriage and at work. I have lost my good reputation in the community and at work because of my promiscuous behaviour as a result of being far from my wife.

Teacher T's predicament clearly illustrates what happens when access to a spouse, together with the attendant conjugal rights. Infidelity becomes inevitable when couples feel lonely and vulnerable to all sorts of temptations. Teacher T colourfully puts it as: "To vent his sexual desire with other women who could be found easy?"

However, the views of our study participants did not

always converge on the downside of long-distance marriages. Teacher Z, a male teacher in an LDM for three years, remarked thus:

Transfers, quite alright, takes us far from each other; it means that we will have more of a distance kind of a marriage. But if a promotion causes the transfer, then the issue changes altogether. Such a transfer would simultaneously put us apart and together. An upgrade would translate into higher revenue for the household, which would also mean that the cost of frequent travel to the spouse's station can become affordable. It brings us together because at least for the sources of income we will have something.

The higher remuneration brought about by the promotion made up for the loneliness that would otherwise be more acute in the absence of adequate financial compensation. To further understand the economic dimensions of LDM, it appeared worthwhile to pursue the views of the administrators.

Admin Z, a Human Resource Officer in Choma, linked the financial dimensions (of LDM) with the effects of family life. He then reiterated that the government, as an employer, had little choice on the matter.

LDM affect the family life in the sense that if a family has a business in town, they cannot leave that business to follow the other partner, the husband may be reluctant to follow the wife or vice versa. The spouse will be may affected emotionally. S/he may misbehave in the end. However, it is challenging for the government to post teachers who are married to desired destinations as there is no policy to that effect where teachers are to teach where their spouses are. It is not there because teachers were allegedly producing fake marriage certificates to back ways that where possible with evidence. However, when the marriage is proven, we facilitate that movement when space is availed.

Additional implications of LDM, emerged as we engaged the administrators further. Administrator P stated that: "Long Distance Marriage does contribute to cases of gender basic violence among such teachers. Wives maintain mistrust of husbands compared to men. Teachers frequent my office with such issues."

Another respondent, Teacher Q stated:

LDM causes lack of companionship with my wife; I play double roles of the mother and father. I lack intimacy encounters with my wife. This has made me feel lonely when I think about her so much so that I lose focus on my professional duties. MOGE should consider matching people when transferring a man or woman within a reasonable time, in a period of 3 months not beyond to 1 year.

As he spoke of his plight, Teacher Q expressed a high level of emotional attachment to his wife; we spotted him wiping down a tear. Marriage is supposed to provide companionship to the couple for such situations. As researchers, we could not do much to calm comfort the visibly disturbed participant.

Meanwhile, Teacher L stated that: This [LDM] has affected my family life, especially the children, because there is no parental guidance from both parents. I find it challenging to raise my children alone, especially the girls, who typically require motherly attention during their adolescent stage. MOGE should always consider putting spouses in workplaces that are not far apart, by moving them closer. Parenting is a full-time job and should be undertaken by both parents. The absence of one parent leads to a gap in modelling and mentoring. Children learn by observing the significant others in their environment.

Teacher D echoed these sentiments by stating that:

MOGE must ensure that couples are transferred and kept together as much as possible. This is in order to reduce suspicions from the community and couples them. Teachers feel scrutinised by the public about their movements, so their privacy is intruded. Child sexual molestation is more prevalent in schools that have high numbers of teachers in long-distance marriage as compared to schools that did not have such teachers. Even extramarital affairs are high in such cases. Some teachers decide to have extramarital experiences to satisfy their sexual desires. The situation has led to broken marriages and frustrated workers. Sexual satisfaction is a matter of concern in these teachers. When sexual needs are not met adequately, it can result in marital dissatisfaction.

The physiological needs of the teachers were intermittently referenced during our study, with an Administrator E succinctly bringing closure to the issue:

MOGE should be encouraged to ensure that teachers should be transferred as couples, not as individuals. This is one way of motivating teachers and also reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STIs as well. Teachers are like any other human beings who have emotions and feelings too. Couples have needs that must be met for healthy relationships to excel. A sexual encounter with a spouse is a critical need. A healthy sexual relationship between spouses is a crucial element to a healthy relationship. Sex in marriage serves as various purposes such as; bond to the wedding, physical satisfaction, as well as cementing of the union- a standard component of marriage. Through sex, conception and procreation are facilitated. This implies that spouses in long-distance marriages are unfulfilled sexually since their partners come back home rarely or occasionally visits where possible. Unfulfilled sexual need is a path to sexual frustration and presents a possibility for infidelity.

Some teachers cited what they called "emotional distance" as an affront to a couple's relationship. Teacher U stated that: "These emotional needs include verbal utterances accompanied with a touch, a kiss and sexual intercourse strengthens a marriage. The absence of emotional relationship results in emotional and social distance. The respondents gave integrity prominence

shows value attached to faithfulness marriage and profession” Administrator Q also amplified this by asserting that: “when these teachers ask for permission to visit their families, I facilitate that, though when that person is away the work suffers. Often time’s teachers exceed their permission by days; this leaves their professional work an attended to. Eventually, the quality of teaching may be compromised. Teachers may find it very difficult to work in LDM because it is costly and turn it is demanding on their work. Teacher F recounted similar sentiments: “Sometimes I fail to plan adequately for my work properly because I’m always looking for how to go and prepare my family back home”.

## 5. Conclusion

LDM exits among secondary school teachers of Choma District. Teachers face challenges of relocating to their spouses once posted to various schools in the district and the country at large. It was evident that marriage, deployment, promotions and teacher transfers have a direct bearing on teacher morale. Teachers who are in this type of marriage can only get a transfer if the PMEC end users and super users can provide PMEC numbers where they intend to be transferred to. The running of two homes by teachers on distant marriage has come with a high economic price for the concerned teachers. Therefore, teacher input/output are compromised as a result of a lot of family responsibilities. Most teachers are not happy with the arrangement of commuter marriage, because they feel that the government is only interested in their service and not their social life.

The research revealed that the performance of teachers in long-distance marriage was not impressive as it made teacher fail to plan, teach, assess and evaluate effectively. According to the research findings Head Teachers, SHRO, DEBS, and PESO confirmed that the performance of secondary school teachers in distance marriage is below par. Teachers involved echoed that they good have performed much better in a complete home than in distance marriage. The observation checklist conducted by the researcher revealed inconsistency in terms of lesson planning, teaching, assessment and timekeeping. She observed that most of the teachers in distance marriage missed Monday briefings and left school early on Friday. Teachers’ absence was more prone to teachers in commuter marriage than those who were not in that type of marriage. Teacher presence in school has a positive turn over on the performance of teachers and consequently the pupils.

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