

**THE ROLE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF ZAMBIA IN COMBATING  
EARLY MARRIAGE OF GIRLS IN ISOKA DISTRICT OF ZAMBIA**

**BY**

**DOUGLAS CHISENGA**

**A Research Dissertation submitted to the University of Zambia in partial fulfilment of the  
award of Master of Education in Religious Studies.**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA**

**LUSAKA**

**2023**

## **DECLARATION**

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## **APPROVAL**

This dissertation by Douglas Chisenga has been approved as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Education in Religious Studies (MEd.RS) of the University of Zambia.

Examiner 1. Name:..... Signature:..... Date:....

Examiner 2. Name:..... Signature:..... Date:....

Examiner 3. Name:..... Signature:..... Date:.....

Chairperson. Name:..... Signature:..... Date:....

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research paper to my wife, Linda Chilufya Chisenga, for the love and encouragement to pursue a master's degree; and to my children, Ebenezer Lubuto Chisenga, Rebecca Kuzipa Chisenga and Prince Chisenga, for their understanding when I had to be away from them all to do my schoolwork.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I pass my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to the Almighty God for the gift of life and the gift of mind, His grace, favour and wisdom. I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Judith Lubasi Ilubala-Ziwa for her tireless and valuable guidance throughout the project preparation and presentation. To the following lecturers: Professor Austin Mumba Cheyeka, Dr. Tomaida Milingo-Kaulule, and Dr. Farrelli Hambulo, of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Zambia, I treasure your advice and guidance. I am most grateful to my late Father, Mr. Simon Chisenga and my mother who is still alive, Mrs. Rosemary Nachivula Chisenga who taught me to work hard and endure all situations in life.

Further appreciation goes to my Bishops, Rev. Sydney Sichilima and Bishop Rev. Festus Bwembya Chulu, the UCZ General Secretary Rev. Chipasha Musaba, Rev. Dr Dennis Mbita Sikazwe, Mrs Priscilla Nanyangwe Sikazwe, Mr Chrispine Sikazwe, Mr Banda Teza, Ms Dorothy Chonya, Mr Josphat Mpombo, Mr Forward Munga, for the crucial role they played in supporting me to pursue my studies alongside my religious duties, not forgetting my friends Rev. Josphat Sinkala, Rev. Goma Dyson, Rev. Aaron. G. Chilongo and Rev. Aaron Simukonda.

To my course mates, I am grateful for your companionship and encouragement offered during those moments when I felt low. Last but not least, I wish to thank Mr Sichinga Ntanchimba, your help did not go unnoticed. I can simply say my support system was strong.

God bless you all.

## **ABSTRACT**

Early marriage is a familiar phenomenon in many countries in Africa. It is a harmful traditional practice, a human rights violation that not only denies young girls a choice of whom to marry but also exposes them to psychological, social, health and economic risks. The purpose of this study was to explore the role of the United Church of Zambia (UCZ) in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District, Zambia. The study sought to achieve the following objectives: to establish the factors that influence early marriage of girls in Isoka District, to examine initiatives put in place by the UCZ in order to combat early marriage of girls and to analyse combating measures put in place by the Church to combat early marriage. Guided by Pilcher and Imelda's (2008) radical feminist theory, which regarded patriarchy as the primary cause of women's oppression, the study adopted a case study research design and was informed by primary data obtained through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Snowball and purposeful sampling techniques were used to select participants. Research findings showed that age at first marriage, lack of financial support services and poverty, among others, significantly influenced early marriage of girls in Isoka District. The study concluded that lack of education had negative effects on people's ability to access and use the information given on the consequences of early marriage. The study further concluded that the UCZ had programmes in which they worked with the boys and girls and the community and reviewed policies that touched on women's lives. However, the initiation of young girls into puberty stage (chisungu) was indicative enough that the people of Isoka District were still attached to traditional patriarchal beliefs and practices, which compelled them to force their daughters into early marriage. The study recommended that the government should ensure that every district has recreational and skills training centres where young people could be kept busy and avoid early marriage, especially after dropping out of school.

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## ACRONYMS

**ACRWC:** African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

**CRC:** Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**ICRW:** International Centre for Research on Women

**NGOs:** Non-Governmental Organizations.

**UDHR:** Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**UNFPA:** United Nations Population Fund.

**UNICEF:** United Nations Children Fund.

**UCZ:** United Church of Zambia

**WHO:** World Health Organization.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

This chapter presents the background to the study, the brief history of the United Church of Zambia in Isoka District, a brief history of Isoka District, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, theoretical framework, scope of the study, limitations of the study and definition of key terms. The last section is a summary.

### 1.2 Background to the Study

Early marriage refers to a harmful traditional practice wherein a girl child is wedded to a man significantly older than she is, with parents and the community making this decision on her behalf (Wondie *et al*, 2011). Moreover, Wondie *et al* (2011) highlight that the Declaration of Human Rights recognises the right to “free and full” consent to marriage, acknowledging that consent cannot be “free and full” when one of the individuals involved is not sufficiently mature to make an informed decision about a life partner. Nonetheless, in developing countries, particularly in rural areas, girls are often committed to an arranged marriage without their knowledge or consent. As Nnadi (2014) states, such an arrangement can occur as early as infancy. Parents see marriage as a cultural rite that protects their daughters from sexual assault and offers them the care of a male guardian. Parents often feel that a young girl is an economic burden and therefore wish to marry off their young daughters before they become an economic liability. Ironically, some of these young girls reach puberty in the houses of their husbands. The practice sometimes, is that very young girls are given in marriage to husbands who are old enough to be their grandfathers and are commanded to remain there and be good wives.

Early marriage is also defined as a formal or informal union, including religious or customary marriage, of anyone younger than 18 years (UNICEF, 2001). Though early marriage is not explicitly addressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), it is linked to several other rights and is frequently highlighted as a serious rights violation by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. A ‘child’ in this instance is anyone younger

than 18 years. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states that “parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular, shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, to enter marriage only with the full consent, the same rights and responsibilities within marriage and divorce, the same rights and responsibilities as parents, the same rights to decide on the number and spacing of children, the same rights with regard to ownership of property. A minimum age shall be set for marriage.” (UNICEF, 2001). CEDAW goes on to state that the betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory. In addition to outlining the need for consent and registration of all marriages, this Convention calls for legislative action to specify a minimum age for marriage. It specifies that a marriage entered into by any person younger than 18 years should be considered illegal, except where a competent authority has granted a dispensation, for serious reasons, in the interest of the intending spouses (UNICEF, 2001).

However, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, article 6, promotes the equality of men and women in all aspects relating to marriage and, among other things, highlights the need for consent and marriage not to take place before the age of 18. Additionally, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, states that early 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 above (UNICEF, 2001).

For Jain and Kurz (2007), marriage is generally taken to refer to a union between two consenting adults of the opposite sex, to the exclusion of all others. In Zambia, marriage is contracted under customary law and the Act of Parliament (civil marriage). As child marriage has more to do with age and the psychological and physical development of the parties to a marriage, the concept is often used interchangeably with the term ‘early marriage’, to signify that one or more of the parties to a marriage are not ready for the responsibilities that come with marriage (Jain and Kurz, 2007). It is for this reason that internationally, ‘child marriage’ is defined as a formal or informal union, including

religious or customary marriage, of anyone younger than 18 (Jain and Kurz, 2007). Early marriage is thus any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years before the girl or boy is physically, physiologically and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and child bearing.

According to UNICEF (2010), early marriage is a formal marriage or informal union before 18 years and occurs throughout the world. Being forced into marriage before one can give consent violates the basic human rights of boys and girls. UNICEF (2018) reports that most married youths are girls, with estimates revealing that 1 in 3 girls in the developing world is estimated to be married before the age of 18 years. The report further states that globally on average, only 5% of males marry before their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.

UNICEF (2018) reports further states that, every year 12 million girls are married before the age of 18. This denies them their rights and childhood, often meaning an end to their formal schooling and the start of their lives as wives and mothers with profound physical, psychological and emotional consequences. Globally, girls from impoverished households are most likely victims of early marriage. Further combined with traditional practices and beliefs, poverty gives education prevalence to boys in situations of economic constraints (Wondie *et al*, 2011). UNICEF (2018) adds that Zambia has one of the highest early marriage rates in the world with 42% of women aged 20-24 years married by the age of 18. For this reason, early marriage has currently become a topic of discussion among several development platforms in Zambia. For example, in December 2013, the former First Lady, Dr Christine Kaseba, at the symposium on ending early marriage held in Lusaka, declared early marriage a national crisis and also called for its criminalization (Munthali, 2015). Munthali (2015) concludes by affirming that another former First Lady, Mrs Esther Lungu, at the Organisation of African First Ladies Against HIV and AIDS (OAFLA) summit held in Kampala, Uganda, highlighted that the scenario of early marriages and pregnancies had become worrisome and that as First Ladies, their goal was to try and find ways to eliminate early marriages and teen pregnancies.

In Zambia, an estimated 23 per cent of girls are married off before the age of eighteen (Gillian *et al*, 2015). The Church and Civil Society Organizations, in collaboration with the Zambian government, are actively working towards reducing early marriage through awareness campaigns on the adverse consequences, presenting viable alternatives, and

advocating for implementation and enforcement of existing laws prohibiting the scourge. However, despite the efforts to discourage and stop early marriage, some communities proceed with this practice.

From many parts of the world, parents support the marriage of their daughters while they are still young, hoping that the marriage might benefit them both financially and socially, while also relieving the financial burdens on the family (Gibbs and Ajuju, 1999). Therefore, in actuality, early marriage is a violation of human rights, compromising the developmental growth of girls and often resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, with little education and poor vocational training thereby reinforcing the gendered nature of poverty. In most cases, early marriage deprives a girl-child of the opportunity of education, as she bears children at a very tender age and cares for them instead of going to school (CRC, 1989). Thus, early marriage has been identified as a vice that negatively impacts or is linked to activities in communities that are likely to hinder development in the country. These include Gender-Based Violence, Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights, and Human Development. Therefore, this study investigated the role of the United Church of Zambia (UCZ), in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District of Muchinga Province in Zambia.

### **1.3 History of the United Church of Zambia in Isoka District**

To understand the characterisation that the post-independence Zambian church up to date was generally “an institutional, spiritual, evangelical and ‘narrowly’ social church”, it is vitally important to go into the historical background of the UCZ. The formation of the UCZ took place when six churches joined together at successive stages in history to form one organic church (UCZ). Bolink (1967) highlights that early church union negotiations (1936-1945), from where the roots of the United Church of Zambia are traced, were essentially carried out by White missionaries from the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in Nyasaland (Malawi), the London Missionary Society (LMS) in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and the United Missions to the Copperbelt (UMCB). The Methodist Church, the Church of Barotseland and the last mission to come into the union was the Church of Scotland in the North-Eastern Zambia. This Mission played a very important role in the evangelisation of Malawi and some parts of Zambia especially

in the North-Eastern and it established the first permanent mission in Zambia at Mwenzo near Tanzania.

Therefore, the story of Isoka UCZ is one of the humble beginnings. According to Burger (2010) early missionaries were spread throughout Zambia. Those who evangelised Isoka district came from Mwenzo mission where the Church of Scotland built its first mission. The first congregation to be established in Isoka was in Chiwanda Village by Reverend Bright Morton who came from Mwenzo Mission in 1958. As the number grew, in 1966 the church moved to Kawenga village, located just within the heart of Isoka town centre. The Reverend Solomon Sichelwe had taken over from Reverend Brighton Morton in 1960 and was the notable native minister who kept the church growing in Isoka district.

Mwansa (2015) observed that in the 1970's the UCZ in Isoka district spread in almost all the villages including Sansamwenje, Kalungu, Chipote, Kapililonga, Nkala, Chuwi, Kafwimbi, Laudani and Katyetye. Additionally, groups such as Mens' Christian Fellowship (MCF) the Womens' Christian Fellowship (WCF) and the Youth Christian Fellowship (YCF) began to be established and play crucial roles in the evangelisation of the district.

In the light of the foregoing , as noted from its inception, credit goes to those that God used for His mission which resulted into the growth and establishment of the UCZ in Isoka district. The 12<sup>th</sup> century theologian and author John of Salisbury once said: “ We are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants. We see more, and things that are more distance, than they did, not because our sight is superior or because we are taller than them, but because they raise us up, and by their great stature add to ours”. True to expression of the continued growth of the UCZ in Isoka district is due to the pioneer people below who served God with utmost devotion.

From 1958 to 1960, the Reverend Brighton Morton who established the UCZ in Chiwanda. There after, the Reverend Solomon Sichelwe, the Rev Mutubila ( father to veteran journalist Frank Mutubila), Reverend Wiya Mugala, Reverend Charles Wilky, Reverend G. Ng'ona, Reverend Dolnald Simbeye, Reverend Lackson Siwale, Reverend Branald Bowa Sinyangwe and Reverend John Kapinga all these served in 1970's to the late 1980's. Moreover, Synod ministers who served between the period of 1990 to 2010 were, Reverend Solomon Zulu, Reverend Dennis Mbita Sikazwe, Reverend Samuel

Silungwe, Reverend Vincent Kangwa, Reverend Edward Kapembwa, Reverend Fridah Kamana and Reverend Brian Kalobwe (Mwansa 2015).

Although the formation of the UCZ is attributed to the missionary's work and initiative, Weller and Linden (1984:151) elucidate that "the formation of UCZ was the result of African initiative". This initiative was important to the viability and sustainability of an African church. Africans, through support from missionaries, were now on a threshold of a new beginning: to put in place an African project which would endure for years to come and contribute its resources, spiritual and material, to the Zambian nation (Weller and Linden, 1984). Realistically, though being a genuine African initiative, the UCZ had to face organisational, doctrinal, social, and financial problems as it grew from infancy to maturity as noted by Hastings (1979). The point is that the UCZ should have re-emphasized its social responsibility because of its charity work, social and community services provided especially through schools and health centres. Because of this anomaly, the UCZ, at inception, could be described as "an institutional, spiritual, evangelical and narrowly social denomination (Bwalya, 2006).

Nonetheless, the UCZ is slowly but surely, changing as far as engaging in social issues is concerned. One of the motivating influences is the changed early marriage scenario in Zambia, which has brought about a collapse in the value attached to the girl child. In this regard, the UCZ, as one of the moral consciences of the nation, is well placed to listen to the cries of the people, feel their hurts, and thus, embrace their pain to contribute to the quest for a more lasting solution to the deteriorating social morals in Zambia in general, and Isoka District in particular. This study, therefore, explored the role of the UCZ in combating early marriage in Isoka District of Zambia.

#### **1.4 Isoka District**

Isoka District is in Muchinga Province of Zambia, in the North-Eastern part of the country near the border of two countries namely, Tanzania and Malawi. The native inhabitants found in this area are the Namwanga people, though the Wiwa, Mambwe, Nyika, Tumbuka and Bemba cultural aspects are also found in some parts of the district. As of the 2010 National Census, the district had a population of 72, 189 people. Early marriage has been one of the major concerns of the public and has an outcry from many sectors in

the district. In addition, despite the government, through the Ministry of Education, committing itself to promote the rights to education of the girl child by removing all barriers that might hinder a girl from accessing quality education (MOE, 1996), early marriage is still a growing problem in Isoka District.

Therefore, like other parts of the country early marriages are one of the moral, ethical and social issues that have affected children, families and communities in Isoka District. In most rural areas of Isoka District, though awareness and information on the effects of early marriage seem to be available, there has been a community and national outcry about the high levels of early marriage in the area and other areas surrounding the district. According to the CAMFED report of 2015, out of the 98.5% total number of girls who enrolled in school in 2015, 27% dropped out of school as compared to boys at 18% (CAMFED, 2015). The United Nations Population Fund, World Vision Zambia and Population Council and Panos Institute of Southern Africa all affirm early marriage as one of the leading causes of girls dropping out of schools in rural areas (UNFPA, 2017). This has caused the number of girls who got married early to swell. This might result in high mortality rates for both the babies and mothers (the girls). This is a discomfoting scenario, especially in rural districts like Isoka.

### **1.5 Statement of the Problem**

There are laws in Zambia and international agreements that forbid early marriage, especially for girls (UNICEF, 2014). However, the phenomenon is still wide spread in Zambia, just as is the case in many developing countries (UNFPA, 2012; and UNICEF Zambia, 2015). Available literature shows that studies that have been conducted in Zambia have focused more on the causes of early marriage and the impact thereof on the girl-child rather than the mechanisms or measures to combat the vice (Elizabeth *et al.*, 1987; Tembo and Mutenga, 2008; Plan Zambia, 2008; Mann *et al.*, 2015; Musyoki, 2016; Sidney, 2016; and Ministry of Gender, 2017). As such, there is insufficient information on the role of the church generally and particularly the United Church of Zambia in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District. Therefore, in an attempt to provide more information, this study explored the role of the United Church of Zambia in combating the early marriage of girls in Isoka District of Zambia.

## **1.6 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the role of the UCZ in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District, Zambia.

## **1.7 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- i) To establish the factors that influence early marriage of girls in Isoka District, Zambia.
- ii) To examine initiatives by the UCZ in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District.
- iii) To analyse the challenges experienced by the UCZ in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District.

## **1.8 Research Questions**

This study answered the following questions:

- i) What factors influence the early marriage of girls in Isoka District, Zambia?
- ii) What are the initiatives by the UCZ to combat the early marriage of girls in Isoka District?
- iii) What challenges are experienced by the UCZ in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District?

## **1.9 Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study was that it might provide new knowledge and add to the already existing body of knowledge in the field of human rights. It was also hoped that the findings might help institutions such as the Church in general, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), the Ministry of Education (MoE) and policy makers to come up with policies that might help in combating the problem of early marriage in Isoka District and the nation at large. Kothari (2004:5) points out that, “All progress is born of inquiry”. Therefore, this study was significant because it might bring to reality the problems and

combating measures of early marriage in different communities in Isoka District and many other districts in Zambia.

Further, the study might help fill the gaps inherent in the study of early marriage and addresses the problem. It might also offer suggestions on how best the problem of early marriage of girls could be tackled in society in general and Isoka District in particular. The results of the study might further be an eye-opener to parents and guardians to help them stop supporting early marriage among young people, let alone early marriage of girls. The study might also help the girl child to be focused in life and improve herself by acquiring life skills in education more than rushing into early marriage. Finally, the findings of the research might significantly contribute to the already existing knowledge on the role of the UCZ in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District.

### **1.10 Theoretical Framework**

Kombo and Tromp (2006) assert that a theoretical framework is a collection of interrelated ideas based on theories, which have a reasoned set of prepositions and are derived and supported, by data or evidence. Kombo and Tromp (2006:56) hold that a theory is a reasoned statement or group of statements supported by evidence to explain an event or phenomenon. The term theory refers to the general and abstract principles of facts (Mwinzi, 2012:126). A theory may consist of hypothesis that has been verified by observation or experiment, or systematic thinking defined by coherence in thoughts (Randolph, 2009:3). Therefore, theories are constructed to explain phenomena; they are an attempt at creating models of reality, and later using them for understanding (Kombo and Tromp, 2006).

This study was guided by Pilcher's and Imelda's (2008) 'radical feminist theory', which emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Radical feminist theory analyses patriarchy as the primary cause of women's oppression. Further, Pilcher and Imelda (2008) added that violence and injustice against women deepened the structure of patriarchal capitalism. They argued that sexualism is so deeply rooted in the social system of patriarchal capitalism that a radical change in the people's culture is needed (Pilcher and Imelda, 2008). In the current study, early marriage combating might be hampered by the traditions and beliefs that compel young girls to marry at an early age. Radical feminists further assert that women can only

be liberated through debates meant to overhaul patriarchal structures (Pilcher and Imelda, 2008). Radical feminists are distinguished by the analysis of gender inequality in which men as a group dominate women and are the main beneficiaries of the subordination of women (Bryson, 1999:5). Moreover, Walby (1997) observed that feminists argue that men are the ruling class, and women the subject class. In most African cultures, girls were raised to be housewives, mothers and home-makers, doing domestic duties. The boys were to be household heads and breadwinners or economic providers of their homes and this meant that they were to be educated and acquire wealth to manage these homes (Walby, 1997). However, Rowland and Klein (1998) suggested that radical feminism's revolutionary intent was expressed first in its woman-centeredness; women's experiences and interests are at the centre of the well-being of society. Further, Rowland and Klein (1998) asserted that radical feminist theory was a theory by and for women. The theory regards all women as part of an oppressed group, stressing that no woman could walk down the street or even live in her home safely without fear of violation by men.

This theory is relevant to this study in the sense that it helped the researcher to analyse various aspects of the Namwanga culture especially their beliefs, customs and practices that explained the causes and combating measures of early marriage of girls in Isoka district. Radical feminist theory also helped the researcher to establish the effect of early marriage on girls.

### **1.11 Scope of the Study**

The scope of the study is defined as the start of the research project before data collection begins and is used by the researcher to set boundaries and limitations within which the study will be carried out (Kombo and Tromp 2006). The current study was a case study of Isoka District of Muchinga Province in Zambia conducted in two villages of the district where there were a number of cases of early marriage of girls.

### **1.12 Limitations of the Study**

The study was restricted to two villages within Isoka District. One of the limitations of the study was that movement in some areas of Isoka District was a challenge because some roads were almost impassable due to geographical location which is not friendly. The only means by which the researcher could access some communities was on foot covering quite

several kilometres. Financial constraint was another challenge because everything had to be provided by the researcher, starting with stationery and transport expenses. Availability of time was also another challenge, as the researcher had to find time to provide pastoral care, community work, care for the family and carryout the research. It is worth noting that though there were these challenges, the researcher worked within his means and ensured that data was gathered as planned and accordingly. He also ensured that he balanced the time for pastoral activities and research activities. This led to collection of data sufficiently within the scheduled time without compromising the quality of the research.

### **1.13 Definitions of Key Terms**

**Child:** UNESCO (2008) defines a 'child' as an individual who is under the age of 18 unless the laws of a precise state set the legal age for maturity younger.

**Early Marriage:** This is a forced or consensual marriage before the legal age of 18 years. This term is used interchangeably with the term child marriage.

**Community Empowerment:** Concerning this project, community empowerment is defined as interventions at the community level addressing the causes of early marriage. It includes; economic empowerment initiatives, enhanced access to education for girls, and awareness and social change initiatives for communities and girls.

**Education:** A process of facilitating the acquisition of skills, knowledge, values, beliefs and habits. It can be formal or informal.

**Girl:** Macmillan English dictionary defines a girl as a female child or adolescent.

**Marriage:** According to Morna *et al.* (2015), marriage is a formal and legally recognised agreement between a man and a woman which makes them husband and wife.

**Combating:** According to the Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners, combating is the reduction in the harmful effects of something.

**Poverty:** Poverty may be defined differently; however, the commonly accepted meaning is a person who lives on less than \$1.25 a day (World Bank, 2010).

### **1.14 Summary**

In this chapter, some issues have been discussed as a way of putting the study into context. The chapter has provided and explained the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose, objectives, research questions, theoretical framework, significance, and scope of the study, limitations and definitions of the terms. The next chapter presents the literature reviewed relevant to the current study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Overview

This chapter discusses different literature related to the study. In order to provide a clear understanding of early marriage. The chapter discusses literature on early marriage, factors causing early marriage globally, reasons for early marriage in Africa, studies on factors that causing early marriage in Zambia, effects of early marriage, combating measures by other stakeholder institutions and research gap. The last section is a summary.

#### 2.2 Early Marriage: Conceptual Mapping

Early marriage is a harmful traditional practice that continues to affect millions around the world. Abner *et al* in their article (2020) highlights that early marriage is any marriage entered into before one reaches the legal age 18. Though both boys and girls could marry early, the norm in many countries around the world is that more girls than boys marry young and someone older (Abera *et al*, 2020).

Early marriage, defined as a legal or customary union before the age of 18, threatens children's well-being and constitutes multiple violations of their rights. In numerous contexts around the world, the practice has been shown to have profound physical, intellectual psychological and emotional impacts, especially girls (Gillian *et al*, 2015). Therefore, early marriage is most prevalent in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and least common in North Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia. Globally, those children most affected by early marriage are those who are poor, live in rural areas, are out of school and without opportunities for labour force participation. Girls are significantly more likely than boys to be married before the age of 18 (Gillian *et al*, 2015).

Historically, early marriage was common around the world. The practice began to be questioned in the twentieth century with the age for 'individual first marriage' increasing in many countries and most countries increasing the minimum marriage age. In most African societies, a girl's marriageable age was and still is in some societies fixed at puberty. This actually meant that societies determines the marriageable age for girls on the grounds of the girl reaching puberty rather than on whether they mature to marry or

not (Parsons *et al*, 2015). Subramanian (2008) highlights that, marriage was arranged by the parents or the guardians of the boy even though in some cases the couple to be, had an opportunity to consent before marriage. The girl got married soon after puberty whereas the boys were married when they were considered old enough to take on family responsibilities. In some instances the girls were engaged at a tender age, for some even before they were born to men who were older than them. Abera *et al* (2020) adds that in Mauritania and Nigeria, for instance, ‘more than half of married girls aged 15-19 have husbands who are 10 or more years older than they are’. However, early marriage is being increasingly recognised globally as a fundamental violation of human rights. Early marriages occur globally in varying degrees across countries and regions. For instance, South Asia alone accounted for almost half of the total number of early marriages that have occurred globally. Early marriage can lead to serious ramifications such as school dropouts, early pregnancy, maternal morbidity and mortality (Mehra, D.*et al*, 2008).

According to UNICEF (2018) Early marriage is often the results of entrenched gender inequality, making girls disproportionately affected by the practice. Globally, the prevalence of early marriage among boys is just one sixth that among girls. Therefore, early marriage robs girls of their childhood and threatens their lives and health. Girls who marry before 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence and less likely to remain in school. According to the United States Agency for International Development (2012), early marriage is a human rights violation and a practice that undermines efforts to promote sustainable development. The USAID (2012) further states that in the last decade, early marriage has affected 58 million girls, many of whom were married against their will and in violation of international laws and conventions. Furthermore, USAID (2012) reports that early marriages stifle boys’ and girls’ abilities to succeed and grow into empowered men and women, able to better themselves, their families, and their communities. USAID (2012) seeks to ensure that children are not robbed of their human rights and can live to their full potential.

### **2.3 Factors Causing Early Marriage Globally**

Globally, 720 million women alive today were married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Every year, they are joined by another 15 million child brides- the equivalent of the entire population of Mali and Zimbabwe (Gillian *et al*, 2015).

The study conducted by Young Lives (2016) showed that increasing global attention focuses on curbing child and teen marriages, although it is still an entrenched practice in many parts of the world. It was estimated that in 2011 nearly 70 million women between the ages of 20 and 24 were married before they turned 18 years of age (Sagade, 2005). Sagade (2005) further asserted that while boys could also be the subject of child and early marriage, girls remained affected in much larger numbers. The UNFPA (2012) highlighted that despite a near-universal commitment to end an early marriage, one in three girls in developing countries (excluding China) would probably be married before they were 18, while one out of nine girls would be married before their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. This would translate to 14.2 million girls getting married globally on an annual basis, with as many as 39,000 girls married each day. The above statistics presented in studies done by Young Lives (2012), were an indication that the problem of early marriage did not just affect Africa, and Zambia in particular but was a global problem.

Furthermore, early marriage is not a recent practice; it is as old as human civilization (Birech, 2013). One would argue that early marriage contravenes laws that have been formulated to protect the plight of the girl child. Early marriage also interferes with basic human rights, such as the right to education; for example, Sagade (2005) postulated that in India, during the Vedic period, around 1500–600 BC, marriages were performed only when couples attained puberty. Before independence in India, the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 proclaimed the legal minimum age for marriage to be 15 for girls and 18 for boys. This law has seen several amendments since India gained its independence in 1947. Sagade (2005) further asserted that in India, the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1978), raised the minimum age at marriage for girls from 15 to 18 years and boys to 21 years. While the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006 further strengthened the earlier legislation by prohibiting rather than merely restraining early

marriage and included provisions for declaring a marriage null and void, making offences under the Act cognizable and non-bailable.

A study carried out in India by Raj *et al* (2012) also showed that the most important clause (Section 16) directed the state government to appoint Child Marriage Prohibition Officers to aid in the prevention of early marriage. The duties of these officers included taking any action necessary to prevent the solemnization of early marriage, collecting evidence for the prosecution and raising the community's awareness of the risks and possible consequences of early marriage. Also, moving for injunctive relief or nullification on behalf of a child in a marriage contract and assisting the government in research and data-gathering regarding early marriage (Raj *et al*, 2012).

Despite efforts, not just in India but globally, to try to combat the practice of early marriage, it continues to exist with few countries recording minimal successes (Birech, 2013). In countries such as India, the existence of child widows had been a particular cause for concern amongst reformers since upper-caste Hindus did not permit the marriage of widows (Birech 2013). Birech (2013) further stated that in 1987, the Law Commissioner of India, in attempting to codify penal laws, discovered a causal link between the prohibition against widow marriage and infanticide. Any sexuality or pregnancy on the part of a widow (whether she was a child or not) was viewed with such disgrace and condemnation that the widow was forced into a position where she was often killed with her new born infant and the bodies disposed of being considered by some to be evil. However, Birech (2013) asserted that early marriage was believed to have many advantages since it led to obedience on the part of the wife.

A qualitative study to establish the causes of early marriage and consequently devising mechanisms to counter it. The qualitative inquiry suggested that statutory rape and early marriages were on the rise in Sri Lanka, among the less developed districts in particular. It was further noted in the Sri Lanka study that the rising cases of early marriage were mainly associated with teenage sexuality and less linked to cultural norms and forced marriages. The study findings recommended the introduction of teenage reproductive health information and services, awareness creation around adverse effects of early marriages, and revision of existing laws related to teenage pregnancy and forced marriages (Ganira *et al*, 2015).

Concerning factors contributing to early marriage, Dixon (1971) attributed the historic practice of early marriage in China, Japan, India and Arabia to the prevalence of ‘clans and lineage’ which gave economic and social support to newly married couples as well as pressures to produce children for the strengthening and sustaining of the clan. Dixon further asserted that as another manifestation of global gender inequality, early marriage had serious consequences for young girls. For all children, the period of adolescence (ages 10-19) was filled with significant changes in physical and emotional maturity as well as sexuality and cognitive development. Taking girls out of their schools and home environments to marry older men was socially isolating and harmful to their overall growth. Marriage often required the bride to move away from school, friends and family to live in a new community or village with her husband (Dixon, 1971).

As a wife, she is often expected to carry the load of housework, including cooking, cleaning, fetching water and raising children, leaving little time for social connection, studies or leisure. Dixon (1971) added that separation from family and friends could be traumatic and impede healthy cognitive development. In addition to these challenges, child brides often lacked the decision-making power to negotiate safer sex practices, making girls vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections or early pregnancy (Dixon, 1971). Additionally, in a study of marriage patterns across the world, Goody (1990) highlighted many reasons why young brides were preferred in traditional societies. He acknowledged that young brides had longer periods of fertility before them; they were more obedient and docile, and acquired the necessary qualities to learn and accept the rules and ways of their new households.

Greene (2014) and other scholars highlighted various reasons as factors contributing to early marriages such as poverty, lack of education, caste and size of family (UNICEF, 2018 International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) and Plan Asia Regional Office, 2013; World Vision, 2013). Socio-political systems such as patriarchy and practices such as gender discrimination were seen as key reasons for the continuation of early marriages. Additionally, UNICEF (2011) reported that discrimination against girls in decisions regarding education, employment, matters of sexuality and sexual behaviour, and other areas created and perpetuated the conditions in which early marriages occurred. There is also the socio-cultural logic attached to early marriages. ICRW and Plan Asia

Regional Office (2013) asserted that parents in certain parts of the globe also married off their daughters early out of fear about their safety. The worry stems from fear both of sexual assault and of girls choosing to begin sexual activities. These findings echo similar ones from a study in South Asia by Raj *et al* (2010).

Young Lives (2016) in their study carried out in India reveal that the perception by most parents was that early marriage protected girls' marriage ability, which could be destroyed by premarital sex, whether it occurred through sexual violence or choice. Hence, there were marked pressures among girls towards marriage at an early age to minimise the risk of, and dishonour associated with, improper female sexual conduct (Young Lives, 2016). As such, in communities where early marriage is prevalent, there is strong social pressure on families to conform. Ruth (2014) stated that failure to conform could often result in ridicule, disapproval or family shame. Invariably, local perceptions of the ideal age for marriage, the desire for submissive wives, extended family patterns and other customary requirements, are all enshrined in local customs or religious norms (Ruth, 2014). Ruth (2014) further asserted that in many contexts, early marriage was legitimized by patriarchy, and related family structures, which ensured that marriage, transferred a father's role over his girl child to her future spouse.

Furthermore, Subramanian (2008) argued that in India early marriage was part of the wider practice of excluding females, through their subordination to men and deprivation of equal access to social and material resources. Subramanian (2008) added that this robbed young wives of the capacity to make decisions and act independently. Dowry is another custom that limits the options available to girls and young women. The practice of dowry has a historical basis like the inheritance system, whereby a girl was given gifts in the form of stridhan on her marriage since she did not get any portion of the household wealth, which was reserved for the sons of the family (Srinivasan, 2017).

Additionally, a study by ICRW and Plan Regional Asia Office (2013) also conducted in India found that girls in poorer families were more vulnerable to early marriage for many reasons; for example, they left school earlier because of the costs associated with education, and limited resources were more likely to be spent on a boy's education than a girl's. The study also found that if a girl was not attending school, parents were more likely to get her married and sometimes married off a younger daughter along with an

older sibling to avoid the costs of a separate marriage later (ICRW and Plan Regional Asia Office, 2013).

Concerning age at first marriage, UNICEF (2014) found that in India, the median age at first marriage was 19.7 years for females in the richest quintile of their sample compared to 15.4 for the poorest females. While poverty played a key role in marriage decisions, discriminatory social norms that valued girls primarily in terms of their reproductive capacities were critical to understanding early marriage (Harper *et al*, 2014). Poverty and rigid gender norms that prescribed a limited life course for girls and allowed no alternatives were commonly cited as factors causing early marriage (Greene *et al*, 2015).

About estimates of girls getting married early, Greene *et al.* (2015) asserted that an estimated 10 million girls were married every year before they reached the age of 18. In the developing world, 1 in 7 girls is married before her 15th birthday, with some child brides as young as 8 or 9. Regionally, 46% of girls under 18 are married in sub-Saharan Africa, 21% in the Caribbean, and 18% in the Middle East (Greene *et al*, 2015). Approximately 1 in 3 adolescent girls in South Asia are married before 18. An estimated 2.2 million women and girls in Europe and Eurasia were married before the age of 18. Furthermore, orphans and young girls in the absence of caregivers were particularly vulnerable to early marriage. One (1) in 9 girls, or 15 million, were forced into marriage between the ages of 10 and 14 (Greene *et al*, 2015).

The right to free and full consent to a marriage is recognised in numerous international conventions and declarations including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Convention on Consent to Marriage and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with the understanding that consent cannot be “free and full” when one of the parties is not mature enough to make an informed decision about a life partner. Despite efforts in these and other conventions to discourage early marriage, national legal frameworks sometimes violate international norms by treating females and males differently. For example, in Pakistan, where it was estimated that one-third of all marriages fell under the category of early marriage, the legal age of marriage for boys was 18 but 16 for girls (World bank, 2007). Cultural and socioeconomic conditions, poverty, and lack of access to education also influenced whether a girl was married early; early marriage was most common in the world’s poorest countries and among the poorest households, with girls living in poor

households twice as likely to marry before the age of 18 as girls from wealthier families (World Bank, 2007).

The main drivers of early marriage during global pandemics seem to be increasing poverty levels, closure of schools, growing insecurity and lack of access to services. Gillian *et al* (2015) asserted that fragility, poverty and displacement were some of the driving factors of early marriages across geographical and cultural contexts and rates increased in times of conflicts and humanitarian crises. Almost two-thirds (60%) of girls in countries with high levels of fragility such as Niger, Bangladesh and the Central Africa Republic were married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (Gillian *et al*, 2015). Further Mehra *et al* (2018) assert that there are multiple drivers of early marriages in India, such as poverty, lack of education, dowry, and patriarchal gender norms. Mehra *et al* (2018) also asserted that there was an increased likelihood of babies who were stunted or underweight, along with the possibilities of miscarriages and stillbirths. There was a lesser likelihood of contraceptive use, delay of first pregnancies and institutional deliveries among women in the age group of 20-24 years (Mehra *et al*, 2018). According to Gillian *et al* (2015), in South Sudan, a country that had experienced civil war and violent conflict for over a decade, World Vision found that most women (85%) were married as teenagers. Gillian *et al* (2015) further stated that of the 25 countries with the highest rates of early marriages, almost all were affected by conflict, protracted crisis or natural disasters. When standard systems of child protection break down (for example, when schools are bombed, the rule of law is disrupted, or families are separated or displaced), the rates of early marriages increase (Gillian *et al*, 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic has generally seen many families face food shortages and a decrease in households' income and resources; the threat of early marriage has become imminent, especially during lock downs. Protracted crises and conflict often leave girls with limited opportunities for education and parents with fewer livelihood options than their counterparts in peaceful environments. According to Mehra *et al* (2018), in Bangladesh, displaced Rohingyas living in Cox's Bazaar do not have legal refugee status, so they could not be allowed to be employed formally. Furthermore, Mehra *et al* (2018) stated that families were not allowed to go outside the camps and formal education is not permitted for the 540,000 children and youths living in the camps. Almost all (97%) of

the adolescents and youths aged 15-24 do not have access to any kind of education (formal or informal), leaving girls highly vulnerable to early marriage. Girls who marry before the age of fifteen are almost 50% more likely to have experienced physical or sexual violence from a partner than women who married after the age of 18 (Mehra *et al*, 2018).

#### **2.4. Reasons for Early Marriage in Africa**

According to Gillian *et al* (2015), every two seconds, a girl is married before she is physically or emotionally mature enough to become a wife or a mother. All African countries are faced with the challenge of early marriage, a harmful traditional practice that robs girls of their education, their health and their future (UNICEF, 2014). In Africa, high rates of early marriage combined with a rapidly growing population could have devastating human and development consequences. UNICEF (2014) also reports that if no action is taken now, the number of girls married as children will double by the year 2050 and Africa will become the region with the highest number of child brides in the world. With coordinated strategies, action and resources to end early marriage, girls can thrive (UNICEF, 2014).

The prevalence of early marriage in East and Southern Africa, at 36 per cent, is higher than the global average, and 10 per cent of girls in the region were married before age 18 (United Nations Children's Fund, 2015). The report states that the prevalence varies within, among countries, and from 52 per cent in South Sudan to 19 per cent in South Africa. In 12 countries in the region – the subject of this mapping – the prevalence of early marriage is greater than 30 per cent (UNICEF, 2015). Therefore, early marriage tends to increase in humanitarian emergencies and conflict settings. Economic shocks, such as natural disasters and protracted crises, have a direct impact on girls. The lack of a functioning civil registration system (which provides proof of age for children), and weak legislative frameworks. These include provisions allowing underage marriage with parental consent or court approval; customary or religious laws that condone early marriage and the lack of accompanying enforcement mechanisms that hinder the combating of early marriage and erode the effectiveness of official legislative intentions (United Nations Children's Fund, 2015).

In Tanzania for example, the system of marriage as guided by the Tanzanian Law of Marriage Act (1971) contains loopholes that create ambiguity concerning early marriages. For example, on the one hand, it put a limit on the acceptable age of marriage, while on the other hand, it gave the parents the power of consent on marriage decisions. This was observed under Section 13 of the Tanzanian Law of Marriage Act (1971), which states, “No person shall marry who, being male, has not attained the apparent age of eighteen years or being female, has not attained the apparent age of fifteen years.” Hence, early marriage was usually legitimized by national laws, regardless of whether the child had an opportunity or was able to give full and informed consent. This rendered many young girls to suffer severe physical, economic, biological, social and psychological problems and contravened several international human rights instruments (Tanzania’s Law of Marriage Act of 1971).

Nnadi (2014) states that early marriage still poses a lot of problems in most parts of Nigeria, even amongst the people of eastern Nigeria, where it is practised and justified in the name of tradition, culture and religion. Nnadi (2014) further asserts that girls in rural areas are more vulnerable as they are forced into early marriage because of poverty. The people in the Eastern parts of Nigeria still believe and succumb to this deep-rooted tradition, which dates back to pre-historic times. Even though early marriage is prevalent in Nigeria as a whole, northern Nigeria has some of the highest rates of early marriages in the world (Nnadi, 2014). Although the practice of polygamy is decreasing in Nigeria, 27 per cent of married girls aged 15-19 are in polygamous marriages. Nnadi (2014) adds that in the northern parts of Nigeria, girls are forced to marry very young and several have been removed from school as soon as they reached puberty. Many fathers remove girls in rural areas from school at the age of 12 to get married. Such girls are exposed to gender-based violence, including domestic abuse and sexual violence (Nnadi, 2014).

According to Tutu and Gumbonzvanda (2015), the main drivers of early marriages were poverty and tradition, which often manifested as social pressure to conform to members of society. More recently, the emphasis has shifted to the protection of women and children from HIV/AIDS, violence and abuse. Adolescent girls have higher rates of HIV infection than do sexually active unmarried adolescents (Grant and Hallman, 2006). Early marriage increases the frequency of sexual intercourse and decreases the use of condoms.

In addition, Grant and Hallman (2006) asserted that the husbands of married girls were three times more likely to be HIV- positive than the boyfriends of single girls. Younger wives tended to be more financially dependent on their husbands and were more vulnerable to domestic violence (Grant and Hallman, 2006). They are also less likely to leave their marriages because of this dependency. Consequently, married girls have been identified as a vulnerable group in the campaign to protect women and children against violence and abuse, and it was in this sense that early marriages have been targeted as undesirable (Tutu and Gumbonzvanda, 2015).

According to UNFPA (2012), the overall prevalence of early marriage in Africa was higher than the global average and if current trends continue, Africa would become the region with the largest number and global share of early marriage by 2050. The report further states that early marriage is highly prevalent in the developing world. UNFPA (2012) observed that in the least-developed countries, the prevalence of early marriage was very high, as almost 50% of girls or more will marry before the age of 18- girls as young as 10 years old might be forced into marriage. Though early marriage was prevalent across Africa, the prevalence was greatest in sub-Saharan Africa where it is estimated that four (4) out of ten (10) women aged 20 to 24 were married before age 18 (UNFPA, 2012).

UNICEF (2014), reports that, in some individual countries, the reported prevalence was even higher. For example, in Mali, the early marriage prevalence rate was at 71% in 2006 and 55% in 2010. Although trends have shown a slow and uneven decline in the overall prevalence of early marriage in Africa, the continent is home to a young and rapidly growing population and without economic growth and social development increased efforts to end the early marriage, the number of girls married by age 18 is expected to rise (UNICEF, 2014). This trend is most pronounced amongst poorer households and in rural areas, where early marriage is twice as prevalent as in urban areas and shows little sign of decline (UNICEF, 2014).

UNICEF (2015), highlights that the prevalence of early marriage in Africa varies by country and by region of any given country. In Cameroon, DHS data from 2011 indicated that 13.4% of women aged 20 to 24 reported being married by the age of 15 and 38.4% by the age of 18 early marriage is prevalent in the north, east, northwest and southwest. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), MICS data from 2010 suggest that 39% of

women aged 20 to 24 were married before 18, and 9% were married before the age of 15. There has been an increase in the prevalence of early marriage since 2007 and projections suggest that this trend will continue in the coming years. Prevalence is highest in the Katanga (50%) and Orientale (50%) regions. UNICEF (2015) further reports that in Gambia, 36% of women aged 20 to 24 reported having married before the age of 18 and 7% reported having married before the age of 15. The report further states that in Kenya, the prevalence rate for women aged 20 to 24 who were married before the age of 15 was 6%, and the prevalence of women aged 20 to 24 who were married before the age of 18 was 26%. These statistics were taken from a DHS survey conducted in Kenya in 2008/2009, which also indicates that there had been a shift in early entry into marriages over time, with the proportion of women marrying by age 15 declining over the past 20 to 30 years. Statistics on the median age at first marriage in Kenya indicated clearly that urban women tend to marry almost three years later than their rural counterparts (UNICEF, 2015).

Niger and Chad have prevalence rates of over 70%. Concerning Nigeria, the number of incidents in this country is higher because of its large population (up to 170 million people). Additionally in Nigeria, there are variations of prevalence rates across the states; the North withstands the worst of the burden. The highest rates are in Jigawa and Bauchi with 87% and 84% respectively. Kaduna is a northern state with a prevalence of 56%, which is also above the national average of 39% in Nigeria according to the UNDP (2012), or 43% according to Afri.Dev.Info (2016).

Furthermore, in Nigeria, early marriage is often rationalized based on cultural, economic and religious reasons Amzat (2018). This kind of marriage robs young girls of their childhood, education and future aspirations. The bad news is that by the year 2030, the number of child brides marrying each year would increase considerably if the current trends continue (UNFPA, 2012). The implication is that more and more adolescent girls will carry the burden of early marriages. The global goal is to end early marriage and promote the wellbeing of adolescent girls. Lemmon and ElHarake (2014) observed that ending the tradition of early marriage is more than a moral imperative, as the practice has many negative implications for girls and the community in general.

Lemmon and ElHarake (2014) further observed a mix of complex factors that are responsible for the practice in Nigeria and such factors slowed down the pace of eliminating the scourge. Culture and tradition push to maintain the status quo, and the twin perils of poverty and lack of education drive the practice. Despite efforts to improve educational opportunities and alleviate poverty, in religious societies with deep-rooted cultural practices, it is important to shift the traditional justification for early marriage, especially through a constant push to shift social norms (Lemmon and ElHarake, 2014).

Additionally a study commissioned by Ganira *et al*, (2015) in Kenya to establish the factors barring completion of girls' secondary education in Nyanza, Eastern, coastal, and Nairobi counties reported early marriage as among the major of school dropouts. Adopting both qualitative (focus group discussion, key informant interviews) and quantitative (household surveys) data collection methods, the study recommended poverty alleviation programmes, education for both girls and boys, awareness creation initiatives toward girls empowerment and further research on household early marriage decisions to inform future programming (Ganira *et al*, 2015). Further Ganira *et al*, (2015) in their study entitled 'Early Child Marriage on Girl's education in Kenya', reveals that early marriage impedes on the rights of girls and women which undermine initiative to increase involvement in education, increase employment and enterprise levels and reduce maternal mortality. This further hindered participation in economic, social and political governance. According to Wodon, Nguyen and Edmeads (2017) in an analysis of the impact of early marriage on education attainment posited that there was a causal relationship between early marriage and educational attainment. Through the use of regression-based techniques in the analysis of Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, Guine, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe on girls' secondary school completion, the findings posited a significant negative relationship between early marriage and secondary school completion. The study, therefore, recommended strategies that sought to retain girls to school (Wodon *et al*, 2017).

According to Parsons *et al* (2015:13), the practice is also influenced by economic transactions. Giving out a daughter in marriage often cuts several years of expenses on the child, such economic burden is transferred to the groom or his family (Parsons *et al*, 2015).

The financial transaction around early marriage is also a major factor. Parsons *et al.* (2015:13) explained that “in contexts where bride wealth or bride price (i.e., a groom or groom’s family provides assets to the bride’s family in exchange for marriage)”, is practised, families often reap immediate economic benefits from marrying their daughters. Parsons *et al.* (2015) added that in many cases, the younger the bride, the greater the financial benefits since it might be a “virgin” marriage. The majority of the girls are out of school because of early marriage. This translates into a low-level of education among such girls, which also means low labour participation (Parsons *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, early marriage is one of the factors responsible for the feminization of poverty. With low economic power, it is often difficult for girls to negotiate any issue within marriage (Parsons *et al.*, 2015).

In general, Raj (2009) documented such social vulnerabilities including gender inequity, low levels of education and unemployment. Gender inequality is a major factor responsible for early marriage. The low value placed on women, right from birth, which persists throughout their lifespan, is a major factor contributing to early marriage (Raj, 2009). Parsons *et al.*, (2015:13) observed that “child-brides often experience overlapping vulnerabilities— they are young, often poor, and undereducated. This affects the resources and assets they can bring into their marital household, thus reducing their decision-making ability.” The crucial fact is that these vulnerabilities affecting half of the population in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa have deleterious effects beyond individuals but also constitute major impediments to national development in countries in Africa, including Zambia (Parsons *et al.*, 2015).

## **2.5. Studies on Factors Causing Early Marriage in Zambia**

UNICEF Zambia (2015), reports that Zambia is the third highest country with cases of early marriage in the SADC. In Zambia, about 42 per cent of women aged 20-24 years married by the age of 18. Suffice it to note that the rate of early marriage varies from province to province (UNICEF, 2015). The 2013/14 Zambia Demographic Health Survey (ZDHS) shows that 31% of the women aged 20-24 years were married before the age of 18, representing a 25% reduction from the 2007 ZDHS where it was at 42 % for the same age group. Children in Zambia enter marriage for numerous reasons, including pressure from poverty, unintended pregnancies, the desire for increased social status, and a lack of

realistic future options (UNICEF, 2015). Reducing early marriage, therefore, must adopt a comprehensive approach that supports individual behaviour change, and community mobilization of products and services.

Early marriages in Zambia are guided by two parallel legal systems and these are statutory law, and customary law (which prevail in cases of traditional marriage and are largely used in local courts). Under customary law, a girl is ready to be married as soon as she reaches puberty, whereas statutory law states that the minimum legal age for marriage in Zambia is 21, and parental consent is required for individuals between the age of 16 and 20. The high incidences of early marriage have diverse causes. For example, UNICEF (2015) attributes early marriage to poverty, cultural values, and inadequate laws (UNICEF Zambia, 2015).

UNICEF Zambia (2015) further reports that the Marriage Act in Zambia elucidates that, to marry, one has to be at least 21 years of age. A person below 21 years needs parental consent to marry. However, the law does not specify the threshold below 21 years at which consent from parents is not acceptable. The law also allows a High Court Judge to consent that a child below the age of 16 can be married. However, the law does not address how it can solve early marriage in Zambia. Early marriage is common in rural communities in Zambia, especially among the girl-child who is considered as a capital investment for the family that wallows in poverty. Several questions arise: Should the phenomenon of early marriage be understood? What are the reasons behind its perpetuation in Zambia? How does it affect girls' wellbeing and constitute a violation of their human rights? How does it undermine the development of the Zambian society? These questions are posed by society in general. There are national laws and international agreements forbidding early marriage, but this phenomenon is still wild spread in many developing countries with a high prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Central, Western and Southern Africa, to which Zambia belongs. Many girls and a few boys are married off without their free and full consent (UNICEF Zambia, 2015).

According to UNICEF (2001), 40% and 49% per cent of girls under 19 in Zambia are married. Therefore, Zambia has been placed 16<sup>th</sup> on the global ranking of the prevalence of early marriage among girls and boys. Particularly notable is the vast gender discrepancy

with 42% of women aged 20-24 years married before age 18, compared to only 5% of men, indicating that girls are often married to older men. The government of Zambia launched a three-year national campaign to end early marriage. Spearheaded by the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, the campaign aimed to empower traditional leaders to become champions and agents of change in their chiefdoms, and to amend relevant laws and policies to ensure that girls are legally protected from early marriage. Campaign plans include the development of a comprehensive national strategy to curb the practice (UNICEF, 2001).

Underage marriage is widespread in Northern Zambia's Muchinga Province, where it is estimated that 70 per cent of teenage girls are forced into marriage (UNFPA, 2012). Poverty, particularly in rural areas, and a tradition of marrying off young daughters, account for the high rates of early marriage in the province. The practice of bride price where the groom pays an amount of money to the bride's family also plays a role as parents seek financial gains from marrying off their daughters (Elizabeth *et al*, 1987:19). Many parents also choose to marry off their daughters young to prevent them from getting pregnant outside marriage and besmirch family honour. Early marriage is one cause of Zambians' high maternal mortality rate (Elizabeth *et al*, 1987). In addition, it is responsible for increasing school dropout levels among girls, which stands at 60 per cent for 13 or 14-year-olds. Additionally, since girls are often married to older men, they run the risk of living in abusive relationships and being exposed to HIV/AIDS (UNICEF, 2001, Lefevre, Quiroga and Murphy 2004).

Sidney *et al* in their report (2016) highlight that the causes of early marriage in Zambia were mostly attributed to a lack of economic opportunities, low education, social and cultural norms of the communities and gender inequalities. Early sexual debut, influenced by initiation ceremonies, peer pressure and poverty, was reported as the main contributing factor to teenage pregnancy which is the influencing factor in early marriage (Sidney *et al*, 2016). On the other hand, Sidney *et al* (2016) study showed that poverty was one of the most significant factors driving early marriage in nearly all of its forms in Zambia. Parents and guardians saw early marriage as a financial gain through the bride price for their daughters and as an opportunity to lessen the household's economic burden (Tembo and Matenga, 2008).

Additionally, research conducted by Plan Zambia in conjunction with the University of Zambia in September 2008 ascertained the extent and impact of early marriages in four districts of Mansa, Chadiza, Chibombo and in Mazabuka in which the causes of early marriage ranged from poverty, limited access to formal education, and lack of information to cultural beliefs and practices. About poverty, early marriage was seen in the study, primarily as arising from high poverty levels experienced by most families, a situation which forces families to marry their daughters at a young age as a way of improving the economic status of the family. At the same time, poverty was linked to compelling girls, particularly orphans, to get married with the hope of leading a better life. Girls, who were affected by poverty, lacked education and were attached to longstanding traditional practices that discriminated against girls and women, were most vulnerable to early marriage (Plan Zambia, 2008).

Sidney *et al* (2016) asserted that economic hardship forced parents and guardians to make difficult choices as they tried to manage their living situation and encouraged short-term strategic thinking rather than consideration of investment in longer-term gains. Young people, particularly young women, saw marriage as an opportunity to escape challenging economic and material circumstances and as a means to cover their own basic needs (Sidney *et al.* 2016).

The problem has been compounded by Zambia's economic performance, which has not been favourable for accelerated poverty reduction and employment of vulnerable households. Poverty levels in the country have persistently remained high, especially in rural areas. According to the World Bank Report (2010), the poverty level in the country is estimated at 69.9%. The micro- and macro indicators including the poor performance of the Kwacha against major currencies since 2015, the high unemployment levels, and the high cost of living, among others, have contributed to the increasing vulnerability of poor households. The low levels of opportunities in rural areas further exacerbate the vulnerabilities that perpetuate the occurrence of early marriage (Ministry of Gender, 2017).

Therefore, economic hardships influence families to marry off their daughters rather than send them to school, and social norms support the view that education is less important for girls than boys. Girls who marry early are caught up in a negative cycle that involves

pre-mature child bearing, high rates of maternal mortality and child malnutrition (UNICEF, 2001). Poverty is also one of the major underpinnings of early marriage. According to a UNICEF report (2001), in families where poverty was a key factor, a young girl might be regarded as an economic burden where one daughter was one less mouth to feed. The report further showed that parents supported the marriage of their daughters while they were still children in the hope that the marriage might benefit them financially and relieve financial burdens on the family. School dropout was the most highlighted consequence of early marriage and teenage pregnancy. It reinforced the cycle of poverty and, in turn, the prevalence of early marriage and teenage pregnancy (UNICEF, 2001).

In current times, Silumesi (2018) in his article in the *Zambia Daily Mail* citing UNICEF concluded that “Zambia has one of the highest early marriage rates in the world with the statistics indicating that 42 per cent of women aged between 20-24 years marry by the age of 18 and below.” This shows that early marriage is a source of concern as it violates the fundamental rights of the victims. Poverty, social norms, customary and inadequate legislative framework, and in some cases religious practices, are among the factors blamed for early marriages. In some communities, culture shapes the way of people live (Silumesi, 2018). Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners defines culture as a set of ideas, beliefs, and ways of behaving of a particular group of people (Macmillan, 2007). Therefore, culture includes marriage customs and family among other issues such as food, dressing, and patterns of work. Culture plays a significant role in the lives of the people of Zambia and Africa as a whole (Cheyeka, 2006). In a bid to understand marriage, it is important to locate marriage in the African traditional cultural setting. Further, there is a need also to take Zambian or African culture seriously to look at salient elements of cultural practices that might influence the rise in early marriage in Zambia. It is vital to mention that the analysis of the Zambian culture will be done in the context of the African traditional culture (Cheyeka, 2006).

UNICEF (2001) reported that while harming girls themselves, early marriage practice also has negative impacts on their children, families and society as a whole. It is not only girls who are paying for early marriages but also the entire society (UNICEF, 2001). Birech (2013) points out that the common practice of early marriage makes it increasingly difficult for families to escape poverty in developing countries like Zambia. This

undermines vital international efforts to tackle hunger, HIV and AIDS and other societal problems and makes development aid worth billions of dollars less successful.

Khasiani (1995) in a study on fertility asserted that early marriage relegated women to low societal and economic status. The study showed that marriage at a younger age, limited engagement in educational opportunities and participation in the labour force. Furthermore, Khasiani (1995) asserted that early marriage exposed women to longer reproductive spans, increasing their fertility rate. Consequently, the young brides were vulnerable to poor health and multidimensional poverty Khasiani (1995). According to MAMTA Health Institute for Mother and Child (2012), early marriage is manifested in various factors classified as economic, sociocultural and religious. It is a practice linked with the rural-urban divide, economic status, education and ethnicity. However, these factors do not independently determine a woman's age at marriage but are rather interrelated in producing a collective effect on marriage age determination (MAMTA Health Institute for Mother and Child, 2012). Policy and legal measures by governments have been put in place to address the issue but it persists. Birech further stated that evidence of the effectiveness of the provision of economic activities, access to educational opportunities for girls, provision of incentives for delayed marriage and life skills training is apparent. The study recommends the need for active community engagement in search of solutions to end early marriage and awareness creation on the negative health ramifications of early marriage (Birech, 2015).

Furthermore, according to the study commissioned by Mann *et al* (2015) in the six districts of Zambia citing poverty and family pressure as some of the factors causing early marriage, Northern Province, Muchinga and parts of the Copperbelt Provinces. Specifically, the districts of Isoka and Chama in Muchinga Province, and Masaiti, Mpongwe and Lufwanyama in the Copperbelt Province were hotspots with the highest likelihood of early marriage. As such, pregnancies, HIV/AIDS and school dropouts are rampant. They are followed by Kaputa and Chilubi districts in Northern Province and Mpika and Chinsali districts in Muchinga Province. In these districts, an adolescent girl was likely to marry before she was 18 years of age (Mann *et al*, 2015). Further, Mann *et al* (2015), add that in the Western part of Zambia, girls are less likely to marry before the age of 18. However, Western Province (Mongu, Lukulu, Senanga and Shangombo

districts) has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the country at 41%. (Mann *et al*, 2015).

According to Musyoki (2016), 42 per cent of girls under the age of 18 are married, meaning that two in five girls in Zambia are Child brides. Early marriage results in maternal morbidity and mortality rates for 15-19-year-olds, diminished capacity to responsibly raise their children to be productive citizens, higher rates of violence in marriage, and increased prevalence of HIV. Also results in a lack of personal and economic autonomy, limited participation in development, limited decision-making with their own lives, weaker economic indicators, inability to climb out of poverty, loss of educational opportunities, social isolation and restricted social mobility (Musyoki, 2016). Some Zambian women marry at a much younger age than any other region of the planet, resulting in early pregnancies (Musyoki, 2016). Musyoki (2016) further observed that early marriage is performed primarily in rural and impoverished societies where young girls are considered an economic burden and rapidly married to reduce household expenses. In these families, girls still have little educational and economic prospects and are instead married quickly to secure themselves and the family's economic well-being (Musyoki, 2016).

Finally, there are many interrelated identified factors almost similar worldwide, with small variations between societies, that place females at risk of early marriage. These include poverty, peer group and family pressure, controlling female behaviour and sexuality, wars and civil conflicts, maximization of fertility where infant mortality is very high (UNICEF, 2001; Mathur *et al*, 2004).

## **2.6 Effects of Early Marriage**

Looking at the effects, Marthur *et al*, (2004) asserted that the consequences of early marriage are severe. National and international indicators on maternal health, education, food security, poverty eradication, HIV/AIDS and gender equality were all negatively correlated with high early marriage rates. Marthur *et al*, (2004) further asserted that child brides were under great pressure to prove their fertility, which often resulted in pregnancies when their bodies were not yet ready for the task, resulting in greater maternal and newborn morbidity. Married girls under the age of 15 are five times more likely to die

in childbirth than married women in their 20s. Marthur *et al*, (2004) further asserted that girls who got married early were also more likely to experience complications of childbirth including obstetric fistula and haemorrhaging. Women who bear children at a young age might face serious health consequences. The study further showed that young mothers experienced higher rates of maternal mortality and a higher risk of obstructed labour and pregnancy-induced hypertension because their bodies were unprepared for childbirth (Marthur *et al*, 2004). Furthermore, girls between 10 and 14 are five times more likely than women aged 20 to 24 to die in pregnancy and childbirth (UNFPA, 2004). Girls aged 15 to 19 were also twice as likely as older women to die from childbirth and pregnancy, making pregnancy the leading cause of death in poor countries for this age group (Marthur *et al*, 2004).

In Mali, for example, the maternal mortality ratio was 178 for every 100,000 live births of women aged 15 to 19, compared to only 32 for women aged 20 to 24 (FCI and the Safe Motherhood Inter-Agency Group, 1998; Child Development Stages CDS, 2002). Girls who had babies also have a high risk of suffering from obstetric fistula, a condition in which the vagina, bladder and/or rectum tore during childbirth and, if left untreated, caused lifelong leakage of urine and faeces (UNFPA, 2003).

Additionally, Clarke (2004) asserted that early marriage exposed young married girls to a greater risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases due to their inability to reject unsafe sexual practices. A study in Kenya and Zambia found that 15 to 19-year-old married girls were 75 per cent more likely to have HIV than sexually active unmarried girls. International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) also reported that married girls might be more vulnerable to HIV infection because they had little option to change their sexual behaviour even with knowledge about HIV (Clark, 2004). Child brides also have less access to quality healthcare services and information compared to girls who married when they were older (Mathur, Greene and Malhotra, 2004).

Another consequence of early marriage is that the children of teen mothers experience serious health consequences as well. Save the Children, US (2004) stated that a child born to a teen mother was twice as likely to die before the age of 1 as the child of a woman in her 20s. The report further stated that one million infants of young mothers died every year worldwide as a result of pregnancy and childbirth-related causes. If they survived,

these infants tended to have higher rates of low birth weight, premature birth and infant mortality than those born to older mothers (Save the Children US, 2004). After birth, infants of teen mothers were more likely than infants born to older mothers to have poorer health care and inadequate nutrition because of their young mothers' poor feeding behaviour (Save the Children US, 2004).

Furthermore, research done by USAID (2010) in Uganda indicated a causal link between early marriage and child labour, as household poverty often necessitated children being overworked at home, which could encourage young girls to marry early to escape the harsh conditions. Girls are often forced to terminate their education; this, along with limited mobility, limited access to social networks, the burden of household responsibilities, and the obligation to care for other children in the household prevented girls from reaping the benefits of good education and economic programmes. Once out of school, early marriage and pregnancy were often the only economic pathways forward for girls, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty (USAID, 2010).

Moreover, USAID (2004) reported that early marriage had a complex relationship with human trafficking. Trafficking and forced marriage intersect when marriage was used both in conjunction with force, fraud, coercion, or abuse of power and as a means to subject wives to conditions of slavery, often in the form of domestic or sexual servitude. The report further indicated that children were trafficked for forced marriage, fuelling a lucrative trade in girls in some regions. Early marriage also increased the vulnerability of children to being trafficked or re-trafficked. In some cases, girls and boys in early marriages were forced into prostitution or exploitative labour situations by their spouse or spouse's family. While in other cases children might become easy prey for traffickers when they attempted to flee their marital home as a result of abuse (USAID, 2004).

Save the Children, US (2004) also reported that early marriage was associated with lower education and economic status of girls. Child brides were less able than older or unmarried girls to access schooling and income-generating opportunities or to benefit from education or economic developmental programmes. Girls already in school were often forced to terminate their education when they married early (Save the Children US, 2004). Limited mobility, household responsibilities, pregnancy and raising children, and other social restrictions for married girls prevented them from taking advantage of education or work

opportunities (Mathur *et al*, 2004). Singh (2006) observed that early childbearing and motherhood, which usually accompanied early marriage, were associated with lower levels of education and higher rates of poverty. Opportunities for young mothers to continue their education or to work often are limited because they have little access to resources, and are responsible for childrearing and household tasks (Save the Children US, 2004).

Additionally, Girls who are married young often lack status and power within their marriages and households, and so are more likely to experience domestic violence, sexual abuse, and isolation from family and community (UNICEF, 2005). This was supported by a survey conducted in India that found girls who married before 18 reported experiencing physical violence twice as often as girls who married at a later age; younger married girls reported experiencing sexual violence three times more often (ICRW, 2005).

UNICEF (2005) study carried out in Kenya found that 36 per cent of girls who married before 18 believed that men were justified in beating their wives, compared to 20 per cent of those who married at a later age. Lower status in the home also left married girls with less ability to influence decisions about their own lives (ICRW, 2005; UNICEF, 2005). The UNICEF (2005) study further reported that women who were married as children were more likely to have partners who had the final say on household decisions, including their visits to family or friends, their health, their ability to work, go for large and small household purchases, and contraception (UNICEF, 2005).

Additionally, the study conducted in Zambia by Mushota and Lilian (2005) indicated that early marriage affected all girls, those with less education, living in rural areas and the lower wealthy quantities were more susceptible than those with higher education, living in urban areas and the higher wealth quantities (Mushota and Lilian, 2005). To add on, Mann *et al* (2015), who conducted a study in six districts of Zambia, suggested that the effects of early marriage mainly perpetuated poverty; child brides who did not receive education and economic opportunities that helped lift them and their families from poverty. Hence, early marriage perpetuates a vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty. Mann *et al* (2015) also noted that child brides were likely to drop out of school, curtailing opportunities and realization of their full potential. Early marriage and teenage pregnancy

exposed girls to early childbearing and greater risks of life-long fertility with significantly higher maternal and infant morbidity and mortality. Mann *et al* (2015) further stated that child brides were at risk of negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes, including early pregnancy, exposure to HIV and other STIs, and increased discrimination. Therefore, early marriage put girls at an increased risk of sexual physical and emotional gender-based violence (Mann *et al*, 2015). As such, early marriage was a scourge, which should be combated by all stakeholders including the church.

## **2.7. Combating Measures by Other Stakeholder Institutions**

A positive political and social environment for ending early marriage is evident in the Zambian government. Traditional authorities, religious communities, civil society organizations, communities and the media are some of the stakeholders who participate in the fight. Like several of its neighbours, the country is implementing a national strategy to reduce and eventually eliminate early marriage (Panos Institute of Southern Africa, 2014). The ongoing Ending Early Marriage campaign has engaged traditional leaders in creating a better understanding of the negative effects of early marriage and has served as a springboard for the creation of a national strategy for ending early marriage (Panos Institute of Southern Africa, 2014).

In 2016, Zambia's Ministry of Gender led a government consortium together with the coalition of the Central Statistical Office (CSO) in developing and launching the National Strategy on Ending Early Marriage in Zambia for the period 2016 – 2021, for which a National Plan of Action was launched in December 2017. The goal of the National Strategy was to reduce early marriage by 40 per cent by 2021 (UNICEF Zambia, 2015). This goal was in line with five objectives: to strengthen multi-sectoral responses to reduce children's vulnerability to marriage; to facilitate positive change in prevailing attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and practices that contribute to the practice of early marriage; to facilitate the development and review of policies and legislation; to ensure a consistent approach to protecting child rights and promoting their well-being; to facilitate the provision of child-sensitive social services to reduce children's vulnerability to marriage and to effectively mobilize financial resources to facilitate the implementation of programmes aimed at reducing children's vulnerability to marriage.

As a response to the early marriage challenge the Zambian Government, with support from UNFPA, UNICEF, and UKAID through the Department for International Development (DFID), the Government of Canada and other partners in Mansa District developed and launched the National Strategy to End Early Marriage (UNICEF Zambia, 2015). Besides other interventions aimed at addressing the drivers of early marriage, there is also an urgent need to engage with the affected populations themselves and other stakeholders to address some negative cultural practices and norms which contribute to the perpetuation of the problem.

The government of the Republic of Zambia has started sensitization of traditional leaders against the practice of early marriage. In 1997, Zambia instituted a School Re-Entry policy, which officially states that girls who become pregnant as students should be allowed to return to school after giving birth. The re-entry policy is a strategy that is being considered for all the schools in Zambia and is being followed by school authorities (McCadden and Danielle, 2015). In support of this, Omondi (2008) points out that the re-entry policy allows girls who become pregnant while in school to be re-admitted unconditionally to continue with their education soon after the maternity break. The Zambian government is set to strengthen the re-entry of girls after their babies have grown and together with other stakeholders sensitize communities to the negative socio-cultural practices that reduce the effective participation of girls in education (Mulama, 2006). Maternity break allows recovery and both head teachers and parents to assist the girl. Mulala (2006) adds that with cooperative implementers, unconditional re-entry ensures that potential performers are given a second chance to excel though some missionary schools like Catholic schools have not accepted the re-entry policy citing that the Church promotes abstinence and not otherwise. Catholic schools were administered on religious principles or the teaching of the Bible. Catholic schools instilled discipline in the pupils and upheld Christian values which were absent in government schools (Mulala, 2006).

According to the early marriage Zambia draft policy (2017), the Zambian government has instituted a national response to address early marriage by launching a multi-stakeholders anti-early marriage campaign. Structures to fight early marriage have been put in place including a civil society coalition against early marriage, a ten-member ministerial committee led by the Ministry of Gender, a draft policy on ending early marriage and a

National Strategy of Ending Early Marriage for the period 2016-2021. All these efforts should be accelerated and effectively supported to reduce and eventually eradicate early marriage (Early Marriage Policy, 2017).

Musyoki (2016) states that keeping girls in school is the most significant thing families can do to delay a girl's age at marriage. Musyoki further states that once the girls leave school, they rarely return to school, and are deprived of the enriching opportunities education can provide, including the acquisition of skills that will ensure the girl can take full advantage of future economic opportunities to support her family and lift her children out of the cycle of poverty. Education for girls is one of the best strategies for protecting girls against early marriage. When they can stay in school and avoid being married early, girls can build a foundation for a better life for themselves and their families (Musyoki, 2016). If they have already been married young, access to education, and health services including HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health will help enrich their lives and enhance their future. Musyoki (2016) further suggested that enabling all girls to have primary education would reduce early marriage rates. Increasing girls' education in Zambia is a particularly significant strategy given that, more than 80 per cent of school girls aged 10-14 have never attended school, and are at risk of early marriage (Musyoki, 2016). As Gibbs and Ajuju (1999) put it, there is a newly emerged global attempt to combat early marriage but it has yet to be translated into action in Africa.

The study by the Africa Union (AU) Campaign to End Early Marriage in Africa shows that most research over the past ten years identifies religion and cultural tradition as having a role in not just the persistence but also the elimination of early marriage on the continent (AU, 2015). The study affirms no single religion alone is associated with the practice. A core objective of the AU Campaign is aimed at promoting and advocating for the rights of women and girls in Africa. The overall purpose of the campaign, which would run over an initial span of 4 years, (2014-2017), was to accelerate an end to early marriage in Africa by enhancing continental awareness of the implications of the practice by supporting legal and policy actions in the protection and promotion of human rights.

The AU (2015) report also suggested that the core objective of the AU Campaigns was to strengthen the evidence base needed to design and implement effective policies and

programmes for reducing early marriage. “Over the past ten years, there has been extensive research concerning the effects of traditional and religious practices of early marriage on Africa’s socio-economic development”, noted Ambassador Olawale Maiyegun, also AUC Director of Social Affairs who was speaking at the conference of African Leaders Resolve to End Early Marriage at the Government Complex in Lusaka on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2015. He added, “This report documents a wealth of information on past efforts so that we can move forward and work from a strong foundation. Involving religious and traditional leaders will be one of our key instruments for success.” The 87-page report, entitled *The Effects of Traditional and Religious Practices of Early Marriage on Africa’s Political and Economic Developments* described several programmes that offer hope for the future. These include the Faith Effect Program in Ethiopia and Nigeria and a recent campaign in Zambia spearheaded by the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs (AU, 2015). Additionally, AU (2015) reports that the Campaign works towards building on existing activities of governments and partners in ending early marriage and is based on advocacy, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as well as the facilitation of technical assistance and capacity building (AU, 2015).

Zambia has three main ecumenical bodies: The Catholic Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC); the Christian Council of Zambia (CCZ), which comprises 13 different protestant churches, to which the UCZ belongs, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ). All these Church mother bodies are represented in all the Provinces of the country. By speaking out on the vice, the Church has played an advocacy role, a role she has played throughout history in Zambia. As Zulu (2014) notes, the Church has not only been a mirror of society, but a voice of the voiceless too. Zulu (2004) added that by being a voice of the people, the Church’s action was linked to advocacy taken as a broad and overarching concept, which can involve engaging with the general public to raise awareness on an important issue as well as influencing policy-makers towards desired solutions (Zulu, 2014).

The Church has a reputation for providing quality education for girls through the schools, which are found in different parts of the country, including rural areas. The response of the Church through the provision of formal education resonates well with the linkage of early marriage to the lack of formal education for girls. The Church has provided

opportunities for empowering girls through formal education since its very inception in Zambia. Zulu (2014) also observes that since the beginning of evangelisation in Zambia, the Catholic Church has always paid great attention to education.

The response of the Church to early marriage, therefore, mirrors the description of the Church as an institution as manifested through the collective response of the Church (leadership, structures), Church as a community (as individual members in their way seek to empower and care for the affected) and the Church's orientation to the world by reaching out to humanity (Brill, 1995). The Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ) though emphasizes much on spiritual matters, preaches against early marriage and do advocate for girls to be educated and become relevant in society (Hot FM Zambia, 2020). Moreover, the UZ Child Protection Policy and Procedure Manual (2016) states that the Christian Council of Zambia (CCZ) has traditionally been involved in service delivery and today is considerably influential in Zambia in its pastoral and social delivery.

Gibbs and Ajuju (1999) highlight that the churches combined exposure to people's living conditions through their pastoral work at the parish level in both rural and urban areas as well as through their service delivery work in schools and hospitals, gives them an understanding of people's living conditions and the problems they face. This enables them to speak with authority and when combined with the legitimacy that their moral position in the community lends them, they undoubtedly have the potential for influence. Gibbs and Ajuju (1999) further asserted that this helped the church to advocate for good moral behaviour, especially in a rural context where people respect the church so much. Additionally, Pew Research Centre (2012) asserted that religious leaders have the greatest reach within the local communities; members of the local communities participate in religious groups. Over 80% of the world's population professes a religious belief. As spiritual guides, religious leaders are among the most respected figures in many communities and often contribute to prescribing which behaviour is acceptable or not (Pew Research Centre, 2012).

Pew Research Centre (2012) also reported that religious leaders and the church in particular, could help change existing norms in communities and be critical allies in the movement to end early marriage. The report added that in the last few decades, religious

leaders from multiple faiths had contributed to addressing early marriage by collaborating with development actors; making public commitments; refusing to perform early marriage; participating in campaigns and training to build their capacity to raise awareness about the harmful consequences of early marriage through their sermons and reflect on solutions (Pew Research Centre, 2012).

Pew Research Centre (2012), has further highlighted that in West Africa, many religious leaders are supporting their communities to end early marriage and violence against women and girls. They have joined in publicly declaring the abandonment of practices such as early marriages and female genital mutilation in villages. Thus, this has helped raise awareness and spread the idea that change is acceptable. However, Anderson (2004) and other writers seem to question the position of religious leaders on ending early marriage. They agreed of course that religious leaders have a lot of influence in the communities but they contended that they were quite reluctant to end early marriage. In other words, Anderson (2004) seemed to suggest that religious leaders had more influence in the community and if they were to take a role, which they have not, early marriage would be combated. In all this argument, the researchers agree with both views. The church is closer to the community, does have influence in the community, and can immensely contribute to ending early marriage, but to suggest that, religion is a determinant factor of early marriage or that, religious leaders are not taking any role to combat the vice, might not be true.

According to UNICEF (2018), early marriage is not determined by any particular religion. Early marriage exists in every region of the world and cuts across countries, cultures, religions and ethnicities. It happens because girls are usually valued less than boys are and because of poverty, insecurity, and limited access to quality education and work opportunities mean that early marriage is often seen as the best option for girls (UNICEF, 2018). Though change is acceptable, a lot of work has to be done. Hence, publicly declaring the abandonment of early marriage is not enough because to some parents early marriage is seen as a way of a protective mechanism against premarital sexual activity, unintended pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). In other words, it is a way of ensuring their daughters' virginity and chastity, besides the financial benefits

(Nour, 2006). However, early marriage is a vice, which should not be encouraged as it goes against the girl's choice of who to marry and it leads to detrimental consequences.

## **2.8 Research Gap**

In concluding this chapter, it is imperative to refer to Cheyeka's (2006) view that from the onset, religion affects the way of life of people. His religious studies established that marriage in African Traditional Religion is a transitional stage in the life of people. Looking at the connectedness of activities systematically observed through the rites of passage at specific stages of human life. The reviewed study by Cheyeka did not focus on combating measures to curb early marriage in Isoka District. Dixon (1971) in his study of the cross-culture variation of age, marriage and proportions, attributed the historic practice of early marriage in China, Japan, India and Arabia to the prevalence of 'clans and lineage'. This study was limited to the causes of early marriages and it was done in a different context. Sydney *et al* (2006) in their study of gaining insight into the magnitude and factors influencing child marriage, found that national and international indicators on maternal health, education, food security, poverty eradication, HIV/AIDS and gender equality were all negatively correlated with high early marriage rates. However, the study focused on the magnitude and factors influencing early marriage and not the means of combating early marriages as this study intended to study.

## **2.9 Summary**

This chapter discussed the literature related to the study from the global, African and Zambian perspectives in particular. The next chapter presents the methodology.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Overview**

This chapter presents the methodology and procedures that were employed in carrying out the study. It describes the research approach, research design, study population, location, sample and sampling procedures, alphanumeric symbols, data collection procedures, research instruments, credibility and trustworthiness, data analysis, ethical considerations and informed consent. The last section is a summary.

#### **3.2 Research Approach**

The current study employed the qualitative method research approach because of the nature of the study which aimed at exploring the role of the United Church of Zambia in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District. Kombo and Trompo (2004) define the qualitative approach as “a form of research that involves description.” In the qualitative approach, the researcher interacts with the people he/she is studying and this interaction assumes the form of living with or observing participants over a prolonged period or the actual collaboration. In other words, the study tries to minimise the distance between the researcher and those being researched. Qualitative approach was used in this study because it was viewed to be the most appropriate, as the researcher was able to interact with the respondents and collect information in its natural form as well as gather corrected data on the problem under investigation. The researcher chose the qualitative approach because it deals mainly with verbal data while quantitative research consists of research in which data could be analysed in terms of numbers. A qualitative approach was used because it explores attitudes, experiences, and behaviour, and it attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants. The qualitative approach was useful in collecting data through interviews that were recorded using a voice recorder and focus group discussion. Further, the qualitative approach was used in checking responses gathered from respondents and grouping those responses in thematic areas.

### 3.3 Research Design

According to Kothari (2004), a research design stands for planning the methods to be adopted for collecting the relevant data and the techniques to be used in their analysis, keeping in view the objective or aim of the research and the availability of time and money. Arising from this definition, a research design provides the basis for the selection of appropriate research methods to be used in investigating a given phenomenon. A research design includes how data is to be collected, what instruments will be employed, how the instruments will be used and the intended means for analysing data collected (Ader and Mellenbergh, 2008). In the current study, the case study design was used. Ghosh (1992) defines a case study as “an intensive study through which one can know precisely the factors and causes of a particular phenomenon.” Flyvbjerg (2006) states that the advantage of the case study is that it can close in on real-life situations and test views directly concerning phenomena as they unfold in practice. Lindvall (2007) agrees with Flyvbjerg and states that the most obvious advantage is that the case study provides a detailed analysis of the individual case. Intensive study methods have their strength in obtaining detailed and relevant data. One of the advantages of studying individual cases in depth is that researchers could find the information they did not anticipate finding from the start (Lindvall, 2007).

Yin (2009) argues that in all fields, the need for case studies comes from the desire of understanding complex social phenomena. The case study research has great strength as it allows investigators to retain a holistic view of real-life events, such as individual life cycles and small group behaviour such as women involved in early marriage.

The researcher found the case study design to be relevant to the current study because this design aims at describing and explaining the unit it studies, in this case, victims (young girls) of early marriage in Isoka District. The victims were involved because they shared the same characteristics of having been married early, before eighteen years of age. Specifically, the researcher used the case study, which is a careful description of a group of people living together in a particular geographic location, in this case, Isoka District (Ranjitham *et al*, 2008). Isoka District was chosen because according to a survey in 2015

carried out by Central Statistical Office (CSO), the district had the highest number of early marriage cases in Muchinga Province.

### **3.4 Study Population**

The study population is the target population from which the sample is selected (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). Cohen *et al* (2000) define the target population as all members or individuals or groups or other elements that are expected to be represented in the study. Best and Kahn (1993) observed that population is the entire group of individuals, firms, plants or things that have one or more characteristics in common that are of interest in the study. It is broader than the concept sample frame that the researcher intends to study. In this study, the population of the study consisted of all females who were involved in early marriage, police officers, teachers and traditional and religious leaders.

### **3.5 Location**

Msabila and Nalaila (2013) explain that before a researcher embarks on the execution of the research project, he/she first has to select and formally delineate the geographical boundaries of the study area. This study was conducted in Isoka District of Muchinga Province in Zambia. The selection of Isoka District and the two villages was purposively done. Purposive sampling involves the selection of the elements of the target population for the study based on the researcher's judgement about the characteristics of the representative sample (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1995). In the present study, purposive sampling was used in selecting Isoka District over other districts in Muchinga Province of Zambia because cases were high in the district, especially in the two villages included in the study.

### **3.6 Sample and Sampling Procedure**

A sample is the section of the wider population that will be engaged in the survey and sampling is the process of identifying whom the researcher will aim to contact from that population or an area (Kish, 1965; Robert, 2004). Best and Kahn (1993) define a sample as a small proportion of a population selected for observation and analysis for special purposes. Sampling is related to the selection of a subset of individuals from within a population to estimate the characteristics of the whole population. According to Mugenda

and Mugenda (2003), a sample is a small group of accessible population. Sampling refers to the process of selecting a sample from a finite population with the intent that the sample accurately represents that population.

In this study, the purposive sampling technique was further used to select two villages of Isoka District because the researcher believed that the selected villages had adequate numbers of young girls to even warrant the generalisation of research findings to the entire district. Moreover, studying the entire population would be very costly and time-consuming. Thus, the selection of the two villages, which were within reach of the researcher to cut on the cost, associated with having to travel long distances to carry out research.

In this study, the targeted study sample was eighteen (18) participants. The composition of the sample was as follows: six (6) victims of early marriage who were the key participants, four (4) parents of the victims, two (2) teachers, two (2) traditional leaders, two (2) leaders of the UCZ Isoka Main Congregation and two (2) police officers from the Department of Victim Support Unit. The researcher planned to interact with 25 participants but some participants could not be reached, as they were not at home, even after making several attempts on the phone. The number, therefore, was reduced to 18.

Concerning the sampling technique used to select the 18 participants from the two villages to take part in this study, the researcher used snowball sampling. According to Msabila and Nalaila (2013), snowball sampling involves a researcher asking the initial subject to nominate another person with the same trait. The researcher then observes the nominated subjects and continues in the same way until he/she obtains a sufficient number of subjects. In this study, the snowball-sampling technique was useful because it enabled the researcher to gather participants through referrals, whom he might not have managed to contact on his own. Through this technique, the researcher initially identified one teenage, married mother who helped in referring the researcher to another teenager, a married mother. The latter led to identifying four teenage, married mothers. The researcher used the same technique in identifying the parents, as two of the teenage, married mothers brought forth their parents. Therefore, only four parents were willing to be part of the study. The other parents were indifferent and the researcher could not force them to participate. The researcher also used purposive sampling to select traditional and religious

leaders, teachers and police officers. These were selected based on the researcher’s judgement that by their being in their positions, they would be ideal informants.

### 3.7 Alphanumerical symbols

To answer the research questions in this study, the researcher interacted with different individual participants. To identify the individual participants, alphanumerical characters were used, for example, E1 to E6 represented victims of early marriage; P1 to P4 represented parents; T1 and T2 represented teachers; Tr1 and Tr2 traditional leaders; L1 and L2 Church leaders and PO1 and PO2 represented police officers. The symbols are shown in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Alphanumerical symbols used to identify participants**

Category	Identification Number	Total Number
Victims of Early Marriages	E1 – E6	6
Parents	P1 – P4	4
Teachers	T1 – T2	2
Traditional Leaders	Tr1 – Tr2	2
Church Leaders	L1 – L2	2
Police Officer	PO1 – PO2	2
<b>Total Participants</b>		<b>18</b>

### 3.8 Data Collection Procedures

The task of data collection begins after a research problem has been defined and the research design explained to the participants (Kothari, 2004:95). The researcher should know how much and what kind of data collection will be collected and when. Kothari (2004) further asserts that the researcher should also be sure that the types of data obtainable from the selected instruments would be used to bring out the significance of the study. Data collection is also the accumulation of specific evidence that will enable the researcher to properly analyse the results of all activities by his or her research design and procedures (Kothari, 2004).

In addition, Babbie (2004) stated that data collection refers to gathering specific information aimed at proving or refuting some facts. In data collection, the researcher should have a clear understanding of what they hope to obtain and how they hope to obtain it. In data collection, the researcher should have a clear vision of the instruments to be used, the respondents and the selected area (Babbie, 2004). Data collection is important in research as it allows for the dissemination of accurate information and the development of meaningful research.

It was important to triangulate using different instruments of data collection as a way of ensuring that more and adequate information was gathered. Secondary data was collected through relevant documents such as books, journals, articles and reports. The researcher focused on materials that provided information on factors that contributed to early marriage and how the church combated early marriage generally and in Isoka District in particular. Participants felt comfortable since the researcher explained that the information obtained would be used for academic purposes. Information from key informants was also obtained through the interview guide. Based on the reports from the healthy facility, the researcher managed to know the key drivers of early marriage in the area under study.

In the current study, before data collection, the researcher sought permission to conduct the study from the University of Zambia Research Ethics Committee, the UCZ church leadership, the Victim Support Unit (VSU) officials and traditional leadership in Isoka District. The researcher collected data using interviews and focus group discussion (FGD).

### **3.8.1 Interview Method**

Data was collected using interviews that were recorded using a voice recorder. White (2003:67) asserts that an interview provides “access to what is inside the person’s head; it makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences) and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)”. Additionally, Sidhu (2006) asserts that through interviews the researcher may capture the feelings, emotions and opinions of respondents, something that the researcher might not be able to do when using questionnaires. Thus in an interview, the researcher can probe for more specific answers and can repeat a question when the response indicates that the respondent misunderstood it. This enables the respondent to

express his or her feelings.

Interviews were preferred because of the opportunity to use of open-ended questions, which allowed the researcher some flexibility to capture any relevant emerging themes (Corbetta, 2003). Interviews were held with the UCZ religious leaders, the teachers, traditional leaders, the police officers, the six (6) key respondents who were victims of early marriage and the four (4) parents. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher conducted the interviews with the participants through the phone. In this kind of interview, the researcher asked specific questions in a specific order (Rakotsoane and Rakotsoane, 1990). If the participants agreed, a phone voice recording was taken. Since the Police Officers were busy people, data was collected from them through email.

During the interviews, the researcher also took notes recorded in a notebook. The researcher ensured that there were only two people: the interviewer and the interviewee by asking respondents if they were in a conducive place, where there were no disturbances. Since the interview was on the phone, it allowed the researcher to collect in-depth information on the role of the UCZ in combating early marriage in Isoka District. Participants were free to express their feelings since they had no face-to-face contact with the interviewer, which could have caused some of them to be too shy to answer some questions.

To strengthen the interviews, the researcher asked follow-up questions on unclear information. By doing this, the researcher acquired in-depth information, which strengthened the research. On average, the interviews took thirty-five minutes each. However, in situations where the participants had challenges arising from a poor network, the interview was much longer than thirty-five minutes. Apart from interviews, data were also collected using the FGD method.

### **3.8.2 Focus Group Discussion**

According to Maguire (1987), FGD is a situation where the researcher provides an opportunity for collective problem sharing and problem-solving regarding everyday experiences. Bryman (2008:47) asserts that FGD “typically emphasises a specific theme

or topic that is explored in-depth.” In the current study, the researcher used FGD to draw upon their experiences. Concerning FGD, Bryman (2008: 475) asserts:

An individual may answer in a particular way but as he or she listens to others’ answers, he or she may want to qualify or modify a view or may want to voice agreement to something that he or she probably would not have thought of without the opportunity of hearing the views of others.

Since the researcher asked the respondents questions for them to discuss as a group, the technique was used to complement the interview method. As the respondents discussed question one: what household factors influenced early marriage of girls in Isoka District, they agreed and disagreed with each other. This helped the researcher verify whether the information gathered in the interviews was authentic enough.

The main challenge the researcher faced was that he had to have the FGDs held in a spacious place where participants were free from infecting each other with COVID-19 virus. The researcher had to provide participants with masks. Soap and hand sanitiser were also provided. Two FGDs groups were created and the first group comprised four parents and two traditional leaders while the second group comprised six participants who were the victims of early marriage and two UCZ leaders. The meetings were held at the UCZ premises, Isoka District, on different days, and on Sundays after the congregation meetings. To avoid delaying the participants, the FGDs took thirty minutes each.

### **3.8.3 Research Instruments**

The research instruments used to collect data in the current study were interview and focus group discussion guides. Sapsford (2007) states that a semi-structured interview does not have a standard format but there is an agenda that is used as a reminder to ensure that all the basic points are covered. Kombo and Tromp (2011:93) add that “this is a written list of questions or topics that need to be covered by the interview”. In line with the qualitative data collection technique in which the interviewer asks the interviewee a series of predetermined open-ended questions, the researcher avoided asking closed questions (Neuman, 2007). Furthermore, Leedy and Omrid (2010) assert that open-ended questions do not only define the topic under study but also provide an opportunity for the interviewer and the person under study to go deeper into the topic. This allowed the researcher to

understand how interventions by the church (to combat early marriage of girls in Isoka District) worked and how they could be improved. Six sets of guides (one each for victims, parents, church and traditional leaders, teachers and police officers) were used to collect data because they were useful when collecting data on the experiences of people (Orodho, 2009). During FGD four sets of guides ( one for each victim, parents, traditional leaders and the UCZ leaders) were also used to collect data.

### **3.9 Credibility and Trustworthiness**

According to Shenton (2004), credibility is an attempt to demonstrate that a true picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny is being presented. Shenton adds that credibility requires the researcher to link the study's findings with reality to demonstrate the truth of the study's findings. In the current study, the researcher ensured that credibility was maintained by conducting interviews, which were detailed, and asking probing questions. Credibility was also maintained by involving teachers, police officers and traditional leaders as participants so that responses by the victims of early marriage could be checked. The researcher also reviewed documents as a way to strengthen credibility. Concerning trustworthiness, Wesley and Miller (2010: 5) argue, "it concerns the establishment of the credibility of the research by protecting the authenticity or true value of the research." In the current study, the researcher ensured that the study was trustworthy by interpreting the data according to the responses gathered from the different respondents and the reviewed documents.

### **3.10 Data Analysis**

According to Achola and Bless (1999), data analysis involves a process of thorough examination and interpretation, a process of resolving data into its constituent components. Data analysis according to Kothari (2004) is the process of organization, manipulation and consideration of the meaning of data collected in order to bring order, structure and interpretation of the collected data, the researcher systematically organises the data by coding it into categories and constructing matrixes. The methods used in data analysis depend on whether the research is qualitative or quantitative. Singh (2006:231) amplifies this when he says, "The analysis and interpretation of data represent the application of deductive and inductive logic to the research process."

In this study, data were analysed using the thematic analysis method by coding, theme development and the interrelationship of themes, first checking the responses gathered from the respondents, grouping according to common themes and analysing according to the themes. The responses were collected, arranged and analysed so that only the information that was useful to address the effects of early marriage under the age of 18 was kept.

### **3.11 Ethical Considerations**

These are morals that relate to right and wrong conduct; for example, the code of conduct in the workplace. Certain ethical issues needed to be put in place before a researcher goes into the field to conduct the research work. Rakotsoane (2006) adds that it is considered unethical for the researcher to secretly gain access to records, which may contain the informants' data or sensitive questions.

In the current study, the researcher understood that certain moral obligations were to be observed and upheld in the community. As such, the researcher sought permission from the Research Ethics Committee at UNZA. Permission was also sought from the Ministry of Education, the District Education Board Secretary's office, the Ministry of Health and the Police Headquarters in Isoka District.

All the respondents expressed willingness to participate in the study. Respondents who did not wish to respond to a question were free to remain silent. Respondents were informed how long it would take to conduct the interview and FGD. Respondents were also free to withdraw from the study whenever they felt so. Additionally, the researcher ensured that the local language was used when interacting with the victims, parents and traditional leaders who did not understand English, the researcher was honest in reporting the findings of the study. The recordings were securely kept and were not shared with other respondents. Finally, respondents who did not want to be involved in the study were not forced to participate but were left out. Instead of having 25 participants as planned, there were 18 participants involved in the study.

### **3.12 Informed Consent**

Informed consent is communication between the researcher and the participant. Informed consent was sought from participants by informing them what the study was about and the significance of the study. This made the participant decide on their own whether to participate in the study or not (Cohen *et al*, 2007). Permission was sought from Isoka Police officer incharge, the Headmen for the the two villages, Isoka DEBS and Isoka World Vision, in order for the researcher to freely interact with the victim support unit officers, Heads of Department, the Traditional leaders, parents of the victims, teachers, victims of early marriage in two selected villages of Isoka District. Regarding children who were below eighteen, the researcher sought permission from their parents who allowed their children to take part in the study.

### **3.13 Summary**

This chapter presented the methodology and procedures that were employed in carrying out the study. It has described the research approach, research design, study population, location, sample and sampling procedures, alphanumerical symbols, data collection procedures, interview method, focus group discussion, research instruments, credibility and trustworthiness, data analysis, ethical considerations and informed consent. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Overview

The previous chapter described the research methodology that has been used in gathering data in the study. This chapter presents the findings on the role of the United Church of Zambia in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka district of Zambia. These findings emerged from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews and focused group discussion, given by six categories of participants namely; victims of early marriage, parents, traditional leaders, Church leaders, teachers and police officers. The findings have been organised and presented according to themes, which emerged during data collection. The findings are presented according to the following research questions:

- i) What factors influence the early marriage of girls in Isoka District, Zambia?
- ii) What are the initiatives by the UCZ to combat the early marriage of girls in Isoka District?
- iii) What challenges are experienced by the UCZ in combating the early marriage of girls in Isoka District?

#### 4.2 Information on Early Marriage

	Received information	Not received information
Village	Frequency	Frequency
A	5	2
B	7	4
<b>Total</b>	12	6

**Table 2: Information on Early Marriage**

Participants were asked whether they had received any information about early marriage. Table 2 shows that more participants in Village B received information on early marriage than those in Village A. Apart from asking respondents if they had information on early

marriage, the researcher also wanted to establish the factors that influenced early marriage of girls in Isoka District.

### **4.3 What Factors Influence the Early Marriage of Girls in Isoka District?**

In trying to find out the factors that influenced the early marriage of girls in Isoka District, the following themes came up: high level of poverty, lack of recreation facilities, peer pressure, desire for independence and lack of improvement in living standards, motivation of high dowry prices, lack of awareness, high illiteracy levels, cultural beliefs and societal pressure. Both verbatim and reported speech have been used to present the findings.

#### **4.3.1 High levels of poverty**

Poverty was one of the factors that influenced early marriage in Isoka district. All the participants interviewed and those who took part in FGDs unanimously agreed that poverty was the biggest factor leading to early marriage of girls in the district. In this vein, Participant P4, one of the parents to the victims of early marriage said, “early marriage of girls is influenced by poverty since the children do not receive education and economic opportunities that can help to improve their families.”

Participant P1, one of the parents stated, “The factors that influence early marriage of girls are poverty and lack of information about early marriage.” Similarly, Tr1 indicated the following:

*Early marriage is influenced by poverty because most families are living a life that cannot even meet the food basket cost of Zambia, which makes parents opt to marry off their children especially if a suitor with financial stability shows interest in the girl. (Tr1: Interview, November 2021)*

Additionally, Tr2 stated:

*One of the factors, which influence early marriage of girls in Isoka District, is poverty. This is because most of the parents in Isoka are poor and fail to support their children financially. In this case, a girl child drops out of school and is forced by her parents to get married. (Tr2: Interview, November 2021)*

Participant T1, one of the teachers, mentioned that poverty was a factor because some parents consider having a girl child as capital to come out of poverty. She added that they charged brideprice and that improved their economic situation.

Participant T2 added, “Sometimes children want to go to school and parents are ready to take them to school, but they do not have funds for school fees and other school necessities. Hence, children stay at home without anything to do. Marriage becomes a necessity.”

Added to the above findings were the views of E2, one of the key participants who took part in the FGD. She indicated that some girls got married because they wanted to have items such as cosmetics and clothes which their parents could not afford to buy for them. In this vein, fourteen-year-old Participant E2 narrated:

*I was married off at the age of 14 years because my father was very sick and we had no money to buy food at home and to take him to the hospital. So, my family decided that I should get married for them to raise some money so that my father could be taken to the hospital.” (E2: FGD, November 2021)*

Participant PO1 indicated, in an email he sent to the researcher, that poverty was one of the factors contributing to early marriage in the District. So young girls saw marriage as a ticket to push them out of poverty. He added that increased poverty levels caused parents to find it difficult to withhold their children from early marriage because marrying off their daughters especially to wealthy men was a great relief to the struggling parents or guardians.

Participant E5 stated the following:

*I got married not because I wanted to, but to help my family. My parents are old and we are a big family; my father does not have a stable income. It was hard for him to provide for all of us. I have younger siblings and my parents could not cater for us all. So I decided to get married to reduce the burden on my parents. Whatever I get from my husband, money or food, I can support my family. I should do this than to let them hunger forever. (E5: Interview, November 2021)*

### 4.3.2 Lack of recreation facilities

Lack of recreation facilities was also indicated in many responses as one of the factors contributing to early marriage in Isoka District. Affirming this, Participant Tr1 indicated that most girls had nowhere to go for recreational activities. As a result, they indulged in sexual activities and became mothers at a tender age. The parents eventually forced the girls and boys who impregnated them into marriage.

Additionally, Participant P2 indicated:

*Children here have no recreational centres; hence, sexual activities become their recreation. It becomes their form of entertainment. As a result, they form relationships and get married at an early age. The government should ensure that every district has recreational centres where young people could be kept, busy and avoid early marriage, especially after dropping out of school due to different challenges they face. (P2: Interview, November 2021)*

Participant E3 also indicated the following:

*After I failed to qualify for Grade 8, I had nothing to do, as there are no recreation centres here in Isoka District, where I could spend my free time and develop skills in sowing and hair plaiting. I ended up coming up with a hair salon so that I could at least have something to do. After some time, the business did not work out due to a lack of materials and my parents could not help me out. I therefore decided that the time had come for me to get married. Though I am young, I am managing somehow and I hope to educate my children so that they will not experience the hardship I have gone through. (E3: Interview, November 2021)*

Further, Participant T2 said:

*Lack of social amenities in rural areas is the main cause of early marriage. The youth have few things to do to make them busy in life. There are no sports activities, except those that take place in schools. There are also no youth developments, skills and sports training centres where young people can acquire knowledge and skills in carpentry, brick-laying, sowing, dressmaking, baking, football and netball, among other skills. This should be the first priority in the next national budget, as doing this will reduce early marriage in this district and other districts in Zambia. (T2: Interview, November 2021)*

This was supported by PO2 who indicated that the geographical environment of Isoka District was not conducive enough to provide youths opportunities for entrepreneurial activities like what is happening in other areas where youths could go out hunting and fishing using different types of fishing methods and tools. He concluded, “There are no social activities except what happens in schools”.

#### **4.3.3 Peer Pressure**

Peer pressure was also cited as one of the causes of early marriage in Isoka District. Participant Tr1 indicated that the decision to marry was often influenced by peers who were themselves married including sisters, brothers, cousins and friends. Tr1 added:

*Girls tend to attach a great deal of significance to personal relationships, especially friendships with their peers. Social approval and acceptance among age-mates in the community is also significant motivator in their behaviour and how they make decisions. (Tr1: Interview, November 2021)*

The value attributed to friendships and peer pressure was evidenced by one of the married girls, Participant E4 during the FGD when she reported that whilst at school, her married friends encouraged her to get married so that she could also experience how married life was.

Participant E4 also indicated that most of the unmarried girls thought that their married friends were in a better position than they were. They saw their friends (married girls) as having a sense of independence, a caring relationship, security and enjoyment in life. She added:

*In grade 8, I was 14 years old and I had always wanted to be a teacher, have my marriage ceremony in church with a colourful white wedding followed by a memorable reception in the evening. My married friends encouraged me that I was missing a lot of good things in marriage. So I stopped school in grade 9 and got married. After staying two years in marriage, my husband started abusing me and when I decided to leave the marriage, my friends and my grandmother advised me to stay saying that over time, my husband would change his attitude and become a good husband. I have missed what I was dreaming to do in life and I envy my friends who are still in school. Now I have to look after my child and my*

*husband. Peer pressure, I think, has more control over us than parental pressure. (E4: FGD, November 2021)*

#### **4.3.4 Desire for Independence and Lack of Improvement in Living Standards**

Concerning the desire for independence, the 14-year-old married girl, Participant E6, shared how she got married out of her aunt's influence who felt that she had become a burden to look after. At the time of the interview, the girl was in her second marriage. Participant E6 continued to state that she stopped school in grade five (5) due to financial constraints following the death of her biological parents. Participant E6 further narrated that her aunt told her that she was approached by a man on her way from church who was interested in marrying her. The following is E6's narration:

*Since he was a Christian and old enough to be like my father, I agreed to his proposal so that I could come out of my aunt's abuse, even though I was afraid of having sex with him since I was a virgin. Nevertheless, I was happy because my aunt arranged for Bana Vimbuza (Traditional Marriage Counsellors) to teach me how to handle the man. When I got married, life was good at first but with time, the man began to abuse me and we had sex whenever he wanted. Whenever I complained to him, he told me that I was too childish to be in a marriage and threatened to divorce me. When I suggested that we should space our children by using family planning methods, he further threatened to divorce me and constantly reminded me that I was an orphan so I needed him and I depended on him for everything." (E6: Interview November 2021)*

Additionally, Tr2 indicated during the FGD that in Isoka District marriage was understood as a means of improving difficult living conditions or a way of escaping neglect and harsh treatment by parents or guardians. Participant Tr2 concluded, "Early marriage is seen as a way of making children autonomous, and to have more freedom, by letting them have their own families to take care of. They are free from the intolerable conditions they encounter in their families."

#### **4.3.5 Motivation of High Dowry (Bride Price)**

Another reason given for the causes of early marriage in the district under study was that most parents and guardians were motivated to give their daughters away due to the high

bride price they received from the men's families. It is due to this reason that one of the traditional leaders, Tr1, indicated:

*High bride price influences early marriage in this district. Most of the parents and guardians think that marriage is a financial benefit through the bride price paid. They are serious when it comes to bride price charges. In this area and many other areas in this province, early marriage seems to be a form of income for many families who are poverty-stricken. The adolescent couple also fears waiting and getting married at an appropriate time because they want to escape from economic hardships. (Tr1: Interview, November 2021)*

Participant Tr1 concluded that traditional leaders encouraged families to unite and find ways in which they could cope with the economic and social challenges they faced instead of marrying their daughters early.

The views of Participant Tr1 above were supported by Participant L2 who added his views by attributing early marriage to high poverty levels in the district. He said in an interview, "Marrying off children in this district is a result of parents wanting to earn income through bride price which is paid to the girl's relatives. For this reason, a girl child is seen as a source of income."

#### **4.3.6 Lack of Awareness**

Lack of awareness or sensitization about the consequences of early marriage also contributed to early marriage in Isoka District. One of the police officers, Participant PO1, indicated that many parents and the girls too were not aware of the consequences of early marriage, such as Sexual Transmitted Infections (STIs) and increased discrimination. Participant PO1 said, "Most parents are ignorant of the consequences of early marriage; hence, they allow their young daughters to get married out of ignorance."

Another Participant, PO2, agreed with his colleague and said in a separate email, "The main factor that influences early marriage is lack of information about the subject. There is also a lack of sufficient awareness information as well as parents' lack of wider social networks."

Furthermore, Participant T1 said:

*Girls in rural Isoka do not have access to online information that may be helpful to them when making decisions. They do not understand that they have every right to education as well as parental care until they are adults and can start their own families. (T1: Interview, November 2021)*

#### **4.3.7 High Illiteracy Levels**

High illiteracy levels too have contributed to early marriage in Isoka because many people are not educated. As a result, they resort to getting married early and starting a family since there is no hope of going to school. For this reason, T2 indicated that illiteracy levels were high in the area because schools were in far places and young children could not manage walking long distances every day. Participant T2 said:

*Long distance to school affects girls negatively as they cannot complete their primary and secondary education and eventually, this contributes to a lack of development in the area. In remote areas of Isoka district schools are located more than 9 km away from the villages. This makes it difficult for pupils to walk to school and arrive on time. Therefore, they end out staying away from school and getting married. (T2: Interview, November 2021)*

Participant T1 also reported:

*Early marriages have contributed to the high rate of illiteracy and the high number of school dropouts in this area. Most people do not value education as a tool to combat poverty, which has led to profound effects on education; it has led to a high rate of young girls having many children before they even attain the age of 20. In most cases, you find that the children they give birth to suffer from ailments such as malnutrition. (T1: Interview, November 2021)*

This was supported by Participant P3 as follows:

*Illiteracy levels are high and education levels are low. As a result of schools being in long distant places and lack of interest to go to school by young people, this contributes to early marriage in the area. Furthermore, many parents do not value education. This has proved to be a deadly driving force to early marriage because the victims lack an understanding that education is an equalizer and a great investment to human development. (P3: Interview, November 2021)*

Another parent, Participant P1 said, “Most parents are ignorant of the dangers of early marriage. Hence, they marry off their daughters with less care and thought of how their children will live in their marriages. Parents who did not go to school find it a challenge to take their children, especially girls, to school.”

Similarly, Participant P4 added, “Long distance to school causes some girls to fail to walk to school due to their biological nature.”

#### **4.3.8 Cultural Beliefs and Societal Pressure**

The research has found that cultural beliefs too have caused some parents to give their young girls into marriage. Since early marriage was common in the District, parents did not have any justification for not allowing their daughters to get married. In this line, Participant Tr2, stated in an interview, “Marriage is viewed as a source of prestige among most of the villagers. It is something to boast about. Some girls enter into marriage to earn respect from the members of the community and their peers.”

Participant Tr2 added, “Cultural beliefs influence some girls and families to give in to early marriage because when a girl becomes of age and does not bear a child, they fear that when she dies, she will be placed charcoal amber in her private parts.” Furthermore, Participant Tr1, who took part in the FGD, stated that for girls, it was acceptable to marry at 14 years, while Participant P1 indicated that some girls married at 16.

Another Participant, P1, who took part in the FGD indicated the following:

*Around here, girls get married when they are between 14 and 16 years. It is a common thing and it has become normal. As long as the girl is mature and can perform house chores, such as collecting firewood, washing utensils and having children and caring for her family, she is married off. When young people see their peers married at an early age, they also want to get married. Same with parents who have their friends who have married off their children want to follow suit.” (P1: FGD, November 2021)*

Similarly, Participant P2 indicated, “Traditional beliefs and ideas are that a girl who attains puberty is old enough to take care of her own family.” Additionally, Participant P3

echoed, “Cultural practices contribute to early marriages. Here in In Isoka, people are used to getting married at a tender age. It is not a strange practice.”

Further, Participant Tr2 concluded, “In the traditional context, marriage is a way of maintaining the family lineage. Some fathers are in a hurry to have grand children who might inherit their possessions. So they force their daughters into early marriage.”

#### **4.4 The UCZ Helping to Combat Early Marriage of Girls in Isoka District**

The second research question sought to establish how the UCZ helped to combat early marriage in Isoka district. The following themes were deduced from this research question: Forming groups for elderly people, Opening up recreational facilities, Designing sensitization programmes, Engagement of youths and strengthening empowerment programmes.

##### **4.4.1 Forming Groups for Elderly People**

In trying to combat early marriages in Isoka district, the study has discovered that the UCZ formed groups of elderly men and women to be speaking to the parents as well as the youths about the dangers of early marriages. In this vein, Participant L1, one of the UCZ leaders, indicated, “The UCZ in Isoka has come up with a group of mothers and young ladies who are sensitizing people about the dangers of early marriage.” This was supported by L2 who indicated that the creation of women groups to venture into skills training was a combating measure taken by the church to end early marriage in the district.

Additionally, P4 added:

*The church is helping to combat early marriage by opening up recreational facilities to enable youths to channel their energies to sports, and through sensitisation. The church has mobilised groups of elderly men and women who teach and sensitise both girls and boys on the importance of growing to maturity by avoiding sex and preserving it for marriage. P4: Interview, November 2021)*

##### **4.4.2 Sensitisation Programmes**

The UCZ has come up with groups to help in sensitising the community on the dangers of early marriage. For this reason, L2 indicated, “The UCZ church has partnered with NGOs

such as world Vision, to sensitize parents on the dangers of early marriage, making more parents alert and knowledgeable.” Another participant, L1, indicated, “The church has set up guidance and counselling committees that help counsel teenagers on the dangers of early marriage, making it easy for would-be victims to be aware of these dangers and refrain from early marriage.”

Participant Tr1 emphasised:

*The church has come out strongly to condemn the vice and support the government’s efforts to stop early marriages in this district. Additionally, the church has come up with programmes to sensitise its members and others in the community on the problems associated with early marriage. This may reduce early marriage cases. (Tr1: Interview, November 2021)*

#### **4.4.3 Engagement of Youths**

The UCZ has also engaged youths on a number of issues and especially on how to avoid early marriage in Isoka district. One of the church leaders, Participant L1, narrated:

*The church has come up with youth groups and those groups are key in disseminating information about the dangers of early marriage. Through these groups, youths are given a platform to share ideas about different social problems related to health, peer pressure and education in general. We also involve youths by engaging them and advising them to live by Christian values, encourage parents to have dialogue with their children on traditional norms, and discuss other concerns such as sexuality, which affect youths in one way or the other. (L1: Interview, November 2021)*

Additionally, Participant E3, one of the key informants, indicated that the UCZ engaged youths by allowing them to participate in youth groups like the Boys’ and Girls’ brigade. She further indicated that the UCZ introduced youth sports clubs at church where youths were given sports equipment like balls used in netball and football. Participant E3 concluded, “So every weekend, youths play football and community members go to watch as they compete with other clubs. This is a recreation venture introduced by the Church.”

Further, Participant L2 indicated:

*Through the Insaka programme, youths are taught and sensitised on the advantages and disadvantages of early marriage and other cross-cutting issues, such as HIV and AIDS and gender-based violence. The UCZ also has youth centre organisations such as Boys Brigade, Girls Brigade, Sunday School and Youth Christian Fellowship in which activities are presented in fourfold: spiritual, social, educational and health. This helps in combating the scourge of early marriage in the district. (L2: Interview, November 2021)*

Another participant, Participant L1, opined:

*Being the Church, as a social organisation the Isoka UCZ, engages the parents and the youths on the disadvantages of early marriage and collaboration with the ministry of health, Planning Parenthood Zambia, health mothers, traditional royal establishments as well as other non-profit organisations helping the community to disengage the vice of early marriage. (L1: Interview, November 2021)*

Another participant a police officer, Participant PO1 wrote in his email:

*The UCZ is combating the scourge of early marriage in Isoka District by introducing moral health lessons on mind-set change, as we are now living in an evolving environment. The Church educates the youths on how to get into Christian marriages. The church teaches the young never to get married before 21 years. This is done through women's Christian fellowship in which information is shared and participants are made to make vows that they would never involve themselves in early marriage.*

Another Participant, PO2, indicated that the UCZ engaged the youths by providing them with information about the dangers of early marriage through preaching, teaching and having seminars. The church also collaborates with NGOs that work with the youths to fight early marriages.

Further, L1 indicated:

*Church leaders in conjunction with NGOs allow young girls to interact with and discuss their problems and pray for them. Whenever they are in a problem, they seek support from us church leaders. There are many programmes in the church designed for adolescent girls and boys to equip them with knowledge and skills preparing them for marriage life.*

*As a church, we discourage early marriage. Here the church is proactive and making efforts to combat early marriage and empower girls to remain in school. (L1: Interview, November 2021)*

#### **4.4.4 Empowerment Programmes**

The UCZ in Isoka has initiated some empowerment programmes aimed at helping young girls and boys from entering into early marriage prematurely. It is in this sense that Participant P4 indicated that the Church had come up with programmes to keep the youths busy and help them focus more on school and having better lives than being involved in early marriage.

Additionally, Participant E3 indicated:

*Empowering girls is on the top agenda of the UCZ here in Isoka District. Girls are encouraged to embark on income-generating projects so that they can be self-reliant. The UCZ also provide vulnerable girls and their families with income-making opportunities so that the parents can start doing something meaningful to send their children to school. (E3: FGD, November 2021)*

In affirming this, Participant L2 indicated “We have youth programmes that aim at teaching the youth life skills to enable them to earn an income as capital for starting small businesses. This is because the UCZ understands that education and empowerment interventions are the most effective ways of reducing early marriage.”

#### **4.4.5 Combating measures used by the UCZ in Isoka District.**

In response to combating measures by the UCZ to curb early marriage, Participant Tr1 indicated that the Church empowered members of the church and the locals with knowledge and skills so that they could use the skills to come up with income-generating businesses instead of earning income from their daughters’ payment of bride price. Furthermore, Participant L2 indicated that by using the local radio station and drawing up a monthly programme in which youths were used to disseminate information, the Church advocated for the elimination of early marriage in Isoka District. Participant L2 said, “Advocacy through preaching and other programmes tailored to help the youths and parents to say “No” to early marriage are promoted by our Church.”

Another participant who was a member of the Church, participant P1, narrated:

*The church uses the pulpit to preach against early marriage. Women and men in the church have formed groups to tutor girls and boys who become of age on how to be responsible adults. In the same vein, to combat the challenge of lack of transport, the women have bought some bicycles to be used for transport when visiting distant places and educate parents and youths on the dangers of early marriages. In all these activities the Church partners with the police, NGOs and other churches to speak against early marriage. (P1: FGD, November 2021)*

#### **4.5 Initiatives to Advocate for Combating Early Marriage**

Research question two sought to examine the initiatives to advocate for combating early marriage in Isoka District. The following themes have been deduced from this research question: having lessons with the youths, promoting youth gatherings, and promotion of youth empowerment.

##### **4.5.1 Having lessons with the youths**

The study discovered that the Church has come up with lessons for the youths as one of the initiatives to combat early marriage in the District. In this vein, Participant T1 mentioned, “The UCZ has introduced catechumen lessons that help youths learn more about their health and hygiene hence making it easy for them to be aware of the dangers of early marriage.”

Participant Tr1, a UCZ member, indicated the following:

*We discuss the issue of marriage with the girls. Some of the girls tell us that they do not want to marry but their parents are not financially capable of paying for their school fees. Therefore, they stopped going to school and got married. We empower girls that do not go to school by helping them with their daily necessities. The church in Isoka has also mobilized groups of elderly men and women who provide traditional education to both girls and boys, at different levels of maturity, on the importance of growing to maturity, sex and sexuality. (Tr1: Interview, November 2021)*

Additionally, Participant Tr2 explained, in an interview, that parental and adult committees were created by the Church as guides to life skills in sexual and reproductive health. She further indicated that the curriculum for all these lessons was developed by the Church.

Participant P2 added that valuable lessons against early marriage were provided through workshops. Participant P2 further indicated:

*The Church has undertaken different activities in this community to respond to the early marriage phenomenon. For example, Isoka main UCZ congregation held a seminar which was attended by many girls from Isoka and other districts. The training focused on cultural matters and the value of traditional education as the only way to uphold traditional values and promote Zambian culture. The training exposed girls to values and traditional customs including the dangers of early sex and early marriage. Other topics discussed included the value and benefits of upholding personal dignity, high self-esteem and assertiveness to minimize inappropriate dressing, promiscuity, drunkenness, early pregnancy and early marriage among girls. (P2: Interview, November 2021)*

Participant P4 also indicated that there were group and community education sessions held on the consequences of early marriage. Participant P4 concluded, “The Church is working hard to eliminate early marriage by putting in place awareness lessons in the surrounding communities.”

Additionally, Participant L2 indicated the following:

*Some of the initiatives which the UCZ, particularly here in Isoka District, is advocating for to combat early marriage is that the church has continued to sensitise boys and girls to the importance of education. The girls are advised that if their parents force them to get married, they should report to the church so that the church can intervene between the child and the parents because the church believes that when a young girl is forced to get married, she is less likely to attend school. Early marriage separates the victims from their family and friends and most likely they experience life-threatening complications during pregnancy and child birth. The church in Isoka has also gone the extra mile by taking a one-on-one session with the girls and boys, empowering them to be aware of their rights. This is done because the church believes in*

*creating a conducive environment for early marriage combating so that girls are assisted to improve their decision-making capacities. (L2: Interview, November 2021)*

#### **4.5.2 Promote Youth Gatherings**

Concerning youth gatherings Participant E4, one of the victims of early marriage, indicated that youth gatherings were also organised and implemented by the UCZ as one of the initiatives to combat early marriage in Isoka District. Participant E4 added, “Promotion of youth gatherings such as music festivals, Bible quizzes and poetry to advocate for the elimination of early marriage helps our youths to have information on the issue. We use the information to advise other youths to refrain from marrying at an early age.” These sentiments were supported by Participant E6 who indicated that the UCZ in Isoka District has designed programmes which helped youths, especially those not yet married, to put marriage in its perspective. Participant E6 further indicated that the Church ensured that the activities were carried out as planned and were helpful to the youths by making follow-up visits to their (youths) homes.”

Furthermore, Participant E1 stated the following:

*I commend the UCZ for the skills development programme where youths are being helped to avoid premature marriage. The church has done this by opening a radio programme to teach survival skills to women. I find this programme useful because it targets people at the grassroots. At least the majority of the people in this area own a radio, so they benefit from the programme. To keep the youths busy and active in whatever activities or businesses they were involved in, the Church also advocates for sponsorship of these activities. (E1: FGD, November 2021)*

#### **4.5.3 Promotion of Youth Empowerment**

On the promotion of youth empowerment, Participant L1 indicated that the Church supported the girl child to go to school. Participant L1 further indicated that the Church-sponsored youths who performed well at secondary school to attain tertiary education. Participant L1 concluded:

*Sponsoring youths to attain higher education does not only help the Zambian government, through the MoE, to provide education to the*

*rural masses but it also reduces cases of early marriage. I do not see a situation in which the government can provide free education at the tertiary level, as it is planned for primary education. Free education should be provided at all levels. However, I still feel that since boys and girls are used in different activities for the economic gain of families, whether free education is introduced or not, some parents and guardians will still withdraw their children from school. Finally, the youth groups introduced by the Church help to keep the youths busy and focus on their well-being and networks rather than focussing on early marriage. (L1: Interview, November 2021)*

#### **4.6 Challenges Experienced by the UCZ in Combating Early Marriage of Girls in Isoka District.**

##### **4.6.1 Challenges Faced by the UCZ**

To begin with, Participant P2 indicated that in their endeavour to combat early marriage in Isoka District, the UCZ faced many challenges. Participant P2 said:

*The problem is that even if the Church sensitises the girls and boys on the dangers associated with early marriage, the information seems to fall on deaf ears as the boys and girls go back to their homes and communities infested by the scourge. They continue experiencing the same negative cultural environmental factors that influence them to get married early. (P2: Interview, November 2021)*

One of the leaders in the UCZ, Participant L1, indicated:

*One of the challenges we face is the lack of adequate funding to undertake sensitization programmes. As much as we would wish to sensitise all the youths in this area, we are constrained due to a lack of funding. If NGOs partnered with us more fully, we could carry out more activities to help combat early marriage not only here in Isoka District but in other districts as well. Since early marriage is no longer a community issue but a national issue, the government should do much by providing funds to churches so that sensitisation awareness campaigns can be strengthened. (L1: Interview, November 2021)*

Participant L2 added in an FGD:

*Another challenge we face as a Church is the lack of support from the general membership. Some of the church members are not interested in working with us to combat early marriage because they are part of the community in which the vice is practised. They prefer adhering to cultural norms rather than combating early marriage. Additionally, the UCZ women groups encounter difficulties when it comes to visitations to distance parts of the district. By the time they arrive at the designated sites, they are exhausted and may not be willing to go back for follow-up visits. The challenges of transportation to move in some far place.” (L2: FGD, November 2021)*

Further, Participant PO1 indicated that another challenge faced by the UCZ in combating early marriage in the District was the high illiteracy levels among parents. Participant PO1 added that the parents resorted to marrying off their children at a tender age because they did value the importance of education since they did not go to school themselves. He concluded, “This is coupled with low public awareness of early marriage and its consequences. More should be done by the church and other stakeholders.”

Finally, Participant PO2 had this to write:

*The major challenge is the traditional beliefs and practices the locals adhere to without question. This is their way of life and trying to bring change to the community may interfere with their beliefs, which of course are detrimental to the development of this area. There is also a need to build high esteem among youths so that they can be independent from parental pressure to get married early. Legal frameworks which allow customary marriages should be adjusted to suit current times.*

#### **4.7 Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the study in line with the main research questions. The next chapter presents a discussion of the findings in line with the objectives of the study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 5.1. Overview

The chapter presents a discussion of the research findings. It specifically discusses the results according to factors that influence early marriage of girls in Isoka district, high levels of poverty, high illiteracy levels, lack of recreation facilities, peer pressure, desire for independence and improvement in living standards, motivation of high bride price, lack of awareness, cultural practices, initiatives by the UCZ and combating measures, challenges experienced by the UCZ in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District. The findings are presented according to the following research objectives:

- i) To establish the factors that influence early marriage of girls in Isoka District, Zambia.
- ii) To examine initiatives by the UCZ in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District.
- iii) To analyse the challenges experienced by the UCZ in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District.

The chapter focuses on discussing what was reported on the ground (current information) in relation to what has been reported in the literature. In the following section, the chapter discusses the findings from the first research objective.

#### 5.2 Factors that Influence Early marriage of Girls in Isoka District

ICRW (2010) studies have shown that early marriage was common among girls similarly, the study found out that early marriage in Isoka District was more common among girls. The situation was similar in Yemeni where approximately half of the girls got married before they were 15 years old (Birech, 2013). The study established that different factors influenced early marriage in Isoka District. Among these factors were high levels of poverty, high illiteracy levels, lack of recreation facilities, peer pressure, desire for independence and improvement in living standards, motivation of high bride price, lack of awareness and cultural practices.

### **5.2.1 High Levels of Poverty**

Poverty was one of the factors that influenced early marriage in Isoka District. Hunger made girls vulnerable to sexual abuse, which often resulted in pregnancy. The findings gathered from the parents generally showed that parents were not ready to take care of a daughter who became pregnant. As such, the girl was forced into marriage with the man or boy who made her pregnant. The findings further revealed that girls forced themselves into marriage due to financial constraints. They hoped that their husbands would support them. This was in line with Birech (2013) who asserted that families with limited resources often opted to marry off a girl at an early age to earn some income or wealth. The current study also found out that parents did not necessarily marry off their daughters to have a bride price but forced them into marriage to reduce the family size and minimize the economic burden of caring for a large family.

The findings gathered from Tr1 showed that early marriage was influenced by poverty because most families were living a life that could not meet the food basket cost of Zambia. This was because most parents were poor and failed to support their children financially. In this case, the girl child dropped out of school and was forced by her parents or guardians to get married. This was evident from (Musyoki, 2016) who said, “Child marriage is influenced by poverty because the children do not receive education and economic opportunities that help lift them and their families.”

Additionally, the findings gathered from Participant T1 showed that poverty was a factor because some parents considered having a girl child as capital to come out of poverty. The bride price was paid to the parents or guardians of the girls who got married. The recipients used the money to improve their economic status. Meanwhile, the girls were forced to be in marriage relationships they were not ready for. This was in agreement with Tutu and Gumbonzvanda (2015) who asserted that the main drivers of early marriage were poverty and tradition, which often manifested as social pressure for parents and their children who had to conform to societal norms.

Additionally, the findings gathered from the victims of early marriage revealed that some girls got married because they wanted to have basic needs such as cosmetics and clothes, which their parents/guardians could not afford. Others got married in order to have money

to support their ailing relatives. This was exemplified by the narration of a fourteen-year old victim of early marriage who was forced into early marriage because the family wanted to raise money for the father to be taken to the hospital.

Therefore, in Isoka District, and other districts in Zambia and beyond, young girls saw marriage as a ticket to push them out of poverty. Increased poverty levels caused parents/guardians to find it difficult to withhold their children from early marriage because a child's marriage was a relief for them to have funds to support their families. These findings were supported by the views of (Sidney *et al*, 2016) , which revealed that in families where the head of the family was poor, the girl was forced to get marriage so that the family's burden could be reduced. A girl who got married was expected to receive support from her husband. This support could be extended to the girl's family. This was evident from what E5, one of the victims stated, "Whatever I got from my husband, money or food, I can support my family. I should do this than to let them hunger forever.

### **5.2.2 High Illiteracy Levels**

The results of the study also showed that the level of education affected the prevalence of early marriage in Isoka District. This agreed with the study by Panos Institute Southern Africa (2014) which established that limited access to formal education often left girls impoverished and thus vulnerable to early marriage because they have limited options for survival. Another study by Nangoma (2013) established that girls who got pregnant could not continue with schooling and instead were forced into early marriage with the view that marriage could be the best alternative to take care of themselves.

In the current study, the findings gathered from the teachers generally showed that high illiteracy levels contributed to early marriage of girls in Isoka District as there was no hope for the victims to go back to school. The results further showed that the long distance to school was another factor, as children could not manage to walk long distances every day. Additionally, early marriage contributed to the high number of school dropouts in the study area. Most people did not value education as a tool to combat poverty. This led to young girls having children before they became adults. In most cases, the children were malnourished, as their young parents could not afford to feed them with nutritious food. Furthermore, the findings by P3, one of the parents, showed that many parents did not value

education and lacked an understanding that education was an equalizer and an investment in human development. As if this was not enough, further findings gathered from another parent, P1, revealed that most parents were ignorant of the dangers of early marriage. Hence, they married off their daughters with less care and thought of what their children's lives would be like in their marriages. Parents who did not go to school found it a challenge to take their children, especially girls, to school. As (Wodon *et al*, 2017) analysed that through the use of regression-based techniques in the analysis of demographic and health survey data from 15 countries on girls' secondary school completion. The study therefore, recommended strategies to retain girls in schools.

### **5.2.3 Lack of Recreation Facilities**

Lack of recreation facilities was found to be one of the factors contributing to early marriage in Isoka District. Affirming this, information gathered from Tr1, a village headman, showed that most girls had nowhere to go for recreation activities. As a result, they indulged in sexual activities and became mothers at a tender age. The parents eventually forced the girls and boys who impregnate them into marriage. Therefore, P2 suggested that the government should ensure that every district had recreational centres where young people could be kept busy and avoid early marriage, especially after dropping out of school. This was further revealed by E3, a victim of early married, who narrated that after she failed to qualify for Grade 8 she had nothing to do, as there were no recreation centres in Isoka District where she could spend time and develop skills in sewing and hair plating. To keep herself busy, she came up with a hair saloon, which could not materialise due to lack of funds. The findings gathered from E3 further showed that though she had parents, they could not afford to help her with funds to boost her business. So she decided to get married and the couple hoped that their children would be educated so that they might not experience the hardship their parents had gone through.

Furthermore, the findings gathered from T2 showed that there were no youth development, skills and sports training centres in the district, where young people could acquire knowledge and skills in carpentry, brick-laying, sewing, baking, netball and football. Making the development of skills centres a priority would tremendously help to reduce early marriage in the district. These findings were closely related to Wodon, Nguyen and Edmeades (2017). In an analysis of the impact of early marriage on

educational attainment, Wodon, Nguyen and Edmeades (2017) posited that there was a causal relationship between early marriage and educational attainment and a significant negative relationship between early marriage and secondary school completion. As shown in this section of the discussion, some youths were forced into marriage due to failure to attain secondary education. As such, they opted to get married so that they could have something to do in life.

#### **5.2.4 Peer Pressure**

According to the findings gathered from the victims of early marriage, peer pressure was one of the causes of early marriage in Isoka District. It was evident during the FGD held with the girls that the decision to marry was often influenced by peers who were themselves married including sisters, brothers, cousins and friends. The findings further revealed that most of the unmarried girls thought that their married friends were in a better position than they were. They saw their married friends as having a sense of independence, and security and enjoying an environment and atmosphere with a home in which the couple shared their relationship amicably. The findings gathered from E4 also showed that some girls had ambitions to become teachers, nurses, and engineers, among other jobs, but their ambitions were shattered due to admiring friends and relatives who were married and influenced them to get married. They remained in marriages in which they were abused by their husbands and were advised by friends and close family members not to leave their husbands, as they (husbands) would change their attitudes in due course.

In their discussion of peer pressure, which they called group membership, (Reich and Adcock, 1976), asserted:

A group and the individual's membership of that group can act both to define, modify and maintain each individual's attitudes and values. Little modification is necessary if the individual voluntarily enters the group because he/she identifies with it, but great pressure to change can occur if the individual merely complies with a group for his/her purposes.

Therefore, in Isoka district girls who identified themselves with their peers were more likely to leave school and get married as their peers did. Additionally, as observed by Gillian *et al* (2015), girls tended to attach a great deal of significance to personal relationships, and especially to friendships with their peers. Social approval and

acceptance among age-mates in the community at large was also a significant motivator in their behaviour and decision-making (Gillian *et al*, 2015). In concluding this section, it is worth stating the value attributed to friendships and peer relations evidenced by E4 who partially narrated, “I have missed out on what I was dreaming to do in life and I envy my friends who are still in school. Now I have to look after my husband and child.” As observed by (Mushota and Lilian, 2005) that early marriage affected all girls, those with less education, living in rural areas and in the lower wealthy quantities were more susceptible than those with higher education, living in urban areas and in the higher wealthy quantities.

### **5.2.5 Desire for Independence and Improvement in Living Standards**

The findings showed that in Isoka District, early marriage was understood as a means of improving difficult living standards or escaping the harsh treatment by parents and guardians. In most cases, girls were forced into early marriage due to compelling circumstances, which influenced them to seek independence, and autonomy through marriage. This was evident from the findings gathered from E6 during FGD, which revealed that she got married through the influence of her aunt who felt that as an orphan, she was an extra burden. The findings further showed that E6 was 17 years old and had been married twice. After her parents’ death, she stopped school in grade five (5) due to financial constraints. The findings also showed that E6 was abused by her husband who used to remind her that being an orphan she needed him and could be divorced if she did not adhere to his demands. This was an unfortunate situation for a girl who was an orphan. Instead of being harsh on such girls, husbands should exercise patience, love, compassion and care and help them grow and develop into adulthood as married individuals. Guardians and parents, too, should not mistreat their dependants and children at all costs. They should be taken as human beings created by God in his image and should be treated as such.

The story that appeared in the “Times of Zambia” newspaper (2007, 11<sup>th</sup> August) of the young girl, Maria, represents many Zambian girls who have been socialised to idealise early marriage. For the people of Isoka District, it might take time for them to change and eliminate early marriage in the district, other surrounding districts and Zambia at large.

### **5.2.6 Motivation of High Bride Price**

Another factor established as one of the causes of early marriage in the district under study was that most parents and guardians were motivated to give their daughters away into early marriages due to the high bride price they received from the men's families. It was due to this factor that the findings gathered from L1 showed that most of the parents and guardians regarded marriage to be a financial and economic benefit through the bride price they charged. The findings further revealed that for parents who were poverty-stricken, bride price was a means of alleviating the poverty. Though traditional leaders encouraged families to unite and find ways in which they could cope with the economic and social challenges they faced instead of marrying off their daughters early, their advice seemed to be ignored. As observed by Tembo and Matenga (2008) that parents and guardians saw early marriage as a financial gain through the bride price for their daughters and also as an opportunity to lessen the household economic burden. For this reason, a girl child is seen as a source of income. If bride price was not one of the cultural practices in Isoka District, most of the girls might not be forced into early marriage.

### **5.2.7 Lack of Awareness**

Additionally, the study established that a lack of sensitization about the consequences of early marriage contributed to early marriage in Isoka District. This was revealed from the findings by PO1, that many parents and the girls too, were not aware of the consequences of early marriage, such as Sexual Transmitted infections (STIs) and increased discrimination. Furthermore, the findings by P02 showed that the main factor that influenced early marriage in Isoka District was the lack of information on the subject. There was also parents' lack of wider social networks. Social networking helps to improve one's social and economic stability. Parents and guardians who interact with others in different areas might acquire knowledge and understanding of how to handle and deal with girls and boys who leave school and seem to have nothing to do. However, for the people of Isoka district, social networking might be a challenge since most of the parents and guardians were poor and might not possess any gargets for networking. Nevertheless, this should not be an excuse for them to charge exorbitant bride price and force their daughters into early marriage. As the findings by T1 revealed, girls and boys in Isoka District should be made aware of their right to education and parental care. This awareness

might lead them to report cases to traditional leaders who endeavoured to end the early marriage in the district.

### **5.2.8 Cultural Practices**

The study found that cultural beliefs and practices influenced some parents to give their young daughters into early marriage. In this vein, the findings gathered from Tr2 revealed that in Isoka District, marriage was viewed as a source of prestige among the villagers. It was something to boast. Culturally, young people are supposed to respect elders. As such, some girls opted to get married to earn respect from their peers and members of the community. When a girl became of age but did not bear a child, there was fear that when she died, she would be placed charcoal ember in her private parts. Furthermore, according to the findings by Tr1, girls could get married at 14 years of age and boys at 16. These findings were similar to (Nangoma's, 2013) who reported that Chinamwali and Nyau initiation ceremonies of Eastern Province had a strong influence on early marriage.

Similarly, the findings gathered from Tr2 showed that in Isoka District the initiation of young girls into puberty ceremony (chisungu), was highly practised among the Namwanga ethnic group. During the initiation of young girls into puberty ceremony (chisungu), girls were kept indoors and taught how to care for their families when they got married. These findings were similar to Gillian *et al* (2015) who stated that initiation ceremonies focused on preparing children for marriage and the initiates developed a desire for marriage because they were taught things meant for adults. The initiation of young girls into puberty stage (chisungu) further influenced young girls to drop out of school due to rituals, which compelled them to stay indoors for some time.

The findings from the traditional leaders brought to the fore the point that parents charged a high bride price for a girl who had successfully gone through the initiation of young girls ceremony (chisungu). As a result, the girl is driven into an early marriage. These findings were similar to Birech's (2013) who carried out a study in India which revealed that the girl's virginity was highly valued and this made parents push their children into marriage at an early age when virginity was still intact. However, the girls in Isoka District, were further subjected to the initiation of young girls ceremony (chisungu), which might cause them to drop out of school. According to the findings by Tr2, in the traditional context,

marriage was a way of maintaining the family lineage. Therefore, some fathers were in a hurry to have grandchildren who might inherit their possessions. Therefore, they forced their daughters into early marriage. The findings from Tr2 revealed that traditional leaders were at the forefront to try to combat early marriage in the district. They worked with other stakeholders such as the MoE, NGOs, politicians and the church to sensitise parents on the need to allow girls to go to school and undergo the initiation of young girls ceremony (chisungu) training only when they were adults and ready for marriage.

### **5.3 Initiatives by the UCZ and Combating Measures**

The findings gathered from the UCZ church leaders showed that the Church was doing a lot in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District. They came up with programmes, which focused on three activities: working with both boys and girls, the community and the legal system, and reviewing policies that affected the lives of the people, such as the Re-entry policy, which allowed pregnant girls to go back to school after delivery. In support of this Omondi (2008) points out that the re-entry policy allows girls who become pregnant while in school to be re-admitted unconditionally to continue with their education soon after the maternity break. Moreover, the Zambian government is set to strengthen the re-entry of girls after their babies have grown and together with other stakeholders sensitize communities to the negative socio-cultural practices that reduce the effective participation of girls in education (Mulama, 2006).

The findings further revealed that the UCZ had a Child Protection Policy and Procedures Manual (2016) which guided church members and stakeholders on how to care for all children and safeguard them from vices that undermined their potential. Moreover, the UCZ Child Protection Policy and Procedure Manual (2016) was designed and implemented to help all church members and non-members who were in contact with children to learn how to protect and support them in all circumstances. It also formed the basis upon which a child-friendly manual was to be developed for usage by youths themselves (Child Protection Policy and Procedure Manual, 2016). In the same vain the Zambian government has instituted a national response to address early marriage by launching a multi-stakeholders anti-early marriage campaign. Structures to fight early marriage have been put in place including a civil society coalition against early marriage, a ten-member ministerial committee, a draft policy on ending early marriage and a

National Strategy of Ending Early Marriage for the period 2016-2021 (Early Marriage Policy, 2017).

Additionally, the findings generally showed that parental and community engagement was a frequently used strategy. The primary motivation behind this strategy was to create an enabling environment in the understanding that the decision to marry girls early was generally in the hands of family and community elders and that the resulting stigma and sanctions for failing to meet social expectations were instituted by the broader community. Girls rarely had the power or agency to decide on their own if, when, or whom to marry. Thus, parental education and community mobilization attempted to change social norms and forge a supportive, less punitive environment for girls and families who were willing and ready to change the custom of early marriage. According to the UCZ leaders, enlisting and sensitising parents and community members helped to combat possible unintended consequences of girls' participation in the different programmes and reinforced a programme's messages and activities.

As shown in the literature, the goal of the Zambia National Strategy to end early marriage was to reduce early marriage by 40 per cent by 2021 (UNICEF Zambia, 2015). In line with the objectives of the national Strategy, the UCZ in Isoka District helped to facilitate positive change in prevailing attitudes, beliefs and practices. These then contributed to the practice of early marriage, to ensure a consistent approach to protecting child rights and promoting their well-being, to facilitate the provision of child-sensitive social services to reduce children's vulnerability to marriage. In addition, to mobilise effectively financial resources to facilitate the implementation of programmes aimed at reducing children's vulnerability to marriage. It did this through the different programmes initiated by the Church. Therefore, the Church worked hand in glove with the government in its endeavour to combat early marriage of girls in the district.

Furthermore, the findings showed that the UCZ engaged youths in different other programmes such as Girls' and Boys' Brigades, Youth Christian Fellowship, Choir groups and through sports clubs to keep them busy away from church activities. In support of this, the UCZ embarked on an educational programme. This programme promoted a safer environment for learning by ensuring that community members interacted with the school

authorities and discussed issues related to the education of their children. The findings further showed that the UCZ ensured that children had support and protection from any form of harassment and abuse. However, as shown the literature, the study by the African Union (AU) campaign to End Early Marriage in Africa shows that most research over the past ten years identifies religion and cultural traditions as having a role in not just the persistence but also the elimination of early marriage on the continent (AU, 2015).

For radical feminists, women can only be liberated through debates meant to overhaul patriarchal structures (Pilcher and Imelda, 2008). The efforts of the UCZ established by this research fit within this framework in facilitation and campaigns against early marriages as a form of oppression for young girls. The establishments made by this study that by culture girls are raised to be housewives, mothers and homemakers who do domestic duties confirm the radical feminists who analyse gender inequality as where men dominate women and benefit from the subordination of women (Bryson, 1999:5). This theory has brought various aspects of the Namwanga culture on their beliefs, customs and practices into context as it explains the causes, combating measures and effects of gender inequalities that come in the form of early marriage in the Namwanga culture of the Isoka District.

In the promotion of youth empowerment, the findings gathered from L1 showed that the Church supported the girl child to go to school. The Church sponsored youths who performed well at secondary school to attain tertiary education. Therefore, in UCZ congregations, religious leaders were encouraged to give attention to children's needs during meetings. The Sunday school teachers were trained in child protection and children's rights. The guiding principle in responding to any concerns or issues surrounding child protection was that the safety and welfare of the child should always come first. No child was to be put at risk by any action taken by the church members. The UCZ also collaborated with other service providers, both state and non-state agencies to ensure that each child received the necessary protection and interventions to guarantee their rights and wellbeing (Child Protection Policy and Procedure Manual, 2016).

Additionally, the findings showed that in each UCZ congregation in Isoka District, children and adults were advised to report any cases, allegations or threats of early

marriage within their community. People are free to report to the Reverends, Diaconal workers and Youth workers or any trusted person. This is in line with the UCZ Child Protection Policy and Procedure Manual (2016), which states that all Church workers and other leaders of the UCZ are encouraged to speak openly against all forms of early marriage, threats or allegations of child abuse, violence, neglect, exploitation, any form of violations are promptly dealt with per the set procedures (Child Protection Policy and Procedure Manual, 2016). Moreover, Zulu (2014) notes, the church has not only been a mirror of society, but a voice of voiceless too. By being a voice of the people, the church's action was linked to advocacy taken as a broad and overarching concept, which can involve engaging with the general public to raise awareness on an important issue as well as influencing policy-makers toward desired solution.

Now, it is worth referring to Anderson's (2004) assertion that seemed to suggest that religious leaders had more influence in the community and that if they were to take a role, which they have not, early marriage would end. The current researcher agrees with Anderson's view that the church in general was closer to the community, had influence in the community and could immensely contribute to ending early marriage, but to suggest that the church had not yet taken any role in ending early marriage might not be true. In Isoka district, the UCZ religious leaders tried to combat early marriage but the onus was on the parents, traditional leaders and the victims themselves to adhere to the measures. This study has established that combating early marriages is laden with the traditions, cultures, customs and beliefs that oblige young girls to marry at an early age or to be married off at an early age.

#### **5.4 Challenges Experienced by the UCZ in Combating Early Marriage of Girls in Isoka District.**

Pilcher's and Imelda's (2008) 'radical feminist theory', stresses that the patriarchy is the primary cause of women's oppression and that violence and injustices against women deepened the structure of patriarchal capitalism has been confirmed by the findings of this research that has been established the patriarchal societies such as the Namwanga of Isoka district in Zambia. They argue that sexualism is so deeply rooted in the social system of patriarchal capitalism. This study has indicated that early marriages of young girls in the

Namwanga patriarchal society were indicators of sexualism and this is one of the challenge the UCZ is facing in Isoka district. Therefore, radical transformation in the people's culture was a must in such societies, acting as a model for understanding and finding resolutions for the problem of early marriages (Pilcher and Imelda, 2008).

However, the findings gathered from L1 showed that the church had inadequate funding to undertake sensitisation programmes. The church called for NGOs to further partner with them more fully so that the combating measures could be strengthened. Additionally, the findings from L2 showed that the UCZ lacked support from the general membership. Some of the church members were not interested in working with the church because they were part of the community in which early marriage was practised. They preferred adhering to cultural norms rather than combating early marriage. This was further compounded by a lack of transport for the women groups to visit designated areas for sensitisation campaigns. Further, the findings gathered from PO1 showed that high illiteracy levels among parents were another challenge the church faced in trying to combat early marriage of girls in Isoka District. The parents and guardians resorted to marrying off their children at a tender age because they did not value the importance of education since they did not go to school themselves. As observed by (Sydney *et al*, 2016) that the causes of early marriage in Zambia were mostly attributed to lack of economic opportunities, low education by parents, social and cultural norms of the communities and gender inequalities.

Finally, the findings from PO2 showed that the major challenge was the traditional beliefs and practices the locals adhered to without question. This was exemplified in the observations the researcher carried out during the visitations he made to the homes of the victims. Though they indicated that they were forced into marriage, they seemed to be having a comfortable lifestyle in which they participated in the different village activities. This was their way of life and trying to bring change to the community might interfere with their beliefs, which might be detrimental to the development of the area. There was a need to build high esteem among youths so that they could be independent from parental and peer pressure to get married early. According to Lemmon and ElHarake (2014) observed a mix of complex factors that are responsible for the practice in Nigeria and such factors also slowed down the pace of eliminating the scourge. Culture and tradition push

to maintain the status quo, and the twin perils of poverty and lack of education also drive the practice. Despite efforts to improve educational opportunities and alleviate poverty, in religious societies with deep-rooted cultural practices, it is important to shift the traditional justification for early marriage especially through a constant push to shift social norms (Lemmon and ElHarake (2014). Legal frameworks which allowed customary marriages should be reviewed to suit current times. Only then could the people of Isoka District change their mind-set regarding early marriage of girls.

### **5.5 Summary**

This chapter has discussed the findings of the study. It is worth noting that to some extent present study had similar factors as causes of early marriage. However, though the factors were similar in categories, the scenarios were different and new factors were established such as lack of transport by women groups to visit distant communities and sensitise them on early marriage. The next chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Overview**

This chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study, which sought to explore the role of the UCZ in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District of Zambia. The conclusion is presented in line with the objectives of the study, which were to, establish the factors that influence early marriages of girls in Isoka District; examine initiatives by the UCZ in combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District and analyse the challenges and combating measures by the UCZ in early marriage of girls in Isoka District. The last section presents the recommendations and suggestions for future research.

#### **6.2 Conclusion**

Currently, increasing global attention focuses on curbing child and teen marriage. However, the scourge is still an entrenched practice in many parts of the world. The study revealed that various factors influence early marriage, the most prominent ones being low education levels, lack of sufficient awareness information, traditional cultural practices and high poverty levels. The study established that early marriage was more prevalent amongst the girls.

The study found that lack of education had a serious effect on people's ability to access and use the information given on the consequences of early marriage. Furthermore, the initiation of young girls ceremony (chisungu) was indicative enough that the people of Isoka District were still attached to traditional beliefs and practices, which compelled them to force their daughters into early marriage.

Regarding the second objective, the study established that the UCZ had programmes in which they worked with the boys and girls and the community and reviewed policies that touched on women's lives. The UCZ had a Child Protection Policy and Procedures Manual (2016) which guided church members and stakeholders on how to care for and protect their children from vices that undermined their potential. Additionally, the study established that parental and community engagement was a frequently used strategy. The

primary motivation behind this strategy was to create an enabling environment with the understanding that the decision to marry girls early was generally in the hands of family and community elders.

On the third objective, the study established that the Church faced challenges related to inadequate funding, and community refusal to adhere to the measures instituted by the church to try to curb early marriage. This was coupled with indifference motivated by the people's traditional way of life, inhibiting them from accepting change.

The gaps that were identified in the literature reviewed were therefore filled and the discovery that in Isoka District, the people were still attached to their traditional beliefs and practices in this modern era might be new.

The study was guided by Pilcher and Imelda's (2008) radical feminist theory, which analysed patriarchy as the primary cause of women's oppression. Sexualism was so deeply rooted in the social system of patriarchal capitalism that reformation in the people's culture was needed. Therefore, in the current study early marriage compelled girls to be in subjection to their husbands whom they had been forced to marry. Many girls do not question the decision of their husbands but hopes to be subject to their schem, desire, greed of their husbands, but faithfully submits in the name of keeping the marriage and fulfilling their duties as wife. This kind of submission would create a very occurred state of affairs for girls. Stories have been told of some men who during their meal times would prefer their wives sit naked before them so as to have the womanhood as part of their relish.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the recommendations are as follows:

- i)** The Zambian government should ensure that every district has recreational and skills training centres where young people could be kept busy and avoid early marriage, especially after dropping out of school.
- ii)** The government should consider funding UCZ and other churches in Zambia so that more sensitisation campaigns could be held in the communities to combat early marriage.

- iii) There is a need to further review policies related to early marriage and ensure that they are strengthened to help reduce cases of early marriage in not only Isoka District but also other districts in Zambia.

#### **6.4 Recommendations for further study**

Further research might be done in the following:

- i) To explore factors that contribute to early marriage in other districts in Zambia.
- ii) To explore combating measures of early marriage by Pentecostal churches.

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## APPENDICES

### **Appendix I: Interview Guide for FGD (Victims, UCZ Leaders, Parents and Traditional Leaders).**

1. What household factors influenced early marriages of girls in Isoka District?
2. What has the UCZ done to combat early marriage of girls in the area?
3. What social programmes do the UCZ offer to youths in this area?
4. Do the UCZ work with other Churches in the district to combat early marriages?
5. What could be the reason why children get married in this area?
6. Do you understand what early marriages is?
7. As parents, are you supporting the efforts the UCZ in Isoka to combat early marriages
8. Have you seen any impact in your congregation's effort to combat early marriages of girls in Isoka District?
9. What are other possible measures to addressing the problem of early marriage of girls in Isoka District.
10. What would you suggest as a means of combating early marriage of girls in Isoka District?

Thank you for your time.

## **Appendix II: Interview Guide for UCZ Leaders**

Dear respondent:

You have been picked to participate in this research project aimed at investigating the role of the United Church of Zambia in combating early marriages of girls in Isoka District of Zambia and your full participation will be highly appreciated. Respond to this interview as accurately as possible. This research will be used for academic purposes only, and your responses will be strictly confidential.

1. Gender [M] [F]
2. Congregation attended by the respondent
3. Role of the respondent in the congregation
4. What communities in the district does your congregation cover?
5. What are the factors influencing early marriage Isoka District
6. How is your congregation providing any support activities and/or groups to combat early marriages in the district?
7. What challenges and combating measures if any does the church face in its endeavour to early marriage in Isoka District?
8. How does the UCZ in this District collaborate with other organisations / institutions, to combat early marriages?

Thank you for your time

## **Appendix III: Interview Guide for Victims**

### **Interview Guide for Victims (ICIBEMBA)**

Kuliba kasuka bameepusho,

Na usalwa ukutiwingafwilisha ukwasuka amepusho ayaleesha ukulanda pamilimo ulukuta lwa United Church of Zambia (UCZ) muchitungu ca mwi Isoka District lulebomba pakufwaya ukuchefya ubwafya bwakupwa bwaice bwaiche.

Echo waipushiwa ukwasuka mubufumachumi kabili amasuko yobe ayatayakeshibikwe ku muntu uliwonse kabili yalebomfeshiwafye mu masambililo epela.

1. Imyika ukwete?
2. Nikwisa upepela?
3. Bushe walyupwa?
4. Bushe nipa myaka nshi waupilwepo?
5. Ninshi calengele ukupwa pamyaka iyo?
6. Nimunshila nshi ulukuta lwafwilamo abaana abakashana abaupwa bwangu?
7. Bushe milimo nshi icilonganino cautumpamo mukupwisha ubwafya bwakupwa bwangu?
8. Bushe mukutontokanya kobe inshila ulukuta lulebomfya mukuchefya ubwafya bwakupwa bwangu lulebomba nangu iyo?
9. Ngachakuti wakana ilipusho lyapamulu bushe ulukuta lwenu lulatungilila inshila shafwilisha ukuchefya ubwafya bwakupwa bwangu?
10. Mumushiwikala bushe mwalibako abakashana waishiba abaupilwe bwangu?
11. Ngawasumina mulipusho lyafumapo nibanga waishibapo?
12. Bushe ukupwa bwangu kwaliseka mumushi wenu?

13. Ngachakutila wasumina kulipusho lyafumapo bushe inshila naumonapo ubupusano kufyo ulukuta lulechita mukuchefya ubwafya bwakupwa bwangu?

14. Ishinshila ngatashilebomba uletontonkanya nishilanshi ulukuta lwa United Church of Zambia (UCZ) lwinga bomfya pakwafwilisha ukuchimfya ububwafya bwakupwa bwangu?

15. Ngawasumina kulipusho lyafumako londolola mukwipifya efyo ulukuta luleyafwa ukuchefya ubwafya bwakupwa bwangu munchende wikala?

16. Mukupima kobe bushe ulukuta lwa UCZ lulebomba shani ukulingana nomulimo wakwafwa ukuchefya nangula ukulesha ubwafya bwa ukupwa bwangu

(A). Nalubombesha(70 – 100%)

(B). Nalubomba (36 – 69%)

(C)Nalubomba eye panoono (0 – 35%)

(D) Nainenshishishibe

(E) Talubombele

## **Appendix IV: Interview Guide for Victims**

Dear respondent:

You have been picked to participate in this research project aimed at investigating the role of the United Church of Zambia in combating early marriages in Isoka District of Zambia and your full participation will be highly appreciated. Respond to this interview as accurately as possible. This research will be used for academic purposes only, and your responses will be strictly confidential.

1. Age of respondent?
2. Congregation of the respondent?
3. Marital status of the respondent?
4. How old were you when you got married?
5. Why did you get married at this age?
6. Explain to me the factors that influence girls to get married at an early age.
7. What activities if any, does the UCZ involve in to combat early marriages in this area?
8. Do you think that measures that the church has put in place are helping to combat early marriages?
9. If the answer is No. what are some of the measures you think the church (UCZ) should put in place to combat early marriages in your community?
10. Are there other girls in your community whom you know of who have married early?
11. If yes, how many do you know?
12. Are early marriages in common in your community?
13. If yes. Is your congregation providing any support activities and/or groups to manage the factors causing early marriages?
14. If yes. Have you seen any impact in your congregation's effort to combat early marriages?

15. If yes, please briefly explain how the congregation has helped in your case and how your congregation's effort has impacted to combat early marriages in your community.
16. On a scale from low to high, what do you think is the level of performance of UCZ in combating early marriages?
- (A) High performance (70 – 100%)
  - (B) Moderately (36 – 69%)
  - (C) Low (0 – 35%)
  - (D) Does not know
  - (E) None

## **Appendix V: Interview Guide for Parents**

Dear respondent:

You have been picked to participate in this research project aimed at investigating the role of the United Church of Zambia in combating early marriages in Isoka District of Zambia and your full participation will be highly appreciated. Respond to this interview as accurately as possible. This research will be used for academic purposes only, and your responses will be strictly confidential.

1. Gender
2. Age of respondent
3. Congregation attended by the respondent
4. How many children do you have?
5. How many girls?
6. What are their ages?
7. How many are married?
8. Do you understand what early marriage is?
9. In your view, is early marriage good or bad?
  - If the answer is good, why?
  - And if the answer is bad, why?
10. What do you think are factors that lead to early marriages?
11. In your congregation, does the minister speak against early marriages?
12. How does the UCZ try to combat early marriages in your community?
13. Is UCZ working with other institutions, which you know of to combat early marriages in Isoka?
14. As a parent, are you supporting the efforts of the United Church of Zambia, in Isoka to combat early marriages?
15. If yes, how are you doing this?

16. What are other possible measures to address the problem of early marriages in Isoka District?
17. Is your congregation providing any support activities and/or groups to manage the frequently experienced early marriage-induced factors?
18. If yes, do you have support programs as parents and the UCZ for managing early marriage risks?
19. If yes, are you collaborating with other institutions in managing early marriages?
20. If yes, what are the institutions that you work with as parents apart from UCZ in combating early marriages?
21. According to you, is UCZ collaborating with those institutions and on which programmes is it cooperating and collaborating with other institutions in managing early marriages?
22. On a scale from poorly to highly, how does your congregation perform compared to other support groups in combating early marriages?
  - (a) We do not have other support groups in the district
  - (b) Highly
  - (c) Moderately
  - (d) Poorly
23. Have you seen any impact in your congregation's effort to combat early marriages?
24. If yes, please briefly explain the main reasons for the impact in your congregation's effort to combat early marriages.
25. On a scale from low to high, what do you think is the level of performance of UCZ in combating early marriages?
  - (a) High performance (70 – 100%)
  - (b) Moderately (36 – 69%)
  - (c) Low (0 – 35%)
  - (d) Does not know
  - (e) None

## **Appendix VI: IFYAKUKONKA PA KWIPUSHA ABAFYASHI**

Kubale asuka amepusho

Namusalwa ukusendamo ulubali mukufwailisha ukulecitwa pakwishiba ulubali atemwa imilimo icilonganino ca United Church of Zambia (UCZ) mu citungu ca mwi Isoka District cibomba mu kucefya kukupa no kupwa bwangu muno mwi Isoka.

Tukatasha saana pakuibimbamo kwenu.

### **Yasukeni amepusho mulibu cishinka**

Ukufwailisha ukukukabombwa fye mufyamasambililo epela, namasuko yenu yakaba yankaama.

1. Muli Baume nanguabanakashi?

[ Abanakashi]

[Baume]

2. Mulongana kwisa?

3. Abakashana baaba banga?

4. Abakashana bene bali nemyaka inga?

(A) 1-10

(B) 10-15

(C) 15-18

(D) 18-30

5. Nibanga baupwa?

6. Bushe mwalitesha umwalola ukupa no kupwabwangu

7. Mukumona kwenu cisuma ukuupa no kupwa bwangu?

8. Ngacakuti cisuma Mulandunshi?

9. Ngaciibi, Mulandunshi?

10. Bushe milandunshi ilenga ukuupa na ukupwa bwangu ?

11. Bushe bashi mapepo bakulukuta lweni balalandapo paku lwisha umusango wakupa no kupwa bwangu?

12. Bushe ba UCZ baleshako mukucincitila ifyupo fya bwaice?
13. Busheba UCZ balabombela pamo notubungwe tumbi mukulwisha ukucefyako umulandu wakupa no kupwa bwangu muno Isoka?
14. Pamo nga abafyashi, bushe mulatungilila ulukutalwa UCZ mukulwisha ukupa no kupwa bwangu?
15. Ngacakuti mwasumina Musangonshi mule tungililamo?
16. Finshi fimbi filecitwa muno Isoka pakwasha ukucefyako ukupa no kupwa bwangu.
17. Bushe ulukuta lwenu mupepako lulasendamo ulubali mukulwisha ifilenga umusango waseka uwakupa no kupwa bwangu?
18. Ngacakuti mwatila ee, kwalibako ubutantiko bumo ubwakulwishishamo ifilenga ukupa no kupwa bwangu mukubombela pamo naba UCZ?
19. Bushemulabombelapamonabatubungwetumbimukulwishaukupa no kupwabwangu?
20. Ngacakuti mwatila ee, tubungwenshi mubombela nato pamo ngabafyashi ukucilapali ba UCZ fye?
21. Mukumona kwenu, bushe ulukuta lwa UCZ lulebomba shani nabatubungwe tumbi kabili nimunshila nshi balebombela pamo mukucingilila ukupa no kupwa bwangu?
22. Mukumonakwenu, ulukuta lwenu ulebomba shani pamulandu wakupa no kupwabwangu ukulinganya kutubungwe tumbi?
  - (A) Tamwaba tubungwe tumbimuno Isoka
  - (B) Lulebombesha
  - (C) Luleeshako
  - (D) Talucitaponangucimo
23. Kuti kwabako ifyatumbuka mukulwisha uku, pamo ku kupwa bwangu ukucitwa no lukutalwenu?
24. Ngamwatila ee, finshiifyo fine?
25. Mukumona kwenu, nipeesa mwingabika Ba UCZ mukulwisha ukupa no kupwa bwangu

- (A) Abalwishapamaka (70-100)
- (B) Abeshako (36-69)
- (C) Abashibombesha (0-35)
- (D) Katwishinshishibe
- (E) Tapalipaliifi

## **Appendix VII: Interview Guide for Teachers, Police Officers and Traditional Leaders**

1. Name of the cooperating partner
2. What is the rate of early marriages in Isoka district? Please explain
  - Low
  - high
  - very high
3. What are the factors leading to early marriages?
4. Do you have support programmes for managing early marriage risks?
5. In your efforts to manage early marriage risks, do you work with other institutions?
6. If yes, is UCZ in Isoka, one of your collaborating partners in combating early marriages?
7. If yes, on which programmes are you cooperating and collaborating with UCZ?
8. What other roles has the UCZ in Isoka played to combat early marriage?
9. On a scale from low to high, what do you think is the level of performance of UCZ in combating early marriages? Please explain.
  - (F) High performance (70 – 100%)
  - (G) Moderately (36 – 69%)
  - (H) Low (0 – 35%)
  - (I) Does not know
  - (J) None

Thank you very much for taking part in this interview

## **Appendix VIII: Letter to Participants**

Dear Esteemed Participant,

I extend this cordial invitation to you to partake in my research endeavor. I am Douglas Chisenga, a postgraduate student pursuing a Master's in Education in Religious Studies at the University of Zambia. The focus of my research is "Combating Early Marriage of Girls in Isoka District of Zambia."

Your Wealth of experience in the subject matter makes you a suitable candidate for participating in this study. I would like to have your views and opinions on the subject at hand "Combating Early Marriage of Girls in Isoka District of Zambia." Additionally, your input will contribute to guiding future researchers on enhancing the effectiveness of combating early marriages of girls.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The research process involves a 30 minute interview, to be conducted at a location and time convenient for you. You reserve the right to refrain from answering any questions during the interview, and you may withdraw from the study at any point without repercussions.

For accuracy in information gathering, the interview will be audio-recorded, with the subsequent transcription provided to you for review. Rest assured, all data shared will remain confidential, with no personal identifiers appearing in any publication resulting from the study. Your permission may be sought for the use of anonymous quotations.

The collected data will be securely stored in my archives. There are no foreseen risks associated with your participation in this study.

Should you have any inquiries or require additional information to aid your decision making process, feel free to contact me at 0977111224 or via email at [douglaschisenga2305@gmail.com](mailto:douglaschisenga2305@gmail.com)

I anticipate the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue with you. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this research project. If you decide to join, I will provide a consent form for your review and signature.

Yours Sincerely,

Douglas Chisenga.

## **Appendix IX: Participant Consent Form**

Dear Respondent,

I am Douglas Chisenga, a post graduate student pursuing Masters of Education in Religious Studies at the University of Zambia. In conducting a research entitled, "Combating Early Marriage of Girls in Isoka District of Zambia. You have been purposively sampled to take part in this research by answering all questions. Your responses will be treated with confidentiality and that you are at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should you so desire.

### **Participant**

I consent that I have heard and agree to the purpose and procedure of the research and understand my rights as a participant.

I have (read) the foregoing information or it has (been read to me). I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Participant:

Signature:..... Date:.....

Interviewers:

Signature:..... Date:.....

Thank you for accepting to be part of this study.

## Appendix X: Approval of the study



### THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

#### DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Telephone: +260-211-290258/293937  
Fax: +260-211-290258/293937  
Zambia  
E-mail drgs@unza.zm

P O Box 32379  
Lusaka,

#### APPROVAL OF STUDY

16<sup>th</sup> August, 2021

REVIEW TYPE	EXPEDITED REVIEW	APPROVAL NO. <u>HSSREC: 2021-JUNE-018</u>
Approval and Expiry Date	Approval Date: 16 <sup>th</sup> August, 2021	Expiry Date: 15 <sup>rd</sup> August, 2022
Protocol Version and Date	Version - Nil.	16 <sup>th</sup> August, 2021
Information Sheet, Consent Forms and Dates	• English.	Provided
Consent form ID and Date	Version - Nil	To be provided
Recruitment Materials	- Nil	Nil
Other Study Documents	• Research Tools	
Number of Participants Approved for Study	•	

#### Conditions of Approval

- No participant may be involved in any study procedure prior to the study approval or after the expiration date.
- All unanticipated or Serious Adverse Events (SAEs) must be reported to HSSREC within 5 days.
- All protocol modifications must be approved by HSSREC prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk (but must still be reported for approval). Modifications will include any change of investigator/s or site address.
- All protocol deviations must be reported to HSSREC within 5 working days.
- All recruitment materials must be approved by HSSREC prior to being used.

- In order to close an approved study, a Closing Report must be submitted in writing or through the REMO system. A Closing Report should be filed when data collection has ended and the study team will no longer be using human participants or animals or secondary data or have any direct or indirect contact with the research participants or animals for the study.
- Filing a closing report (rather than just letting your approval lapse) is important as it assists HSSREC in efficiently tracking and reporting on projects. Note that some funding agencies and sponsors require a notice of closure from the IRB which had approved the study and can only be generated after the Closing Report has been filed.
- A reprint of this letter shall be done at a fee.
- All protocol modifications must be approved by HSSREC by way of an application for an amendment prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk (but must still be reported for approval). Modifications will include any change of investigator/s or site address or methodology and methods. Many modifications entail minimal risk adjustments to a protocol and/or consent form and can be made on an Expedited basis (via the IRB Chair). Some examples are: format changes, correcting spelling errors, adding key personnel, minor changes to questionnaires, recruiting and changes, and so forth. Other, more substantive changes, especially those that may alter the risk-benefit ratio, may require Full Board review. In all cases, except where noted above regarding subject safety, any changes to any protocol document or procedure must first be approved by HSSREC before they can be implemented.

Should you have any questions regarding anything indicated in this letter, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us at the above indicated address.

On behalf of HSSREC, we would like to wish you all the success as you carry out your study.

Yours faithfully,

*Dr. J. L. I. Ziwa*

**ACTING CHAIRPERSON**  
**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA HUMANITIES AND**  
**SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE - IRB**

cc: Director  
 Acting Director - Research  
 Assistant Registrar - Research  
 Senior Administrative Officer - Research