Factors Associated with Child Marriages in Zimbabwe: Evidence from the a Nationally Representative Survey

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Abstract

Child marriages are of major concern in Zimbabwe. The study's aim was to investigate factors associated with child marriages in Zimbabwe. The study utilised data from the 2015 Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey from whom a total of 1,697 women aged 20-24 participated in the survey. The study shows that 32% of the women aged 20-24 years were married before age 18 and 11.9% by age 15. The analysis shows that women who had attained the highest level of education and were from the richest households were the least likely to marry as children. Women who were in polygamous marriages, had an age difference of 5-10 years with their spouse/partner, and with more siblings of 3 to 5 were more likely to have experienced child marriages. There is need for policies and programmes that support and promote girls' education and social investment and empowerment within communities to reduce poverty.

Keywords: Child marriage, early marriage, married before age 18, married before age 16

Background

Child marriage, which is commonly known as early marriage, is defined as a marriage or union in which one or both spouses are younger than 18 years old (UNFPA, 2012). Child marriage is a gendered phenomenon that disproportionately affects girls when compared to boys (UNFPA). Globally, more than one in five young women (21%) are married before the age of 18, while 650 million girls and women are married before their 18th birthday and 12 million girls under age 18 are married each year (UNICEF, 2020). More than one in three girls are married before the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2014a). The rate of child marriage varies across the world,

child marriage is highest in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (37%), followed by South Asia (30%), Latin America and the Caribbean (25%) and the Middle East and North Africa (18%). Within SSA, it is highest in West and Central Africa (40%), followed by Eastern and Southern Africa (34%) (UNICEF, 2020. However, child marriage is a violation of human rights, compromising the development of girls and often resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, with little education and poor vocational training reinforcing the gendered nature of poverty (UNICEF, 2005). Within sub-Saharan Africa, the highest child marriage rates are in Niger (76%), Central African Republic (68%) and Chad (67%) (UNICEF, 2020).

Zimbabwe is among the Southern African countries with a high rate of child marriage, 32% of women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18, and 4% were married before the age of 15 while 6% of the women aged 15-24 years were married by age 15 (ZIMSTAT and ICF Int., 2016). The 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) shows a higher prevalence of 33.7% and 5.4% of women aged 20-24 who were married before the age of 18 and 15, respectively (ZIMSTAT and UNICEF, 2019). Women are most at risk of early marriage compared to their male counterparts ((32% and 1%, respectively), among those aged 20-24 (ZIMSTAT and ICF International, 2016). According to the 2012 Zimbabwe Census, 12% of girls age 15-17 were married while less than 1% of boys (0.9%); 0.8% were already divorced/separated, and 0.1% were widowed. This shows that girls are more at risk of marrying early than their male counterparts. Child marriage is on the increase despite widespread programmes to reduce it. The 2014 MICS reports that one in four female teenagers aged 15-19 was married (ZIMSTAT, 2015). Furthermore, child marriage increased from 21% in 2009 to 25% in 2014. At age 15, five percent of girls were already married while more than half were married at age 19 (ZIMSTAT, 2015).

Child marriage is not only regarded as a human rights issue but also as a barrier to development because early marriages have negative outcomes for girls and their future children (Wodon et al., 2017). Child marriage threatens the lives, well-being and future lives of girls around the world (UNICEF, 2020). Young women who marry early are more likely to drop out of school, suffer gender-based violence, have poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes, contract STIs including HIV, and are likely to die due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth (Kurebwa and

Kurebwa, 2018; Fry et al, 2016). Due to poverty within families, children drop out of school as parents cannot afford to pay the school fees, and thus these parents may offer the child to a wealthy man for marriage (Kurebwa and Kurebwa, 2018). Generally, child marriage reduces employment opportunities and income for affected girls, hurts economies and reinforces intergenerational cycles of poverty among the girls their families and communities (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2017; ZIMSTAT, UNICEF and CCORE, 2013 and UNICEF, 2014b).

Zimbabwe is part of various global treaties, conventions and programmes established to end child marriages. These include: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1979); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action and the 1999 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (UN Women, 2014). Ending child marriage is an important part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda (Fukuda-Parr, 2016). These international instruments and Target 5.3 of the SDGs call on all governments to abolish harmful traditions and customs and eliminate violence against children and harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriages. Additionally, ending child marriages is closely related to the achievement of the other SDGs, including Goals: 1 (no poverty); 2 (zero hunger); 4 (quality education); 8 (economic growth); 10 (reduced inequalities); and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) (UN, 2018). However, the success of these programmes requires a deep understanding of the key drivers of child marriages and the formulation of targeted intervention (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2018) (Sayi and Sibanda, 2018). Therefore, the study aimed at investigating factors associated with child marriages in Zimbabwe.

Literature Review

Child marriage is more prevalent among the world poorest countries. According to Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), the highest rates of child marriage are in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. Child marriage rates vary across the world, with East and Southern Africa having the highest prevalence rate of 36%, which is higher than the global average (UNICEF, 2016). Furthermore, within the region, prevalence varies within and among countries from 52% in South Sudan to 6% in South Africa (UNICEF, 2016). Some regions of the world are witnessing a decline in the number of child marriages. However, this is

not the case in Africa where a growing population coupled with a strong culture that promotes child marriage continue to put millions of girls at risk. (UNICEF & UNFPA, 2017). It is estimated that by the year 2050, nearly 50% of the world's child marriages will be in Africa if the current trends continue (UNICEF & UNFPA, 2017). Although the prevalence of child marriages in Africa is slowly declining, progress has not been equitable. Prevalence among the richest has been reduced by more than half while it has remained unchanged among the poorest. Similarly, higher prevalence is still found among girls from rural areas when compared to girls from urban areas. Rural residence was found to be a risk factor as rural women were more likely to ever be married or be married early (before age 16 and 18, respectively) as compared to their urban counterparts (Rumble et al., 2018).

The understanding of the key drivers of child marriage is crucial since it is associated with a range of poor social, physical and health outcomes for young girls, especially adolescents (Mpilambo, et al., 2017; UNFPA, 2012; Godha et al., 2013; ICRW, 2012). The key drivers of child marriage are complex, diverse and interlinked. They include factors at the household and individual levels as well as features linked to macro socio-economic aspects that are context-specific. Factors that cause child marriage acts as both causes and consequences of child marriage. A mapping conducted by UNICEF and UNFPA in twelve African countries reported a deep interconnection between child marriage and local traditions and rites (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2017). These include female genital mutilation, aspects of family honour, parental concerns surrounding premarital sex and pregnancy, dowry pressures, the perception that marriage provides protection from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and the desire to secure social, economic or political alliances.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the key drivers of child marriage are numerous that include poverty, cultural and social norms, religious, traditional beliefs and norms, the perception that marriage will provide 'protection', family honour, customary or religious laws that condone the practice (UNICEF 2019; UNFPA, 2012; Ayiga N, 2013). Several studies have explored the relationship between child marriage and socio-economic outcomes using DHS and MICS data. For example, in the 2015 ZDHS, ZIMSTAT and ICF Int. (2016) reported that child marriage among women aged 20-24 was highest in the poorest households (45%) than in the richest (12%). In

many parts of the world, parents encourage the marriage of their daughters while they are still children in hopes that the marriage will benefit them both financially and socially, while also relieving financial burdens on the family (UNICEF, 2005). Child marriage is most prevalent among the poorest than the richest (Rumble et al., 2018; ZIMSTAT and ICF Int., 2016; UNICEF, 2005). The decision to marry children of a younger age is often rooted in poverty and as a strategy by families to navigate through economic hardships (Kurebwa and Kurebwa, 2018; Rumble, et al., 2018; UNICEF and UNFPA, 2018). Wealth was consistently protective of child marriage, with wealthier households having a decreased risk of early marriage (Rumble et al., 2018). Poverty and economic hardships limit a family's options and child marriage is viewed as a way to reduce household poverty and relieve the financial burden that girls place on their families (UNICEF. & UNFPA, 2017; (Bicchieri et al., 2014). Girls are usually married off to reduce the family's perceived economic burden, with their bride price (lobola) used by families as a means of survival. However, poor households may see child marriage as economically beneficial in the short-term, but it does not improve the economic status of the household over the long term or provide financial security for the future, potentially due to the lost financial capital of married girls and women not working (Rumble et al., 2018). In a study conducted in Nepal and Bangladesh, child marriage was associated with prestige and child safety since households perceive child marriage as having more benefits than risks (Karim et al., 2016). Child marriages compromise the development of girls, consequently resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, with little education and poor vocational training reinforcing the gendered nature of poverty (Bajracharya and Amin, 2010).

According to Parsons et al. (2015), child marriage is associated with harmful socio-economic outcomes for women, including lower levels of participation in household decision-making and worse marriage market outcomes. Gender inequality, especially in communities where women have low status, is a root cause of child marriage (Source). Data from the DHSs have shown that girls are generally at a greater risk of getting married early than boys (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2018). In most low-income countries, women and young girls are not involved in marriage negotiations and they lack the power to make key decisions regarding marriage issues (Karim et al., 2016). The 2014 MICS shows female teenage marriage had relatively similar values across the first four wealth quintiles, which suggests that teenage marriage is affected by

other cultural factors in addition to deprivation (ZIMSTAT and UNICEF, 2015). Only eight percent of female teenagers in the richest quintile were married, possibly showing how the wealth quintile interacts with socio-economic opportunities and values that militate against teenage marriages.

Most traditional cultures are reported to practise child marriages (Kim, Thapa and Achmad, 2001). Culture may be associated with family honour, safeguarding virginity, family prestige, and gender discrimination, among other factors (Bamgbose, 2002). In some African cultures, a virgin is valued by her husband and honoured by his family. Virginity is valued in most communities and is considered an important part of marriage. A girl has to be married while still a virgin. Thus, there is a need to ensure that the child's virginity is maintained at the time of marriage (Kurebwa and Kurebwa, 2018). The general belief in such communities is that the younger the girl, the higher the chances of being a virgin. Several studies have reported religion as one of the drivers of child marriages (Kurebwa and Kurebwa, 2018; Dzimiri, Chikunda and Ingwani, 2017; Sibanda, 2011; UNFPA, 2012). UNFPA (2012) in its report on "Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage", indicated that religion has an impact on the prevalence of child marriage. Sibanda (2011) reported that child marriage in Zimbabwe is prevalent among the Apostolic sect, especially among the Johanne Marange Apostolic sect, whose doctrine promotes child marriages. In their qualitative study in districts in Mashonaland provinces, Dzimiri, Chikunda and Ingwani (2017) reported that girls were even taught by older ladies in the church on how to be good wives and mothers in the early stages of their growth. Once a girl was eyed for a man in the church, she was not given the chance to refuse or reason and they were not allowed to marry outside their church otherwise the girl would be disowned by her parents.

Education plays a key role in preventing child marriages (Rumble et al., 2018; Kurebwa and Kurebwa, 2018, Dzimiri, Chikunda and Ingwani, 2017). Studies have reported that girls with lower levels of education or no education were more likely to be married as children than girls who would have attained higher levels of education (Kurebwa and Kurebwa, 2018; Rumble et al., 2018; Dzimiri, Chikunda and Ingwani, 2017). Some of the girls were reported to fall for men working on mines who have income (Dzimiri, Chikunda and Ingwani, 2017). Keeping girls in school reduces the risk to child marriage. When given proper education, girls tend to enter marriage and

deliver children later in life and give birth to fewer children (UNICEF, 2011). Past studies found out that the educational level of the girl and her parents is a protective factor against early marriage (Gazi, et al., 2013 more sources). Education among girls delays the onset of marriage and increases their autonomy and the power to make decisions regarding their future marriage plans (Islam, et al., 2016. Secondary education or higher is associated with a lower risk of early marriage(Raj, et al., 2014; Roest, 2016; Equality Now, 2014)., while no education and primary education increases the chances of girls getting married early (Winter and Nambiath, 2016; Nasrullah, et al., 2014a, 2014b; Hotchkiss, et al., 2016), while secondary or tertiary education is generally associated with a decreased risk of child marriage (more recent and country or context-specific sources are needed).

Having more siblings when growing up reduced one's risk of early marriage, which may indicate that there was increased pressure to marry or attention to marrying off children in smaller families (Rumble et al., 2018). Spousal factors were also associated with child marriages. Age differences between partners have implications for power dynamics within the household (UNICEF, 2005). Women aged 20–24 whose male partners are more than five years older are more likely to have been married before age 18 (UNICEF, 2005). In countries with higher proportions of child marriage, it is more likely that the male partner has received more education than the woman. In Namibia, for example, 27 per cent of couples for whom there is no gap in education levels entered into union before the woman was 18, compared to 45 per cent where the husband received more education. Similarly, in Egypt, 22 per cent of couples with no education gap resulted from child marriage, compared to 38 per cent of couples where the male partner received more education. Therefore, understanding the key drivers of child marriage is crucial in the efforts to eradicate child marriages. Thus, the study aimed to explore the factors associated with child marriages in Zimbabwe.

Data and Methods

This study used data from the 2015 Zimbabwe Demography and Health Survey (ZDHS), conducted by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency and ICF International (ZIMSTAT and ICF International, 2015). Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Surveys collected information on the current marital status that is useful in the analysis of marriage patterns. Its main objective was to provide reliable and current information on fertility and reproductive behaviour, maternal and child health, infant and child mortality, contraceptive knowledge and use, and knowledge and attitudes regarding HIV/AIDS. The 2015 ZDHS collected household, male and female level information from a sample of 10,534 households, a representative at the national and regional level. A total of 1,697 women aged 20-24 participated in the survey.

Data Analysis

The study is a secondary analysis based on ZDHS 2015 data and data analysis was done using STATA 13. Proportions were used to describe the independent and outcome variables. In the bivariate analysis, Chi-Square test was used to assess the relationship between each independent variable and child marriage outcomes. In the adjusted analysis, the multivariate logistic regression model was used to examine the relationship between the child marriage outcome variables and independent variables. All variables significantly associated with outcomes at $p<0.25$ were included in the multivariable model. Individual women weight variable (v005) was used to restore the representativeness of the sample. Variables with a corresponding p-value of less or equal to 0.05 were considered to be significantly associated with the outcome.

Measurement of Child Marriage

Different data sources and methodologies have been used in measuring child marriage. However, the most common and adopted way of measuring child marriage is "the proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were first married or in union before age 18". This is provided by the DHS and MICS surveys which have been conducted in many developing countries over the past decades. In Zimbabwe, both the DHS and MICS provide data on child marriage indicator, based on the five years preceding the survey. While measuring child marriage, the choice of the age group 20-24 is considered mainly since it is the first demographic five-year cohort to have

complete exposure to the risk of marrying in childhood (i.e. the first cohort in which all women are 18 years or older), thereby to using the age group 20- 24 for measuring the indicator is a robust way (Kumar, 2017; UNICEF, 2018). Child marriage was coded based on participant's age at marriage or when cohabitating began with a partner as if married; those reporting marriage before age 18 years were defined as having experienced child marriage. Furthermore, given the potential for unique vulnerabilities among very early marriages among girls, we created separate variables representing marriage by age 15 or before 16 years:

- Household wealth. We used the DHS wealth index, which categorises women into quintiles according to household wealth. The wealthiest quintile served as the reference group.

- Residence. This was a binary variable indicating whether the woman resided in a rural or urban area during the time of the survey.

- Region of residence. This was classified by province based on the ten provinces – Manicaland, Harare, Bulawayo, Masvingo, Midlands, Mashonaland Central Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, Matebeleland South and Matebeleland North.

- Women's Education: Educational attainment was categorized into no education, primary, and secondary school or higher.

- Religion: A woman's religion was categorized as Catholic, Apostolic, Pentecostal, and other (Muslim, traditional religion, Muslim or not religious).

- Type of Union. Those who were married by type of union, polygamous or monogamous.

Results

Sample Description

A total of 1,697 women aged 20-24 years interviewed during the 2015 ZDHS were included in the analysis. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics and other characteristics of the respondents. The respondents were almost equally distributed across the ages, with women aged 20 years constituting the highest (21.5%) and those aged 24 years the lowest (18.2%). Most of the respondents were from rural areas (57.1%) and the majority had attained at least secondary education (77.7%). Harare had the largest proportion of women (19.6%) and Matabeleland North the lowest (4.6%). On religious affiliation, the Apostolic Sect constituted the highest percentage (38.5%), followed by the Pentecostals (30.7%) and Protestants (14.7%). The poor constituted around a third of the respondents, disaggregated into the poorest (15.7%) and the poorer (17.7%), while more than half of the respondents were from the richer and richest households, 24.4% and 27.7%, respectively. Thirty-two percent of the women were married before age 18 while 11.9% were married by age 15 years. More than a quarter of the women had husbands/partners less than five years difference in age (27%), while 29.9% had attained education level below their partners/husbands. Almost half of the respondents had 3-5 siblings (46.1%), while 29.2% of the respondents had 0-2 siblings and 24.7% had more than 5 siblings.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Age		
20	365	21.5
21	336	19.8
22	333	19.7
23	354	20.9
24	309	18.2
Place of Residence		
Urban	728	42.9
Rural	969	57.1
Province of Residence		
Manicaland	201	11.9
Mashonaland central	132	7.8
Mashonaland east	144	8.5
Mashonaland west	185	10.9
Matabeleland north	77	4.6
Matabeleland south	97	5.7
Midlands	238	14.1
Masvingo	168	9.9
Harare	332	19.6
Bulawayo	122	7.2
Level of Education		
No education	7	0.4
Primary	372	21.9
At least Secondary	1318	77.7
Religion		
Catholic	100	5.9
Protestant	250	14.7
Pentecostal	520	30.7
Apostolic Sects	652	38.5
Other religions (traditional, other Christians, Muslim, other)	174	10.3
Household Wealth		
Poorest	266	15.7
Poorer	301	17.7
Middle	245	14.5
Richer	414	24.4
Richest	471	27.7
Age at Marriage		
Married/Cohabited age < 18 years		
Yes	550	32.4
No	1,147	67.6
Married/Cohabited age < 16 years		
Yes	202	11.9
No	1,495	88.1
Number of Siblings		
0-2	496	29.2
3-5	782	46.1
Above 5	419	24.7
Type of union		
Monogamous	952	56.1
Polygamous	81	4.8
Not in Union	664	39.2
Spousal Age Difference		
0-4 years	464	27
5-10 years	396	23
Above 10 years	185	11
Not in Union/Don't know	651	38
Spousal difference in years of education		
More than partner	200	11.8
Equal number of years	322	19.0
Less than Partner	508	29.9
Not in Union/Don't know	667	39.3
Number of Siblings		

0-2	496	29.2
3-5	782	46.1
Above 5	419	24.7
Total	**1697**	**100.0**

Bivariate Analysis: Factors Associated with Child Marriages

Table 2 presents the results of the bivariate analysis performed to examine the association between child marriage and socio-demographic factors. Women from rural areas were more likely to have married: before their 18th birthday (42.1%) than their urban counterparts (19.6%); and by age 15 (15.8%) than urban counterparts (6.1%). (p<0.0001). Similarly, women in Mashonaland West and Mashonaland Central, provinces which are mostly rural, were more likely to be married before age 18 (49.6% and 48.8%, respectively) compared to those from urban provinces of Harare and Bulawayo (17.2% and 14.8%, respectively) (p<0.0001). Marrying before age 16 was more likely to occur in Manicaland (18.2%) and Mashonaland Central (18.7%) compared to Harare (6%) and Bulawayo (6.9%) (p=0.002). Marrying before age 18 and by age 15 was most prevalent among women who have never been to school (87.1% and 71.7%, respectively) compared to those who had at least secondary education ((25.4% and 7.8%, respectively) (p<0.0001). Child marriages were more likely to occur among women belonging to the Apostolic Sect, both before age 18 (43.6%) and by age 15 (15.8%) (p<0.001 and p=0.002, respectively). Women from the poorest households were more likely to have married before age 18 (52.7%) and by age 15 (18.5%) compared to women from the richest households (12.4% and 2.8%, respectively, p<0.0001). The proportion of women who married before ages 18 and 15 was higher among women in polygamous marriages (75.4% and 34.6% respectively) than women in monogamous marriages (42.1% and 15.1%, respectively) (p<0.0001).

Spousal age difference, spousal education difference, and the number of siblings were also associated with child marriages. Women with spousal age differences less than 5 years were less likely to have married before ages 18 and 15 (36.4% and 9.4%, respectively) (p<0.0001). Women who had less education than their spouses were more likely to marry early, 52.5% before age 18 and 20.5% (p<0.0001 before age 15 (p=0.0165). Women who had fewer siblings, 2 or less were less likely to have married before age 18 (24.6%, p=0.001) and 15 (9%, p=0.0396).

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Table 2: Bivariate Analysis: Factors Associated with Child Marriages

	Married before Age 18			Married by Age 15		
	Number	%	P value	Number	%	P value
Age						
20	109	30.0		49	13.4	
21	104	30.9		40	11.9	
22	112	33.4		35	10.4	
23	122	34.6		38	10.8	
24	103	33.3	0.7769	41	13.2	0.7713
Place of Residence						
Urban	143	19.6		49	6.7	
Rural	408	42.1	<0.0001	153	15.8	<0.0001
Province						
Manicaland	86	42.5		37	18.2	
Mashonaland Central	64	48.8		25	18.7	
Mashonaland East	55	38.5		23	15.7	
Mashonaland West	91	49.6		31	17.0	
Matabeleland North	25	32.0		6	7.4	
Matabeleland South	18	18.3		8	7.9	
Midlands	86	35.9		32	13.4	
Masvingo	50	29.7		13	7.9	
Harare	57	17.2		20	6.0	
Bulawayo	18	14.8	<0.0001	8	6.9	0.0022
Level of Education						
None	6	87.1		5	71.7	
Primary	210	56.4		94	25.3	
At least Secondary	334	25.4	<0.0001	103	7.8	<0.0001
Religion						
Catholic	19	19.1		5	4.9	
Protestant	39	15.3		15	5.9	
Pentecostal	136	26.1		56	10.7	
Apostolic Sects	285	43.6		103	15.8	
Other	72	41.1	<0.0001	24	13.8	0.0020
Household Wealth						
Poorest	140	52.7		49	18.5	
Poorer	137	45.5		55	18.4	
Middle	80	32.7		31	12.5	
Richer	135	32.5		54	13.0	
Richest	58	12.4	<0.0001	13	2.8	<0.0001
Type of Union						
Monogamous	400	42.1		144	15.1	
Polygamous	61	75.4	<0.0001	28	34.6	<0.0001
Spousal Age Difference						
0-4 years	169	36.4		44	9.5	
5-10 years	203	51.3		94	23.8	
Above 10 years	97	52.5	<0.0001	37	20.2	<0.0001
Spousal Education Difference						
More than partner	80	39.8		31	15.6	
Equal number of years	113	35.1		36	11.2	
Less than Partner	267	52.5	<0.0001	104	20.5	0.0165
Number of Siblings						
0-2	122	24.6		45	9.0	
3-5	261	33.3		92	11.8	
Above 5	168	40.0	0.001	65	15.6	0.0396

Table 3 shows the results of the multivariable regression model. The woman's level of education, household wealth, type of union, spousal age difference, age difference of spouse/partner and number of siblings were associated with child marriage. Women with at least secondary education were least likely to marry before age 18 (AOR=0.04, 95% CI= (0.004, 0.44) and 15 (AOR=0.02, 95% CI= (0.001, 0.42). Women from the richest households were less likely to marry before age 18 (AOR=0.32, 95% CI= (0.15, 0.69) and 15 (AOR=0.23, 95% CI=(0.06, 0.87) than the women from the poorest households. Women in polygamous marriages were three times more likely to marry before age 18 (AOR=2.85, 945% CI= (1.51,   5.41) and twice as likely to marry before age 15 (AOR=2.04, 95% CI (1.08, 3.86). Those women who had an age difference with their spouse of 5-10 years were twice more likely to marry at age 18 (AOR=2.01, 95% CI= (1.43, 2.82) and three times more likely to marry before age 15 (AOR=3.30, 95% CI= (2.01, 5.31). Women who had less education than their spouse/partner were more likely to marry before age 18 (AOR=1.69, 95% CI= (1.12, 2.56). Women with 3-5 siblings were more likely to marry before age 18 (AOR=1.53, 95% CI= (1.04, 2.26) than women with fewer siblings, 0-2.

Table 3: Multivariable Analysis: Factors Associated with Child Marriages

Characteristic	Under 18 marriage		Under 16 marriage	
	Adj OR (95% CI)	P value	Adj OR (95% CI)	P value
Place of Residence				
Urban	1		1	
Rural	0.99 (0.57 1.70)	0.973	1.22 (0.49 3.05)	0.690
Level of Education				
No education	1		1	
Up to Primary	0.08 (0.007 0.80)	0.032	0.06 (0.003 1.14)	0.061
At least Secondary	0.04 (0.004 0.44)	0.009	0.02 (0.001 0.42)	0.012
Religion				
Catholic	1		1	
Protestant	0.58 (0.23 1.41)	0.227	1.11 (0.29 4.31)	0.880
Pentecostal	0.86 (0.39 1.90)	0.717	1.81(0.61 5.41)	0.288
Apostolic sects	0.98 (0.45 2.11)	0.950	1.10 (0.38 3.23)	0.859
Other religions	0.99 (0.42 2.32)	0.981	1.07 (0.34 3.39)	0.904
Province				
Manicaland	1		1	
Mashonaland Central	0.98 (0.53 1.84)	0.960	0.98 (0.42 2.29)	0.967
Mashonaland East	0.93 (0.51 1.70)	0.815	1.13 (0.52 2.45)	0.766
Mashonaland West	1.71 (0.97 3.04)	0.065	1.00 (0.47 2.12)	0.995
Matabeleland North	0.52 (0.24 1.15)	0.107	0.27 (0.10 0.73)	0.010
Matabeleland South	0.50 (0.24 1.01)	0.055	0.52 (0.21 1.32)	0.170

Midlands	0.68 (0.36	1.29)	0.236	0.64 (0.28	1.46)	0.283
Masvingo	0.54 (0.28	1.06)	0.074	0.30 (0.11	0.83)	0.020
Harare	0.77 (0.43	1.39)	0.386	0.77 (0.30	1.98)	0.586
Bulawayo	0.58(0.25	1.35)	0.205	1.18 (0.39	3.51)	0.770
Household Wealth						
Poorest	1			1		
Poorer	0. 74 (0.46	1.18)	0.208	1.16 (0.65	2.09)	0.611
Middle	0.54 (0.31	0.93)	0.027	0.80 (0.37	1.63)	0.507
Richer	0.59 (0.33	1.04)	0.066	1.00 (0.42	2.37)	0.996
Richest	0. 32 (0.15	0.69)	0.004	0.23 (0.06	0.87)	0.031
Type of union						
Monogamous	1			1		
Polygamous	2.85 (1.51	5.41)	0.001	2.04 (1.08	3.86)	0.028
Spousal Age Difference						
0-4 years	1			1		
5-10 years	2.01 (1.43	2.82)	<0.0001	3.30 (2.01	5.31)	<0.0001
Above 11 years	1.58 (1.00	2.49)	0.05	1.69 (0.91	3.15)	0.095
Spousal Difference in Years of Education						
More than partner	1			1		
Equal number of years	0.90 (0.57	1.43)	0.667	0.59 (0.31	1.12)	0.107
Less than Partner	1.69 (1.12	2.56)	0.013	1.00 (0.55	1.85)	0.987
Number of Siblings						
0-2	1			1		
3-5	1.53 (1.04	2.26)	0.031	1.36 (0.77	2.39)	0.284
Above 5	1.46 (0.96	2.24)	0.078	1.15 (0.62	2.13)	0.655

Discussion

The study shows that child marriages are prevalent in Zimbabwe. A third of the women aged 20-24 years were married before age 18 and 11.9% by age 15. Several factors were found to be associated with child marriages, after controlling for other factors. These include woman's level of education, household wealth, type of union, spousal age difference, age difference of spouse/partner and number of siblings were associated with child marriage. Women who had attained the highest education were the least likely to marry as children, showing the importance of education. This finding is supported by other studies that have found education to play a key role in preventing child marriages (Rumble et al., 2018; Kurebwa and Kurebwa, 2018; Dzimiri, Chikunda and Ingwani, 2017). The low level of education could also be an effect of early marriage as it reduces the chances of education once married. These findings imply that interventions that promote girls' education would have a greater impact on reducing child marriages. Wealth was also found to be a predictor of child marriages, with women from the richest households least likely to marry before age 18 compared to women from the poorest households. However, this association is

found between the first (poorest) and fifth (richest) quintiles. Similar findings were reported by the 2014 MICS, where the first to the fourth quintiles had the similar values and went on to suggest that there could be other cultural factors associated with child marriages other than poverty (ZIMSTAT and UNICEF, 2015). Previous studies have shown that some poor families encourage their children to marry early to ward off poverty. However, poor families tend to favour child marriages to improve the economic situation in their households in the shorter term, but not in the longer run, and suggest greater investment in social protection and poverty eradication by the government and partners (Rumble et al., 2018). Rather, child marriages compromise the development of girls and consequently resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, with little education and poor vocational training reinforcing the gendered nature of poverty (Bajracharya and Amin, 2010).

The study showed that women in polygamous marriages were more likely to have married before age 18. In Zimbabwe, polygamous marriages and child marriages are associated with the Apostolic religion (Kurebwa and Kurebwa, 2018; Dzimiri, Chikunda and Ingwani, 2017; Sibanda, 2011; UNFPA, 2012), although religion itself was not found to be significantly associated with child marriages. Spousal factors were associated with child marriages, concerning age difference and education difference with the spouse/partner. The age difference with the spouse/partner was associated with child marriages, with women with an age difference of 5-10 years more likely to marry before 18 than women with an age difference of less than 5 years. The relationship is even stronger for women who married by 15 as they were three times more likely to marry early compared to those marrying by age 18, who were twice as likely to marry early. Thus, the issue of young women dating men older than them or "blessers' should be discouraged. This again is also related to the difference in educational attainment between the woman and spouse/partner. Women who had less education than of their spouse/partner were more likely to marry before the age of 18.   Previous studies have also reported similar findings where in countries with higher proportions of child marriages, such as Namibia and Egypt, it was more likely that the male partner had received more education than the woman (UNICEF, 2005). Women with a higher number of siblings were more likely to have married before age 18 than women who had less than 3 siblings. However, this contradicts Rumble et al. (2018) study reported a reduced risk of early marriage

among women who had more siblings when growing. It could be also related to poverty and having more children which forced the parents to marry or encourage their daughters to marry early. However, the study has limitations since secondary data was used to explore most of the socio-cultural factors. Also, some of the factors identified could be causal. For example, education was found to be a protector of early marriage, it can also be an effect of early marriage. Despite these limitations, the study revealed some of the crucial factors that can be addressed in reducing child marriages. We conclude by stating that there is a need to do more research which will explore some of the factors not captured by this study. The study revealed that women with at least secondary education were at reduced risk of child marriages, and thus there is need for policies that promote and support girls' completion of secondary schooling to effectively reduce child marriages. There is also a need for the Government to invest in the girl child's education and social investment to eradicate poverty among the communities.

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