



**THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN ANYIGBA, DEKINA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF KOGI STATE, NIGERIA**

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***Abstract***

*Early marriage today remains one of the greatest challenging phenomena demanding absolute and urgent attention in Africa, including Nigeria. This study examines the socio-economic implications of child marriage in Anyigba, Dekina Local Government Area of Kogi State. The research design for the study was a cross-sectional descriptive survey, while questionnaire was used to collect data from 180 respondents using purposive sampling to select the participants for the study. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18 and were presented in simple percentages, frequency counts and tables. The findings revealed among others that child marriage had a negative effect on the respondents' health, the standard of living and educational status. It was also discovered that religious orientations of the couple's parents did not play a significant role in the practice of child marriage. Finally, the finding revealed that many factors such as religion, illiteracy and poverty were the reasons why parents gave out their children early in marriage. The study, therefore, recommended that government, religious leaders and traditional rulers should be engaged through conventional, traditional and social media with a view to sensitising the parents and child brides on the effect of child marriage and its negative implications in the study area.*

**Keywords:** Child marriage; early marriage, socio-economic; religious beliefs, development; well-being.

**Introduction**

Tens of millions of girls in the developing world are at risk of being forced to marry as part of the deeply entrenched child marriage practice that significantly impedes progress on human rights, education, global health and economic development (International Center for Research on Women, 2013). In developing countries, more than 30 percent of girls are



married before the age of 18, and 14 % before they are 15 years (Ford Foundation, 2013). The marriage of adolescent girls remains common in many parts of the developing world as the third of the more than 330 million girls and young women aged 10 – 19 years who currently live in developing countries were or will be married by the 18th birthday, while 73 % of girls within ages 13 and 19 are married in the North-Eastern States of Nigeria (Facts on Adolescent Marriage in North-East Nigeria, 2014).

Child marriage is one of the most pernicious manifestations of the unequal power relations between females and males. UNICEF (2007) viewed it as a practice to protect unwelcome sexual advances and to gain economic security. In the actual sense, however, child marriage has undermined the very purpose it was meant to achieve. Child marriage often means for the girl a life of certain sexual and economic servitude (Mahato, 2016; Naveed, 2015). The subordination of women is both a cause and consequence of child marriage. However, marriage gives identity placement to children in any given society as members of a particular lineage. The foregoing therefore underscores the importance of marriage as one of the cultural universals. According to Forward (2008), child marriage is predominantly practised in the rural and poor communities where young girls are regarded as an economic burden and quickly married off to alleviate household expenses. Often times, in these communities, educational and economic opportunities available to girls are few and they are often married off quickly to protect them and the economic well-being of the family. The persistent economic hardship in many developing countries might encourage a rise in early and child-marriage, even among populations that do not normally practice it, as child marriage is often regarded as a family-building strategy, an economic strategy and the resulting transaction important for the financial and social survival of the child and her family. Where poverty is acute, also, parents may regard young girls as an economic burden. In that case, marrying the much older rich men becomes very attractive and beneficial to the girl and her family.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Early marriage today remains one of the greatest challenging phenomena demanding absolute and urgent attention. Most child marriages are pre-arranged and based on the consent of parents and often fail to ensure the best interest of the girl-child. Once girls are married, their status infringes upon a range of their rights to the extent that it often includes some element of force (Oyorley & Pobi, 2003). Lloyd (2005) opined that in many parts of Africa, Nigeria inclusive, the bride price or wealth paid in exchange for brides labour and fertility is an important resource for greater wealth and survival of the family and therefore may induce early arrangements of marriage by parents. It is argued that some religious practice, such as Islam encourages early marriage. Parents who are disposed to giving out their under-aged wards in marriage imbibe the fear of their daughters being pregnant out of wedlock and the only available option could be marriage at an early age (Giyan, 2009). The practice of child marriage in Nigeria is deeply entrenched in tradition, culture and religion as the country has one of the highest rates of child marriages in the world, with



estimated 42% of girls married before 18 years. While this is found among many ethnic groups across the country, its predominance is clearly in the northern parts of the country (Abdallah, 2011). However, statistics show that girls who marry before the age of 18 are disproportionately affected by complicated pregnancies that may lead to maternal mortality and morbidity (UNICEF, 2006).

Similarly, Girls aged 10–14 are five times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than women aged 20– 24. Also, girls aged 15–19 are twice as likely to die from pregnancy complications (Mahato, 2016). They go into marriage at a disadvantage with regard to their husbands, who tend to be older and to have more experience of school, work and often, previous relationships. Other harmful consequences may include exposure to HIV infection, especially as older husbands may engage in unprotected sexual relations with other partners (Bankole, Singh, & Woog, 2004).

In a multi-country research study, Erulkar and Bello (2007) noted that contraceptive usage rate among married child brides from 13-17 years old in Nigeria was 0.6 percent. This percentage is negligible to the extent that child brides in most cases could not determine the period of pregnancy and are prone to early pregnancy. Consequently, these adolescent brides are susceptible to the risk of dying, confronted with premature labour, low birth rate and higher chances that the newborn babies would not live. These girls are too young and lack the courage to persuade their partners to learn their own serostatus, avoid violence in the home, and limited freedom to interact with their peers or to participate in civic and cultural activities in their communities. It is in the light of the foregoing that this study examined the socio-economic implications of child marriage in Anyigba, Dekina LGA of Kogi State, Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this paper is to examine the socio-economic implications of child marriage in Anyigba, Dekina LGA of Kogi State. However, the specific objectives include to:

- i.** Examine the negative health implications of child marriage as perceived by the respondents in the study area.
- ii.** Examine the impact of religion on the practice of child marriage among the respondents.
- iii.** Investigate the influence of child marriage on the educational attainment of the respondent couples in Anyigba.

### **Study Hypotheses**

The hypotheses of this study are expressed thus;

**Ho1:** Child couples do not perceive any negative health implication of child marriage in Anyigba.



**Ho2:** Religion does not play a significant role in the practice of child marriage among the respondents.

**Ho3:** Child marriage does not hinder educational attainment of the couples in the study area.

### **Review of Related Literature**

In Nigeria, several research studies have been carried out on the incidence of child marriage and the various factors that influence the practice (UNICEF in Iyabode, 2011; Anderson, 1998; Mensch, 2006; Elaigwu & Galadima, 2003). Throughout the world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life. The Nigerian review draft decree put the marriageable age of the girl-child at 18 years. Also, the UNICEF (2001) on the rights of the child recommended that children should not be separated from their parents before 18 years unless it is considered necessary. Similarly, UNFPA (2006) defines early marriage or child marriage as one carried out below the age of 18 years prior to a girl's physical, physiological, emotional and psychological maturities to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and child-bearing.

The age of marriage is a highly controversial issue and varies from place to place. For instance, in the North West and North Central parts of Nigeria, 14 years is the age of marriage. While in the Northern and Central parts of Nigeria, the age of marriage is between the 2nd and 3rd menstruation, whereas in the Southern part of the country, the marriage age varies from between 16 to 18 years. Section 18 of the marriage act allows persons under the age of 21 years to get married, provided that parental consent is given. The Matrimonial Causes Act 10 provides that one of the grounds upon which a marriage shall be void is when "either of the parents is not of marriageable age". However, it does not go further to define the marriageable age. Be that as it may, the Child Rights Act 12 attempts to infer the prescription of a marriageable age 13, Section 277 of the Act defines a child as a person under the age of 18 years.

Furthermore, several anti-child marriage advocacy organisations and programmes have emerged over the years across the world. Prominent among these advocacy organisations are the Elders, Girls are not Brides, Plan International, CARE-Global, Girls up- USA, ICRW-USA, Save the Children-Global among others (Ahmed (2015).

### **Causes of Child Marriage**

The determinants of child marriage are complex. It has been noted that socio-economic variables explain a lot of the causes of child marriage. According to International Center for Research on Women (2010), child marriage continues to be a reality for many of the world's girls because of a variety of factors, namely: poverty, limited education and economic options, conflict and insecurity, tradition, religious beliefs among others.



Globally, forced child marriage is much more in poorer countries and regions, within those countries; it tends to be concentrated among the poorest households (Mahato, 2016). The practice is reinforced by illiteracy in the same manner that it causes illiteracy itself to the extent that it hampers the educational aspirations and attainment of the victims. When poor families want to send their daughters to school, they often lack access to nearby, quality schools and the ability to pay school fees. It is usually safer and economically more rewarding to spend limited resources on educating sons than daughters. This constrains the affected families into giving out early in marriage their under-aged female children thereby depriving them of the opportunity to realize their educational ambitions (International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), 2013).

Another factor that could make child marriage to flourish is life-threatening conflict and persistent insecurity. When families live in unsafe regions, parents may genuinely believe that marrying their daughters is the best way to protect them from danger. In war-endemic areas of Afghanistan, Burundi, Northern Uganda, Somalia, Libya among others, it is common for a girl to be married to a warlord or another authority figure who can ensure that she and her family remain safe (UNICEF, 2005 in ICRW, 2010). Furthermore, in many traditional societies, parents are under pressure to marry off their daughters as early as possible in an effort to prevent her from becoming sexually active before marriage. A woman who does so brings dishonour to her family and community. Because marriage often determines a woman's status in many societies, parents also worry that if they do not marry out their daughters according to social expectations, they will not be able to get suitable suitors at all. Forced child marriage also is a route to consummating family, clan, and tribal connections or settling obligations. At its core, forced child marriage is rooted in tradition (Nwimo & Egwu, 2015). Culturally, women are also expected to marry early to bear children to whom they should devote their time (Atama, 2012).

Religion may be a promoter of child marriage in some climes. In Nigeria, early marriage is a phenomenon that is practised predominantly among the Islamic adherents especially in the northern region of the country, including Kogi State. Islam has its own distinctive legal system, that is, Sharia law. Therefore, Islamic jurists have tackled the issue of age of marriage based on the interpretations of the Quran. According to these jurists, a child "experiencing wet dream" or "experiencing [a] monthly course," as stated in the Quran in relation to the age of marriage, indicates the age of maturity for males and females. However, the *ihtilam* (wet dream) for males and *haida* (menstruation) for females are not attained at any particular age. In essence, it is lawful for a girl who has not attained the age of puberty to enter into marriage. With the precedence of the Prophet's marriage to Aisha when she was about 12 years old, it is unanimously agreed by all the four *Sunni* schools that there is no limit to the number of years that a girl must reach before the age of marriage. Therefore, Islamic Law does not fix any age for marriage, and this probably explains the higher incidence of "marriage of minors" or "child marriage," or "child bride" in the North including the Sharia implementing states (Center for Islamic Studies, 2004).



Whilst not condemning this practice, which is firmly rooted in the Quran, the caveat that copulation should be delayed until when such girls are mature is often abused as these child brides are often engaged in sex (Abd-al-Afi, 1977)

### **Review of Empirical Literature**

It has been documented in the literature that child marriage causes life-threatening challenge to the health of the child brides. Allen and Adekola (2017) examined the factors that promote child marriage in the most endemic location of the North-Eastern part of Nigeria and the health implications on the “victims”. The states considered for this study were Taraba, Adamawa, Bauchi, Bornu, Gombe and Yobe respectively. The authors triangulated both the primary (questionnaire) and secondary data in order to address the objectives of the study. The total number of the questionnaire copies validly administered to the “child-wives” through simple random sampling was 120. On the other hand, the secondary data in this case were sourced from the Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS, 2008). Similarly, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also conducted among the cross-section of child wives, all of whom were less than 18 years. The findings emanating from this study indicated that poverty and limited educational attainment were the two main cause of child marriage with the attendant different health problems. It is, therefore, recommended that child marriage with its negative consequences could be curbed in the North-eastern Nigeria through delayed marriage. By so doing, the girl would have matured physically and physiologically, thereby reducing the possible effects on health.

Moreover, Sekine & Hodgkin (2017) identified the ‘tipping point’ school grades in Nepal when the risk of dropout due to marriage is highest, measures the effect of child marriage on girls’ school dropout rates, and assesses associated risk factors. Weighted percentages were calculated to examine the grades at highest risk and the distribution of reasons for discontinuing school. The authors also used the Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2014 data to estimate the effect of marriage on school attendance and dropout among girls aged 15±17 by constructing logistic regression models. A multivariate logistic regression model was employed to assess risk factors of school dropout due to child marriage. The results showed that early marriage was the most common reason given for leaving school. In all, the risk of school dropout due to marriage increased after girls completed the fifth or sixth grade. The risk of girls’ dropping out reached the highest in the seventh and eighth grades and remains noteworthy in the ninth and tenth grades. Married girls in Nepal were 10 times more likely to drop out than their unmarried peers. Little or no education of the household head, belonging to the Kirat religion, and membership of a traditionally disadvantaged social class each increased the risk of school dropout due to early marriage. The findings suggested the need to delay girl’s marriage so as to reduce girls’ school dropout in Nepal. Also, school-based programmes aimed at preventing child marriage should target girls from the fifth grade because they were at an increased risk of dropping out, as well as prioritizing girls from disadvantaged groups. Khazaei, S.,





Mansori, Khazaei, Z. and Ayubi (2016) further noted that the practice is sustained by poverty and impacts adversely on a country's health and educational sector. Indeed, other negative consequences of child marriage include early pregnancy, social isolation, school dropout, constrained employment opportunities and increasing domestic violence (Khazaei, S. et al, 2016).

### **Materials and Methods**

The data analysed in this study were obtained from a prospective cohort study investigating the socio-economic implications of child marriage in Anyigba, Dekina LGA of Kogi State, Nigeria. The data were collected from a sample size of 180 women affected by child marriage. The sample size of 180 respondents was drawn through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The study location is called Anyigba in Dekina Local Government Area (LGA) of Kogi state, Nigeria. It is a semi -urban town situated in the eastern part of Kogi state, which lies between longitude  $7^{\circ} 12^1$  East of the Greenwich meridian and latitude  $7^{\circ} 36^1$  North at the equator ([www.http//google.anyigbapopulation.com](http://google.anyigbapopulation.com)). The town is in the southeastern direction of Lokoja, Kogi state capital. As an urbanising state-owned university town, it has a population of 71,323 inhabitants according to the 2006 census ([www.http//google.anyigbapopulation.com](http://google.anyigbapopulation.com), retrieved on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2015).

Questionnaire served majorly as the instrument of data collection in this study and it was administered using an interviewer guided approach. Participants reported their current age, monthly income, marital status, religion and age at marriage. Also, data captured were analysed using the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) version 20. Frequency counts and percentages were estimated from all variables. To examine the correlates of the impacts of child marriage, chi-square statistics was used with a p-value of 0.000 considered to be statistically significant. Ethically, the principle of informed consent whereby participants were properly intimated with the purpose of the research was complied with to the letter. Also, participants' privacy and anonymity were strongly taken into cognizance in this study.

### **Results and Discussion of Findings**

The total copies of the questionnaire distributed to respondents were 200 copies while 180 were validly retrieved, giving a response rate of 90 %. The analysis of the data was, therefore, premised on the 180 items of the retrieved questionnaire as the results are presented below:



**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Child wives**

Category	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Current Age	10-15	-	-
	16-21	74	41.1
	22-27	46	25.6
	28-33	36	20.0
	34-39	24	13.3
	40 above	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Monthly Income (N)	≤ 18,000	15	8.3
	19,000-29,000	86	47.8
	30,000-40,000	74	41.1
	41,000- and Above	5	2.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Marital status	Married	167	92.8
	Divorce	-	-
	Widow	3	0.6
	Separated	11	1.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Religion	Christianity	79	43.9
	Islam	101	56.1
	ATR	-	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Age of marriage below	15 years	66	36.7
	16-20 years	16	8.9
	21-24	3	1.7
	25 above	1	0.6
	No response	94	52.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field survey, 2015

From table 1 above, the distribution shows that almost all the respondents (92.8%) had been married, while those who declared themselves as separated and widowed constituted 0.6% and 1.7% respectively. The age distribution shows that most of the respondents (41.1%) were within the age range of 16-21, while 25.6% of the respondents were within the age range of 22-27 years. Religious affiliations of the respondents indicated that the majority (56.1%) professed Islam, while a little less than half (43.9%) were Christians. This implies that the study population was closely dominated by both Christian and Muslims. The age at first marriage of the respondents showed that 36.7% were within the age bracket of 15 years and below, while the oldest respondents accounted for 0.6% with the corresponding age of 25 years and above according to the definition of the concept of





a child. In addition, 8.9% and 1.7% constituted the respondents whose ages were between 16-20 and 21-24 respectively. In the same table above, the income distribution reveals the majority (48%) of the couples earning between N19, 000-N29, 000 monthly. On the other hand, those who earned the highest monthly income were significantly 2.8%, while 41.1% and 8.3% of the respondents were within the income parameters of N30, 000-N40, 000; N18, 000 and below respectively.

**Table 2:** Child Marriage and Standard of Living.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Does marrying early affect your level of income ?		
Yes	116	64.4
No	64	35.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Ever since married, have you acquired any vocational skill on your own?		
Yes	83	46.1
No	97	53.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Do you have a personal accommodation of your own?		
Yes	31	17.2
No	149	82.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field survey, 2015.

Table 2 shows among others, the distribution of respondents by level of income, level of skill acquisition for development and property ownership after marriage. In terms of the effect of child marriage on the income level, 64% of respondents affirmed that marrying early affected the income they had while 35.6% of the respondents did not perceive marrying early as a minus to the level of income they had. Similarly, 46% of the respondents affirmed that they have acquired more vocational skills since they got married. The study further revealed in the table above that more than half of the respondents (53.9%) affirmed that they did not acquire any skill on their own ever since they got married. Also, respondents were asked if they owned a personal accommodation as married couples, the majority (82.8%) of the respondents affirmed that they did not own a personal the while 17.2% of the respondents affirmed they had accommodation of their own.



**Table 3: Child marriage and perceived Health Implications among the Respondents**

Variables/Categories		Perception of negative health implications ever since married.		Total		
		Yes	No			
<b>Negative Health Implication of Child Marriage</b>	Death	Frequency Count	21	19	40	
		Within death	52.5	47.5	100	
	Complication at birth	Frequency Count	45	37	82	
		Within complication at birth	54.9	45.1	100	
	Body pains	Frequency Count	32	26	58	
		Within body pain	55.2	44.8	100	
	<b>Total</b>		Count	98	82	180
			% within health implication	54.4	45.6	100

$V=3.84, df=1, P>0.000$

**Source:** Field survey, 2015.

In table 3, a little more than half of the respondents (54.4%) had perceived health-related problem ever since married. The test of the relationship between the perceived negative health implications of child marriage or otherwise was validated by the Pearson chi-square result (DF=1, P>0.000). It could be deduced from the result of the test of the hypothesis that the respondents perceived negative health implications associated with child marriage among them. The finding of this study is in consonance with Mahato (2016) who discovered that child marriage worsen health of girls due to maximum workload at home such as cooking, grass cutting among others. According to the author, the pregnancy of a child bride may be life-threatening to both the mother and the child due to biological and physiological immaturity.



**Table 4: Role of Religion in the Practice of Child Marriage**

Variables/Categories		Religion and practice of child marriage.		Total	
		Yes	No		
Significant role of religion	Yes	Frequency Count	78	27	105
			74.3	25.7	100
	No	Frequency Count	45	30	75
			60	40	100
Total		Count	123	57	180
		% within role of religion	68.3	31.7	100

V=3.84, df=1, P<0.000

**Source:** Field survey, 2015

From table 4, the views elicited from both Christians and Muslims reflected that of a discordant acceptability and permissiveness of the practice of child marriage. In other words, there is a significant relationship between the religious belief of both adherents of Christianity and Islam. The data show that the majority of Muslims (68.3%) in the study population affirmed that their religious belief played a significant positive role in the practice of child marriage. This finding is in consonance with Abdallah (2011) in a study where it was observed that the practice of child marriage was deeply entrenched in tradition, culture and religion. It is obvious from the same table 4 that religious orientation of the respondents plays a significant role as expressed by the validated chi-square test of significance (DF=1, P<0.000).



**Table 5: Educational Attainment and Child Marriage**

Variables/Categories		Does child marriage hinder educational attainment of women?		Total
		Yes	No	
<b>Impact of child marriage on educational attainment of women?</b>	Yes	Frequency Count	91	109
			83.5	100
	No	Frequency Count	47	71
			66.2	100
Total		Count	138	180
		% within educational attainment of couples.	76.7	100

V=3.84, df=1, P>0.000

**Source:** Field survey, 2015.

Table 5 indicated that the majority (76.7%) of the respondents viewed child marriage as a hindrance to their educational attainment. This finding is in tandem with Alan Guttmacher Institute (1998) where it was reported that early marriage causes low level of schooling. In a similar study, Bellamy (2003) reported how early marriage affected a girl's education in so many ways such that girls were taken out of schools, or prevented from attending in the first place. While only a few respondents (23.3%) affirmed that child marriage did not hinder their educational attainment, and this was probably because they were married to wealthy partners. The test of chi-square result (DF=1, P>0.000) implies that there is a relationship between child marriage and hindrance to the educational attainment of the child brides. This finding further reaffirms the position of Mahato (2016; Naveed, 2015; Khazaei, Mansori, Khazaei & Ayubi, 2016; Allen & Adekola, 2017). In other words, the null hypothesis which hitherto held that child marriage did not hinder educational attainment of the couples in the study area is rejected.

In summary, this study set out ab initio to examine the socio-economic implications of child marriage in Anyigba, Dekina LGA of Kogi State, Nigeria. In tandem with the main objective, the study finding has revealed among others, that the issue of early marriage has some effects on the child brides, their standard of living, education, and health consequences. It was noticed that more than half of the respondents (57%) affirmed high level of awareness of the negative health implications of child marriage while the majority of the respondents (64%) identified child marriage as affecting their standard of living. Furthermore, 84% affirmed the negative effect of child marriage on their educational attainment, with more than half (61%) indicated that religion did influence their belief in



child marriage disposition. The major factors identified as instrumental to child marriage among the respondents include religion, illiteracy and poverty.

### **Conclusion**

The findings emanating from this study suggest that the socio-economic implications of child marriage in the study area are varied. That is, child marriage practice and its consequences are really high and disturbing, ranging from low standard of living, poor or arrested educational aspirations to avoidable pregnancy-induced health risk conditions. The determinant factors of child marriage in the study location include low standard of living of the respondents, low level of schooling and permissive religious orientations. Thus manipulation of these variables has the potential of yielding results such as reducing the mortality and morbidity rates among young brides, improving the standard of living, and increase educational attainment.

### **Recommendations**

Arising from the findings above, the following recommendations were made:

1. Empowerment of the female gender with information, skills and support networks. By bringing girls together to learn basic skills like literacy and numeracy; how to communicate and negotiate with others, how to stay healthy during reproductive years; how to work together to solve problems; and how to earn and manage income, they can become more knowledgeable and self-confident on matters regarding early marriage.
2. Provision of economic support and incentives to girls and their families. Parents may benefit financially from marrying their daughters off early, either through gaining a bride price, lowering the price of the required dowry or simply having one less mouth to feed. Approaches that enhance the economic security of poor households can aid in curbing child marriage. Providing a girl or her family with an incentive, such as a loan, or an opportunity to learn an income-generating skill, can yield immediate economic relief for struggling families. Daughters who learn skills that enable them to earn an income in the future may be seen as adding more value to the family.
3. Encouraging supportive laws and policies. Many countries with high rates of child marriage have passed legislation to prohibit the practice or have established a legal minimum age for marriage. Advocating for the implementation of such laws, and raising awareness among government officials and community leaders and members help to strengthen and/or better enforce existing initiatives around girls' rights. Where legislation is not on the books, advocating for legal and policy reform is a critical first step. This can be reinforced by the teachings of the religious leaders and traditional rulers accentuating the negative consequences of child marriage.
4. Enhancing female access to a high quality education. Girls with no education are three times as likely to marry before 18 compared to those with secondary or higher education. Providing incentives such as uniforms or scholarship or the necessary



skills and support for girls to enroll and remain in school can help delay marriage. When girls are in school they are unlikely to be seen as ready for marriage by their families and community members. Programmes aimed at improving the safety and girl-friendliness of schools, strengthening school curricular and making school lessons relevant to girls' lives also are effective. The school allows girls to develop supportive social networks as well as the skills and knowledge to better advocate for themselves and their future.

5. Educating parents and community. Families and community elders are naturally responsible for deciding when and whom a girl marries. Educating them through meetings, information campaigns and/or public announcement about how child marriage impacts negatively on a girl's health and future often sparks positive attitudinal change against the practice.

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