

Gender Social Norms Among Internal Migrant Communities in South-West Nigeria

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Abstract

This study delves into the complex relationship between migration, gender social norms, and child marriage within internal migrant communities in Southwest Nigeria. Existing research has demonstrated that the dynamics of child marriage and migration are intricately interwoven and contingent upon specific contextual factors. This relationship is further nuanced by the dual pressures of conflict and forced displacement, which can exert both upward and downward influences on child marriage practices. Drawing from the prevalence of child marriage across multiple boards, specific normative factors were identified, such as a girl's chastity as a means to preserve family honour, a preference for male education and opportunities, the perception of girls as a financial burden leading to early marriage, and the societal view of girls primarily in roles as wives and mothers. These norms constrain girls' participation in decision-making processes and reinforce their subservient roles. The intersecting impact of these social norms on poverty and prolonged insecurity contributes to the perpetuation of child marriage. Insights from studies on legalities surrounding the permissible age for marriage underscore the significant sway of societal norms in determining marriage timing. These insights provide a foundation for the development of interventions and policies promoting gender equality and safeguarding the rights of individuals affected by child marriage. Despite a growing volume of research on child marriage, there remains a research gap within humanitarian contexts, particularly migration. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the complex interplay between migration, gender, and social norms in shaping child marriage practices, specifically within the Nigerian context.

Keywords: *Gender Social Norms, Internal Migrant Communities, Social Norms.*

Introduction

Studies on migration and gender social norms surrounding child marriage have found that the relationship between child marriage and migration is intricate and highly dependent on the specific context. Conflict and forced displacement can exert both upward and downward pressures on child marriage practice, as noted in studies by Neal, Stone, and Ingham (2016) and Sieverding et al. (2020). According to Schlecht, Rowley, and Babirye (2013), they argue that when communities are destabilised in hard times as a result of conflict, it may lead to displacement and forced migration, and such crises have the potential to either erode existing norms or reinforce them. However, Knox (2017) asserts that changes in circumstances and insecurity are some of the reasons why young girls are left with the choice of being given out in marriage, aside from norms that encourage child marriage. Some research has discovered an increase in child marriage rates during periods of conflict and displacement, driven by factors such as economic hardship and the perceived need to safeguard girls from insecurity and sexual violence (Neal et al., 2016).

Conversely, in other studies, conflict and migration have been linked to a reduction in child marriage. This decline is attributed to factors like changing gender norms, disruption of social networks, and economic challenges (Abbasi-Shavazi, Mahmoudian, & Sadeghi, 2018). In cases of prolonged migration, these migrant populations may also adapt to the norms and customs of their host communities, leading to variations in child marriage prevalence. This is demonstrated by the lower child marriage rates among Jordanians in comparison to the Syrian refugee population, as observed in the studies of Gausman et al. (2022) and Sieverding, Berri, and Abdulrahim (2019).

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Nigerians have a long history of migration, driven by factors like climate issues, economic hardship, and violence, both within the country (rural-urban, inter-state) and internationally (colonial and post-colonial eras). Major cities like Lagos, Abuja, and Ibadan attract many migrants from the north (Arhin-Sam, 2023). Nigeria's southwest, including Lagos and Ibadan, serves as a hub for migrants due to its large seaports, industrial plants, educational institutions, and agricultural plantations (Mberu & Pongou, 2010). In contrast, the northeast and northwest experience less migration due to insurgencies, kidnappings, and armed attacks, leading to persistent poverty (Sobowale, 2020). Attacks by Boko Haram and other non-state armed groups in the northeast trigger displacement and forced migrations to the southern region, exposing migrants to protection risks, including gender-based violence (Aragba-Akpore, 2023; IDMC, 2023). According to a 2019 World Bank report, the southern part of Nigeria thrives better in human capital income compared to the north, which lags far behind.

In Northern Nigeria, the prevalence of child marriage surpasses that of other regions, primarily influenced by entrenched social norms. These norms include the emphasis on a girl's chastity as a means to preserve family honour, the preference for male education and opportunities, the perception of girls as a financial burden leading to their early marriage to alleviate parental responsibilities, and the societal view of girls primarily in roles as wives and mothers. Consequently, this reinforces the prioritisation of male education, establishing distinct paths for both genders. Additionally, these norms limit girls' participation in decision-making processes, further entrenching their subservient roles (Daudu, Osimen, & Shuaibu, 2023). These social norms intersect with factors such as poverty and prolonged insecurity (Pacheco-Montoya et al., 2022; Naved et al., 2022). Studies conducted on the legalities surrounding the permissible age for marriage indicate that societal norms hold significant sway in determining the timing of marriage. Furthermore, it has been observed that the perception of others' behaviour and the evolution of group norms can also impact the decision to enter into matrimony. (Steinhaus, Hinson, Rizzo, & Gregowski, 2019). Knox (2017) argues that girls may opt for early marriage in response to the uncertainties and insecurity stemming from these circumstances. In essence, child marriage in Northern Nigeria is deeply rooted in societal norms, which significantly influence behaviours and actions.

Addressing child marriage comprehensively requires an understanding of the underlying norms that perpetuate the practice, as solely relying on legalistic and punitive measures is intricate and challenging to implement. In patriarchal societies, expectations and societal pressure often revolve around preserving family honour, the chastity of girls, and ensuring respectable marriages for daughters. (Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021).

By exploring the dynamics of gender social norms within migrant communities, particularly those relocating to areas with stricter regulations and limitations on child marriage, valuable insights can be gained into the processes of norm change or replication. For instance, do the stringent laws in host communities influence the norms associated with child marriage? Or does the interaction between migrant groups and their host communities alter their perception of these norms? These insights can guide policy formation regarding gender equality and protect the rights of girls impacted by child marriage. Despite the increasing volume of research on child marriage, there still needs to be more studies within humanitarian contexts like migration. The complex interplay between migration, gender, and social norms in shaping child marriage practices remains insufficiently explored in the Nigerian context. It is within this research gap that this study seeks to contribute.

Overview of South-West Nigeria

The South West, a significant geopolitical zone in Nigeria, constitutes a distinct geographical and political entity within the country's southwestern region. This zone encompasses six states: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo. The prevailing religious practices observed in this geopolitical zone encompass Christianity, Islam, and traditional indigenous beliefs. Key urban centres within this region comprise Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ado-Ekiti, Osogbo, Ogbomoso, and Akure (Babatunde, 2021). Lagos is the most populous city in Nigeria and the most populous urban area in Africa, with an estimated population of 21 million. The city of Lagos therefore has a significant role to play in Africa's cultural, financial, and

entertainment industries as it generates high capital for the country as a whole from all spheres of life, including art and tourism, recreation, and commerce (Awojobi & Sotunsa, 2023).

Conceptual Review

Gender Social Norms

The term 'norm' or 'behavioural norm' can be used simply to mean a prevailing practice, representing the typical behaviour observed among the majority within a particular context (Marcus, Harper, Brodbeck, & Page, 2015). This prevailing or common practice is distinct from a social norm. Murphy et al., (2021), consider gender norms, as a subset of social norms, encompassing the societal expectations regarding appropriate behaviour for individuals based on their gender, including women, men, girls, and boys within specific groups or societies. These norms go beyond individual attitudes and play a significant role in shaping and reinforcing distinct roles and behaviours for females and males, both in childhood and adulthood.

For this study, gender social norms as defined by (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020) will be adopted:

Gender norms are social norms defining acceptable and appropriate actions for women and men in a given group or society. They are embedded in formal and informal institutions, nested in the mind, and produced and reproduced through social interaction. They play a role in shaping women's and men's (often unequal) access to resources and freedoms, thus affecting their voice, power, and sense of self (p. 416).

Concept of Migration

Migration, as defined by the International Organization of Migration (IOM, 2019), refers to the movement of individuals from their usual place of residence either across a national border or within a country. Within demography, migration is described as a movement that results in a long-term or permanent change in the individual's usual place of residence. However, since this change involves a shift in social surroundings, migration is often considered to be a stressful life event. Various definitions suggest that the move must be of a significant distance and result in the individual residing in the new location on a semi-permanent basis (Toney & Bailey, 2014). Migration can be further classified in several ways, including by distance, location, continuity, reasons, and status.

Child Marriage and the Role of Gender Social Norms

Numerous interpretations exist for the concept of social norms, although they all underscore the importance of shared expectations or implicit guidelines within a specific group, commonly referred to as a reference group, regarding acceptable behaviour. Furthermore, there is a consensus that these norms are upheld through societal incentives for those who conform to them, which may include receiving approval from others and attaining a respected standing in the community. Conversely, individuals who deviate from these norms may face social repercussions like rumours, exclusion, or even physical harm (Marcus et al., 2015).

In their research, Marcus et al. (2015) emphasise that there are various reasons why social norms have been developed to serve multiple functions. These functions encompass serving as a way to coordinate collective actions, expressing local beliefs, representing cultural or religious values, and maintaining social order. Gender norms, though capable of nurturing relationships based on equity and promoting positive sexual development, predominantly reinforce imbalance in power dynamics between males and females in many contexts. These inequitable norms, adversely affect the well-being of both genders, particularly disadvantaged females and girls, limiting their opportunities to challenge and counteract these established norms (Chidozie, Osimen, Bhadmus, & Newo, 2024).

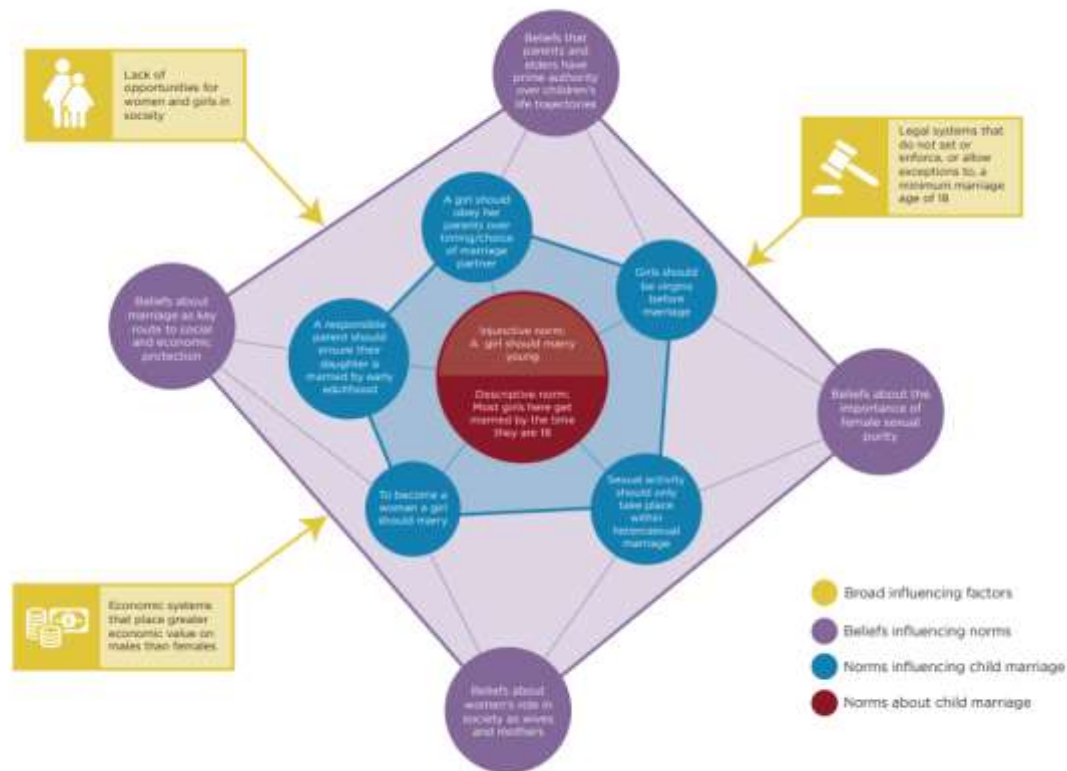
In Shaheen et al. (2022) study, the authors shed light on specific social and gender norms on a broader scale. These norms, including preserving honour through the requirement for girls to maintain their virginity before marriage, have gained heightened importance for numerous families. These families are apprehensive about the potential rise in sexual harassment, assault, and rape faced by their daughters due to compromised physical safety, particularly in camp environments. In explaining the cycle of norms, Pulerwitz et al. (2019) posit that adolescents are raised in societies dominated by hegemonic norms, wherein gender norms reinforce notions of male dominance and control while emphasising female vulnerability and the need for protection. These norms establish boundaries for attire, education, conduct and career choices, significantly influencing adolescents' expectations and behaviours, which can either facilitate or impede child marriage (Lundgren et al., 2018; Pulerwitz et al., 2019).

To illustrate, considering the restricted social and economic agency of young individuals, it is frequently the case that family members wield considerable influence concerning the timing of initial sexual experiences or early marriage. Even when families and governmental policies endorse alternative social norms, it is common for communities to persist in upholding conventional norms, as exemplified by the persistence of child marriage practices (Pulerwitz et al., 2019).

Taylor et al. (2019) suggest that the direct support of child marriage serves to control and subordinate girls' sexuality, movement, and unions. Norms influence behaviour both directly, sustaining practices, and indirectly, shaping societal conditions. Injunctive norms may exist where child marriage is approved publicly but privately opposed (Cislaghi & Heise, 2018b). Similarly, Kok et al. (2023) emphasize that child marriage results from various factors, including social norms and gender expectations that limit girls' access to information, services, and decision-making autonomy, prioritizing boys' education over girls'. Pacheco-Montoya et al. (2022) assert that inflexible gender norms enforcing control over girls' actions and sexuality strongly influence decisions leading to early marriage.

In their (2015) study, Yarrow, Aplan, Anderson, and Hamilton carried out an interview and focus group survey in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Indonesia and outlined the core ideologies and reasons associated with child marriage. The study's findings revealed that marriage and child marriage serve as a means to help men, women and their families achieve specific goals. While some reasons reflect rational human concerns, such as safety or the desire for children, they also highlight the strength of social norms underpinning patriarchy. Men cited fulfilling sexual, emotional, and reproductive needs, as well as labour-related reasons, for marrying. Women, on the other hand, were seen as needing to marry to avoid risks such as harm to their reputation, safety, or physical integrity, as well as risks to their family's honour, financial burden, poverty, or homelessness for themselves and their children.

Figure 1. Contributing Factors to Gendered Norms and Beliefs on Child Marriage



Source. Advanced Innovation on Gender Norms and Learning (ALIGN)

In their study in Bangladesh, Naved et al. (2022) explored societal norms facilitating child marriage, focusing on girls' involvement, decision-making, mobility, and interactions with the opposite sex. These norms aim to control the sexuality of unmarried girls, with child marriage often seen as a response to perceived norm violations. The association between a girl's sexuality and family honour persists, even with some progress in allowing girls to interact with male classmates or travel to and from school.

Dean et al. (2019), in their study in Sudan, highlight how gendered social norms and relations shape marriage decisions, contributing to early and child marriages. Gendered roles position husbands as providers and protectors, while wives are expected to fulfil roles as mothers, carers, and homemakers. Remaining unmarried is stigmatized, emphasizing the importance of female chastity for family honour. Gausman et al. (2022) found similar dynamics among Rohingya participants, where norms sustaining girl-child marriage are transmitted across generations through normative expectations. The practice persists due to a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty and limited awareness of alternatives. Religious factors play a significant role, in shaping the ideology of the community, alongside cultural, political, and economic vulnerabilities (Melnikas et al., 200). Understanding the function of norms in practices is crucial for devising effective norm change strategies. Deeply ingrained norms like gender roles require different approaches than those based on misconceptions. Practices are influenced by a combination of factors, including norms, values, and legal systems. Identifying the most influential factors is essential for effective change (Marcus et al., 2015). Despite the existence of minimum marriage age laws in many countries, their frequent violation suggests they are not effective in shifting the norms driving child marriage. Legal norms can reflect and drive changes, but they face resistance and are limited by pluralistic legal systems and weak enforcement (Greene & Stiefvater, 2019; Psaki et al., 2021).

Child marriage persists due to strong social norms and enabling structural environments. Weak enforcement and exceptions to laws against child marriage reinforce existing gender norms (Greene & Stiefvater, 2019). Gender norms play a significant role in maintaining disparities in resource distribution and authority. Many individuals, including adult men, adolescent boys, and older women, have a vested interest in supporting these norms. Men and boys benefit from increased authority, freedom, resource access, and power, while older women may benefit from prestige or domestic help. These norms persist partly because people perceive them as natural and resist change (Chukwudi, Osimen, Dele-Dada, & Ahmed, 2024). Discriminatory gender norms are reinforced in various facets of life, including at home, in school, workplaces, markets, and public spaces, as well as through social institutions like religion, social hierarchies, education, and media. Efforts to replace these norms with more equitable beliefs must address how they are disseminated and reinforced across these institutions (Kandiyoti, 1988; Marcus et al., 2015; Marcus and Harper, 2014).

In light of the foregoing, gender norms do not inherently harm girls' well-being and growth; in fact, they can facilitate the acquisition of specific skills and knowledge beneficial during adolescence and adulthood. However, as gender norms both mirror and perpetuate disparities in power and resource allocation, often to the detriment of women and girls, many of these norms, in practice, do limit girls' opportunities for development and undermine their overall well-being (Osimen, Newo, & Fulani, 2024).

The Intersectionality of Child Marriage, Norms and Migration

Rubiano-Matulevich (2021) suggests that displacement often leads to a reevaluation and renegotiation of gender roles, with women taking on provider and protector roles in families where male partners face challenges like death, disappearance, or migration. Despite this adaptation, women continue their primary caregiving duties, leading to a double burden exacerbated by issues like insecurity and limited infrastructure. Culcasi (2019) found Syrian refugee women in Jordan becoming breadwinners while still fulfilling caretaking responsibilities. Gausman et al. (2022) highlight intensified gender norms during displacement due to inadequate legal structures, economic vulnerability, and concerns for girls' safety.

Child marriage rates are increasingly problematic in conflict-affected areas, presenting challenges for these regions. While not common in the contemporary Arab region, conflicts have led to a surge in child marriage prevalence due to protection concerns. Before the Syrian crisis, around 13% of girls under 18 experienced child marriage, but forced displacement significantly worsened the situation, with a staggering 35% of Syrian refugee girls marrying before 18 (El Arab & Sagbakken, 2019; United Nations Population Fund, 2017). This trend is evident globally during humanitarian crises, where the persistence of norms, attitudes, and policies supporting child marriage exacerbates the issue, especially in conflict and displacement contexts (Gausman et al., 2022).

Sieverding, Krafft, Berri, and Keo (2020) stress the importance of understanding the contextual shifts in norms underlying child marriage practices resulting from conflict and displacement. The relationship between child marriage and migration is complex and context-dependent, with conflict and displacement exerting both upward and downward pressures on child marriage rates, as observed by Neal, Stone, and Ingham (2016) and Sieverding et al. (2020). Knox (2017) highlights changes in circumstances and insecurity as major reasons for early marriage, alongside existing norms that encourage it. Conversely, Schlecht, Rowley, and Babirye (2013) argue that crises such as conflict-induced displacement may destabilize communities, potentially either eroding or reinforcing existing norms.

According to Gausman et al. (2022), child marriage among Syrian refugees and forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals is driven by factors such as religion, tradition, gender expectations, and the preservation of family honour. Their study, along with the works of Arab and Sagbakken (2019) and Gausman, Othman, Amawi, and Langer (2019), indicates that upstream factors contributing to the persistence of girl-child marriage, including economic vulnerabilities, safety concerns, and gender dynamics, are further exacerbated by the challenges of displacement. Additionally, within humanitarian contexts, social pressure plays a significant

role in decisions related to child marriage, as families fear social ostracization and punishment if they do not adhere to perceived behavioural norms.

In their study on child marriage among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Elnakib et al. (2022) found that rates of child marriage among Syrian girls aged 10-19 were lower than among women aged 25-29, indicating prewar practice of child marriage. However, both rates were higher than in the general Lebanese population. Factors across different levels of social ecology increased vulnerability to child marriage, with education and employment of the male head of household inversely associated with the practice. Girls with fathers who were educated or employed were 40% less likely to marry early. The study suggests that interpretations of community norms and gender-related practices influence the risk of child marriage, suggesting that altering these norms could impact prevalence. The authors recommend further research to examine how social and gender norms associated with child marriage shift during displacement and to identify effective interventions to mitigate this risk in such contexts (Osimen, Daudu & Awogu-Maduagwu, 2023).

In their study on Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Mourtada, Schlecht, and DeJong (2017) found that although respondents disapproved of child marriage, the concept of "al Sutra," which emphasizes protecting women's honour, influenced parents to marry off their daughters during displacement. Concerns about adolescent girls' vulnerability to sexual harassment and rape due to unfamiliar and insecure living conditions were significant factors. Exposure to perceived more progressive Lebanese social norms also led some parents to opt for early marriages for their daughters, with mothers outside tented settlements expressing apprehension about cultural influences (Daudu, Osimen, & Ameh, 2024).

Additionally, the research highlighted differing viewpoints on the appropriate age for marriage. Despite displacement, adolescent women agreed on a minimum age of 20 for women and 25 for men, while mothers believed the age should be lower, considering marriage for daughters as young as 16 to 17. Fathers advocated for even younger marriage, suggesting 15 as the appropriate age for women, often with significant age gaps. The study suggests that factors driving child marriage in conflict and displacement settings diverge significantly from stable settings due to evolving marriage norms, economic challenges, and increased safety anxieties (Bartels, Michael, & Bunting, 2020; Mourtada et al., 2017). This indicates a noticeable shift in child marriage norms, particularly among younger generations exposed to Lebanese social norms, while older generations largely maintain traditional views.

Shaheen et al. (2022) explored the evolving perspectives of Jordanian and Syrian adolescents on child marriage within the context of displacement. The study revealed that families increasingly sought marriages outside the Syrian community, particularly with men from more affluent countries, to expand their support networks and access resources. Interestingly, the research noted a trend where some Jordanian families began to adopt child marriage, influenced by the Syrian community. This mutual influence between Syrian migrants and Jordanians demonstrates a significant shift in attitudes and practices regarding child marriage.

In a study conducted by Sieverding, Krafft, Berri, and Keo (2020), on the changes in age at marriage and drivers of child marriage amongst Syrian Refugees in Jordan, unlike previous studies, no evidence of an increase in child marriage practice was found after Syrians arrived in Jordan. The authors posit that it remained similar with chances of reduction due to a combination of several factors such as declining rates of consanguinity and inability to meet marriage costs, arguing that the departure from previous findings was a result of the compositional differences the study took into cognisance.

Gausman et al. (2022) conducted a comparative study involving Syrian refugees in Jordan and Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, revealing how displacement exacerbates reliance on traditional norms, leading to child marriage practices due to gender norms limiting women's economic participation and pervasive poverty in refugee camps. Participants in Bangladesh observed a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty, lack of awareness, and normative expectations reinforcing child marriage across generations. Among Syrian refugees, changing norms were evident, attributed to greater emphasis on girls' education and visible familial support for completing education before marriage.

In contrast, Rohingya refugees faced a different reality, with limited educational opportunities and norms restricting girls' mobility, exacerbating the problem. While previous research among Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon showed exposure to more liberal host community norms leading families to resort to child marriage for protection (Mourtada et al., 2017; Shaheen et al., 2022), this study presented a contrasting perspective. Positive influences from host communities were found to shift norms and attitudes away from child marriage among Syrians.

Melnikas, Ainul, Ehsan, Haque, and Amin (2020) conducted a study on the Rohingya community, highlighting the impact of displacement on marriage practices. The Rohingya, originally from a country with a low prevalence of child marriage (16% of women married before 18 in Myanmar), moved to a country with higher rates (59% in Bangladesh). The study found that the Rohingya in Bangladesh are more open to early marriages (before 18) compared to their experiences in Myanmar. This preference may have existed in Myanmar but was constrained, leading to an increase in child marriages within the camps in Bangladesh. The change is attributed to the influence of religious and group norms, including concerns about reputational consequences linked to female sexuality, shaping marriage prospects.

Discussion

Control over Girl's Sexuality and Lack of Agency

Strongly entrenched gender expectations imposing stringent control over girls' actions and sexual conduct significantly impact their choices regarding entering into child marriage. There exists a distinct concern that girls might partake in actions deemed 'improper,' thereby reflecting upon the family's reputation. Consequently, this apprehension subjects these girls to continual scrutiny and regulation by their own family members (Pacheco-Montoya et al., 2022). According to a report by Abah (2017), during an interview with an older man who married his wife at 15, he strongly advocated for early marriage as the optimal choice for his wife. He expressed, for some of these girls who tend to exhibit stubbornness, it's preferable to arrange their marriage as early as feasible. It's in their best interest. The notion of a child 'agency' has gained substantial significance among international child-focused organizations, non-governmental bodies (NGOs), and United Nations (UN) agencies, especially in addressing the concern of child marriage (Lokot et al., 2021). Within this framework, agency is presumed to lead to informed decisions and is portrayed as an inherent outcome of enhanced awareness. This agency purportedly empowers girls to oppose marriages imposed upon them by their parents.

In Makoko, a slum community in Lagos primarily inhabited by a diverse mix of ethnic groups from Nigeria, Togo, and the Benin Republic, child marriage is widespread. Victims of this practice emphasised that when a girl becomes pregnant, there's an expectation for her to identify the boy or young man responsible. Subsequently, the girl's family arranges a marriage ceremony and sends her to live with the identified boy. If the boy still resides with his parents, she joins him there. One respondent noted that in instances where the boy denies responsibility, the parents promptly arrange for her marriage to any willing individual alongside her pregnancy (Abah, 2017). Another young woman forced into child marriage recounted how her uncle chose and sanctioned her marriage to an older man. Despite enduring mistreatment and eventually returning home, she never resumed her education, despite being one of the top-performing students in the entire school (Abah, 2017). In a report by Human Rights Watch (2022), Families frequently arrange marriages for girls without granting them any say in the timing or choice of their spouses (Abasilim, Gberevbie, & Osibanjo, 2019).

Gender Prioritisation

Child marriage persists as a manifestation of gender discrimination and inequality deeply embedded in various societies. Often, it endures due to harmful social norms and is exacerbated by the adverse effects of poverty and lack of resources (Versluys, 2020). According to a 2022 UNESCO report, Nigeria is documented as having the largest count of out-of-school children globally, reaching a staggering 20 million (Umeh, 2023). This distressing figure largely stems from economic challenges, governmental apathy toward

children's welfare, failure to implement the Access to Universal Basic Education law, and the persistent insurgency against western education in the northern regions (Abah, 2017).

A significant portion of this statistic comprises girls. The pervasive lack of investment in girls' education and well-being in numerous areas throughout Nigeria has led to the prevalence of child marriage. Families facing economic hardship often prioritize their male children, hastily arranging marriages for their daughters to redirect attention and resources to their sons. The pronounced disparities in education between genders are closely tied to the prevalence of child marriage (Sanni, 2021). Repeatedly, girls have been compelled to halt their education for the sake of their brothers' academic pursuits, even when they excel academically themselves. Additionally, a prevalent scenario involves girls discontinuing their education immediately upon marriage (Abah, 2017).

Role of Girls as Wives and Mothers

In communities where child marriage is widespread, traditional norms dictate that girls are destined to become wives and mothers. These norms enforce the belief that marriage is the ultimate aspiration for girls, viewing divorce as disgraceful. Moreover, societal expectations compel women to endure abuse, shoulder heavier domestic responsibilities, and prioritize maintaining harmony by yielding to their husbands (Greene & Stiefvater, 2019).

According to Abah's report (2016), despite the presence of the Child's Rights Law and its legal status in Lagos, instances of child and forced marriages persist within various communities in the region. A specific case is that of a girl who fled from her home at the age of 16 to seek assistance from the police for fear of being forcefully married. However, the Divisional Police Officer (DPO), following discussions with her family members, advised her to "cooperate" with her family, asserting that they had her best interests at heart. This indicates the presence of weak institutions, as the governmental agencies responsible for addressing these issues often turn a blind eye or offer only superficial statements without taking effective action.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Child marriage, an issue fraught with severe repercussions for the well-being of girls, continues to impede Nigeria's advancement. UNICEF reports Nigeria as having the highest rate of girl marriage in Africa, with more than 50% of women in the North being married off before or at age 16. Despite the historical emphasis on studying girl marriage prevalence in rural regions, particularly in the North, recent revelations have highlighted a consistent practice of child marriage in urban communities such as Lagos. This sheds light on the persistent nature of this issue, extending beyond rural settings to urban areas within the country.

The prevalence of child marriage persists, albeit at a relatively lower rate, among settler communities and secluded groups such as the Hausa-Fulani, Nupes, Shuwa Arabs, and minority populations from the Benin Republic and Togo. These communities, including Makoko, the Kofiganmen seaside area of Badagry, Ojo, Agege, New Okoba, Ijora, and Marine Beach, among others across Lagos, demonstrate the continuation of this practice. Nigeria, being a culturally rich society, retains strong ties to traditions, religious beliefs, and cultural dispositions that profoundly influence its people. Even as individuals migrate to urban centres like Lagos or Ibadan, these cultural influences persist and shape their private lives. This is evident in the prevalence of child marriage within settler communities, showcasing how cultural norms endure and impact practices in urban environments (Abah, 2017).

Despite the existence of laws in Lagos that prohibit child marriage, such as the Lagos Child Rights Law of 2007, the primary challenge lies in enforcement and inadequate communication. Even law enforcement agencies, including the police responsible for upholding these laws, often lack essential information and resources. While having legislation in place is a positive step, creating awareness among the populace and ensuring effective government enforcement are crucial additional steps. The current issue revolves around

insufficient implementation and enforcement mechanisms. The state's enforcement system requires development to a level where it can effectively execute all the provisions outlined in the Child Rights Act to combat the practice of child marriage effectively.

It is imperative to raise awareness among communities regarding the dangers inherent in subjecting their daughters to the perils of child marriage. Parents and guardians need to comprehend the significant risks posed to their daughters' lives, health, education, and prospects. Encouraging a heightened level of consciousness among families is crucial to enabling them to make well-informed decisions about their daughters'.

In preventing child marriage, educational campaigns should prioritize initiatives that challenge ingrained gender biases. These efforts should focus on normalizing discussions about attraction and intimacy during adolescence. Such educational programs should be comprehensive, targeting adolescents, parents, and community members.

To achieve successful prevention, a shift towards altering societal perceptions of marriage and gender roles is vital. Strategies should extend beyond addressing the immediate symptoms of the problem at an individual level. Instead, efforts must focus on more extensive societal changes by challenging prevailing norms and constructs related to marriage and gender roles.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors state that they have no conflicts of interest.

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