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I AM JUST A CHILD

Impact of Child Marriage to Accessing Education in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Child marriage is a serious human rights violation that has significant socio-economic effects on children, families, and communities. This study aimed to identify key the impact of child marriage on the right to access to education in the state of Cameroon. The research was conducted through a questionnaire that was issued online and remotely, through assistance from the ALDEPA team – a non-profit organization based in Cameroon.

The study found a negative relationship between lack of access to education and child marriages, indicating that the need for empowerment of local community dwellers on traditional and cultural practices specifically child marriage. The results of this study have important policy implications, and it is crucial that local government authorities and administrative bodies prioritize measures to protect against child marriages to address gender inequality.

Keywords: Child marriage; Education; Gender inequality and Cameroon.

DEDICATION

First and foremost, to thy Almighty Lord, to my family members, lecturers, friends, and colleagues for the support they had in guiding me through this research.

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ACRONYMS

- ACERWC: African Committee of Experts on Rights and Welfare of the Child.
- ACHPR: African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.
- ACRWC: African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child.
- ALDEPA: Action Locale pour un Développement Participatif et Autogéré.
- AU: African Union.
- CCPR: Human Rights Committee (Committee on Civil and Political Rights - CCPR).
- CEDAW: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
- CERD: Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.
- CESR: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- CFA franc: Franc of the Financial Community of Africa.
- CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- GBV: Gender Based Violence.
- ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- ICESCR: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- OHCHR: Office of the High Commissioner on Human Right.
- RDPC in French: the Cameroon People's Decomocratic Movement.
- SHRH: Sexual And Reproductive Health And Rights.
- SR: Special Rapporteur.
- UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- UN: United Nations.
- UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- UNHCR: (Office of) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- UNHRC: United Nations Human Rights Council.
- UNICEF: The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.
- WHO: the World Health Organization.
- WB: the World Bank.

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives an outline of the study background, offers a statement of the problem, indicates the purpose of the study, highlights the research question(s), gives a definition of terms, touches on a theoretical framework, and concludes with a limitation of the study.

1. Introduction

Child marriage is a marriage in which at least one of the parties is or was a child at the time of the marriage.¹ The term child marriage is often used interchangeably with the terms forced marriage and early child marriage but, in this thesis, child marriage should be understood as distinct from forced marriage. Regardless, forced marriage refers to a marriage in which either or both of the parties have not personally expressed their full and free consent.² Although many child marriages are also forced marriages, forced marriages include marriages that are not child marriages,³ such as where a widow is forced to marry a relative of her deceased husband. Child marriage refers to a marriage in which even though one of the parties to the marriage may not have reached the minimum marriageable age, majority status will nevertheless be conferred at marriage through a legal process of emancipation.⁴

There is a sense in which any child marriage is also a forced marriage, in that children are not normally accorded the legal ability to give their full and free consent to marriage.⁵ It is for this reason that the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) states that the ‘betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect.’⁶ This is not to deny that children do exercise autonomy and may genuinely want to enter into marriages of their own accord, nor to deny that there are differing degrees of social and family pressure to marry, not all of

¹ Gastón, Colleen Murray; Misunas, Christina; Cappa, *Child Marriage Among Boys: A Global Overview Of Available Data. Vulnerable Children And Youth Studies*, 201914 (3): Pgs. 219–228.

² Rapporteur: Mrs Rosmarie Zapfl-Helbling, Switzerland, *Forced Marriages And Child Marriages, Report - Committee On Equal Opportunities For Women And Men, Group Of The European People’s Party*, Doc. 10590, 20 June 2005.

³ United Nations Human Rights Office Of The High Commissioner, *Child And Forced Marriage, Including In Humanitarian Settings Ohchr And Women’s Human Rights And Gender Equality*, Available At <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitarian-settings> [Accessed On 1st February 2023].

⁴ Report Of The Office Of The United Nations High Commissioner For Human Rights, *Preventing And Eliminating Early, Child And Forced Marriages*, 2014 At P. 3.

⁵ European Union Agency For Fundamental Rights, *Addressing Forced Marriage In The Eu: Legal Provisions And Promising Practices, Luxembourg: Publications Office Of The European Union*, 2014. Available At https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-forced-marriage-eu_en.pdf.pdf [Accessed On 1st February 2023].

⁶ Article 16, UN General Assembly, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 18 December 1979, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1249, p. 13. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3970.html> [Accessed 11 June 2023].

which should necessarily be characterised as coercive.⁷ Nevertheless, it is a premise of this thesis that child marriage is legally problematic and is both a cause and consequence of various social ills. Although boys are sometimes married as children, this is comparatively less common⁸ and for that reason, this thesis has predominantly on the marriage of girls, while in turn trying to encourage gender equality.

2. Summary of the Republic of Cameroon

The Republic of Cameroon is a country located in Central Africa at the bottom of the Gulf of Guinea. Cameroon is made up of several cities including Yaoundé the political capital, Douala the economic capital, Bafoussam, Garoua, and Maroua. Covering an area of 475,442 km².⁹ Cameroon is bordered to the North by Chad, to the East by the Central African Republic, to the South by The Republic of Congo, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea, and to the west by Nigeria.¹⁰ With a population of 25.9 million.¹¹ Cameroon is a country strongly marked by its diversity.¹² It is home to an estimate of 250 ethnic groups divided into three large groups (Bantu, Semi-Bantu, Sudanese).¹³

On the political level, in particular domestic politics, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (RDPC in French), the party of President Paul Biya, has been in power since 1982 and won the latest elections by an absolute majority. President Biya was reappointed in the presidential election of October 7, 2018, where he won 71.28% of the votes cast.¹⁴

Regarding foreign policy, Cameroon has in recent years been confronted with attacks by the Boko Haram group in the Far North and a separatist movement in the English-speaking regions.¹⁵ These attacks led the Cameroonian authorities to strengthen the military presence in the North of the country.¹⁶ Members

⁷ European Union Agency For Fundamental Rights, Addressing Forced Marriage In The Eu: Legal Provisions And Promising Practices, Luxembourg: Publications Office Of The European Union, 2014. Available At https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-forced-marriage-eu_en.pdf [Accessed On 1st February 2023].

⁸ N Otoo-Oyortey & S Pobi, 'Child Marriage And Poverty: Exploring Links And Key Policy Issues' In C Sweetman (Ed.) Gender, Development And Marriage, 2003.

⁹ One World Nations Online Website. Available At <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/sitemap.htm> [Accessed On 1st February 2023].

¹⁰ One World Nations Online Website. Available At <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/sitemap.htm> [Accessed On 1st February 2023].

¹¹ UCLA, African Studies Center. Available At <https://www.international.ucla.edu/asc/countries/96723> [Accessed On 1st February 2023].

¹² UCLA, African Studies Center. Available At <https://www.international.ucla.edu/asc/countries/96723> [Accessed On 1st February 2023].

¹³ Urama, Kevin, Muchie, Mammo, Twiringiyimana, Remy, *East, And Central Africa: Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo (Republic Of), Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda*, In Unesco Science Report: Towards 2030, Pgs. 499-533.

¹⁴ Republic Of Cameroon Website. Available At <https://www.prc.cm/en/the-president/political-vision> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

¹⁵ Republic Of Cameroon Website. Available At <https://www.prc.cm/en/the-president/political-vision> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

¹⁶ Republic Of Cameroon Website. Available At <https://www.prc.cm/en/the-president/political-vision> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, Cameroon participated in the Paris summit for security in Nigeria in May 2014.¹⁷ The action of the Cameroonian armed forces, as well as the establishment in 2016 of a joint multinational force by the countries of the region (Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Benin), have helped reduce the pressure exerted by Boko Haram, but the threat remains active.¹⁸

Despite stability and progress at the national level, Cameroon also faces social inequalities, and challenges in terms of social inclusion.¹⁹ In addition, the relatively high infant mortality rate, child marriage, and birth registration²⁰ are some of the challenges Cameroon must remedy to realize and guarantee children's rights in accordance with its international commitments.

3. Status of Children's Rights

According to UNICEF, 3.9 million people, of which 2.21 million children are in need humanitarian assistance due to permanent and protracted crises linked to conflict, displacement and periodic epidemics.²¹

The humanitarian situation in Cameroon therefore remains worrying. Cameroon is affected by three complex and simultaneous humanitarian situations: the violence of Boko Haram in the Far North region;²² the influx of refugees from the Central African Republic to the eastern regions (Adamawa, North and East);²³ violence in the Northwest and Southwest (NWSW) regions, affected by the co-called Anglophone crisis, with spillover effects in the West and Coastal regions.²⁴

In addition, Cameroon faces some key challenges, including birth registration, violence against children, child marriage, economic exploitation of children²⁵ and access to education.²⁶ These challenges represent

¹⁷ Republic Of Cameroon Website. Available At <https://www.prc.cm/en/the-president/political-vision> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

¹⁸ Humanium Website On Children Rights In Cameroon. Available At <https://www.humanium.org/en/cameroon/> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

¹⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Bti 2022 Country Report — Cameroon*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022.

²⁰ International Center For Research For Women. Available At <https://www.icrw.org/what-will-a-future-free-of-child-marriage-look-like-for-girls-in-cameroon/> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

²¹ Unicef, *Cameroon Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1*, 31 March 2023, Humanitarian Action For Children, Available At <https://www.unicef.org/documents/cameroon-humanitarian-situation-report-no-1-31-march-2023> [Accessed On 1st June 2023].

²² Global Protection Cluster Website. Available At <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/aor/cp> [Accessed On 15th June 2023].

²³ Global Protection Cluster Website. Available At <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/aor/cp> [Accessed On 15th June 2023].

²⁴ Global Protection Cluster Website. Available At <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/aor/cp> [Accessed On 15th June 2023].

²⁵ United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, *Country Office Annual Report 2022, Cameroon – 0*. Available At <https://www.unicef.org/media/136721/file/cameroon-2022-coar.pdf> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

²⁶ Relief Web, *Cameroon Education Cluster Strategy Northwest And Southwest*, January - December 2020, 29th July 2020.

a major issue in the guarantee of the rights of children and the creation of an environment favourable to their development into adulthood.

In Cameroon, the recognition, acceptance, and ratification of the CRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) have been incorporated into the country's legal framework, serving as a mechanism for safeguarding the rights and welfare of children. In accordance with Article 45 of the Cameroonian Constitution, international agreements and treaties that have been ratified are endowed with superior legal authority over domestic laws. In terms of the status of international instruments that have been duly ratified by the government, Cameroon is commonly regarded as a monist state. With respect to the implementation of ratified treaties, Cameroon operates in a dualist legal framework, whereby the effect of such treaties is contingent on their domestication by national legislation. Inference can be made to the Appendix for brief highlights on Cameroon's status regarding the national, regional, and international legal framework pertaining to children's rights.

4. Study Background

Cameroon has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the CRC) along with the corresponding consensus which affirms the entitlement of all children, irrespective of their economic status and prevailing conditions, to access a fundamental basic education of quality. In the country, the provision of education is mandatory up until the attainment of age fourteen, upon the conclusion of six years of primary schooling. It is noteworthy that the state has justified the ratification of most international and regional instruments that enshrine the right to education, particularly emphasizing compulsory, and gratis primary education. Nonetheless, a predicament has emerged in Cameroon as the government has indicated a decrease in children's participation, which has manifested a perceptible upturn since the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak.²⁷

Children are frequently subjected to maltreatment, negative socio-cultural customs, sexual assault, and different forms of hazardous economic exploitation, such as commercial sexual exploitation. Most grow up in rural areas and are trained by the guardians, to understand that they exist to care for the adults or older generations. Therefore, they become subjugated to servitude and may even perform labour that exceeds their physical and mental capacities. Several individuals engage them in labour without remuneration, which precipitates occurrences of child maltreatment and injustice.

Children are subject to perilous occupational environments that pose substantial threats to their physical health and overall well-being. Some even undergo the experience of being abducted and subjected to

²⁷ Serges Alain Djoyou Kamga, *Realising The Right To Primary Education In Cameroon*, Doctoral Candidate And Researcher, Centre For Human Rights, University Of Pretoria, South Africa, African Human Rights Law Journal, 2011.

human trafficking. The activities are in breach of the fundamental rights and welfare of minors and have the potential to dismantle their aspirations of participating in leadership roles pivotal to the development of Africa in the future. The present research study aims to investigate from a gender perspective the impact of traditional practices on the right of the child to education, with particular emphasis on child marriage.

In this context, child marriage data has allowed to infer that a significant proportion of females who were married between the ages of fifteen and forty nine – specifically 30% – underwent marriage prior to reaching their fifteenth year of age, while an overwhelming majority totalling 66% were married before reaching the age of eighteen.²⁸ This prevailing phenomenon presents a significant challenge in terms of providing a means of recourse for victims with respect to the assessment of said national laws vis a vis regional and international instruments, as there exists a dearth of domestic remedies in this regard.

It is within the exclusive purview of the executive branch of government and Members of Parliament to initiate a review of legal statutes, and hence, private citizens (victims) lack the capacity to undertake such actions.²⁹ In addition, it must be noted that even though child marriage is a punishable offense under the Penal Code, minors who are victims of this practice can only seek legal recourse through parental representation.³⁰ Furthermore, it is unlikely for parents, who play a pivotal role in enabling such an offence, to institute legal proceedings against themselves. Therefore, the legal structure has been designed to facilitate the ongoing existence of the phenomenon.

The legal system in Cameroon acknowledges marriages that are established through civil, customary, and religious means. In accordance with civil law, the solemnization of marriages is contingent upon the presence of a designated civil officer, as well as the mutual consent of both parties involved.³¹

It is imperative to recognize that consent cannot be acquired by means of coercion, physical aggression, or intimidation.³² The state's Penal Code reinforces the law prohibiting forced marriage and imposes penalties on offenders in the form of imprisonment and a financial penalty.³³ The practice of polygamy is legally permitted and has firmly established roots in traditional society.³⁴

A common trend has been that minors of the female gender are being obliged to enter the bond of matrimony devoid of their volition or concurrence. The reason for child marriages among a significant

²⁸ The Findings of the Cameroon 2018 Demographic and Health Survey Indicate a Significant Prevalence of Child Marriage in Cameroon, Particularly Among Young Girls Who Are Disproportionately Affected By This Phenomenon.

²⁹ Article 25, *The Constitution Of Cameroon*, Adopted On 18 January 1996, Amendment to the Constitution Of 2 June 1972.

³⁰ Article 71(1), *The Criminal Procedure Code*, 1973.

³¹ *Ordinance 81-02*, Art. 64, *The Civil Code*, 1981.

³² Art. 65, *The Civil Code*, 1981.

³³ Art. 356, *The Penal Code*, 2016.

³⁴ *Ordinance 81-02* and Article 49, *The Civil Code*, 1981.

number of adolescents can be attributed to the financial hardships that their parents face, leading them to come to that decision. Certain individuals may be coerced into participating in certain activities since it is a customary tradition. Individuals are influenced both emotionally and psychologically. This phenomenon is predominantly observed in rural areas, representing a violation of the rights of children.

5. Statement Of the Problem

Child marriage has several negative effects on children as well as society at large. It is a violation of human rights in general especially children's rights. Child marriage has severe physical, intellectual, psychological, and economic repercussions on children (impacting both boys and girls) stifling opportunities for personal development through education and employment. Moreso, child marriage affects young girls and their future children, families, and society at large the burden is shared by all parties.³⁵

Marriage is commonly celebrated as a happy occasion and an important step in adulthood all over the world. Such cause for joy is rarely reported from the practice of child marriage. A child's future is frequently cut short, and their fundamental rights are violated when a marriage partner is imposed upon them.³⁶ Majority of these children are deprived of their freedom of choice of their partner or the time of marriage. They were forced into these unions by their parents, who frequently knew the real reason why. The main problem is that early marriage is likely to halt to a child's full educational potential.

a) *Children's Right to Education*

It can be inferred that the safeguarding of the right to education for children in Cameroon is deficient. Cameroon boasts of a commendable primary and secondary education system, which has resulted in noteworthy advancements in educational prospects for the younger generation, thereby affording them the chance to acquire knowledge. Nonetheless, the Cameroonian education system continues to encounter hindrances in furnishing exemplary education to every child. Regional, economic, and gender inequality has been sighted to have a significant impact on the well-being of children, placing marginalized populations at heightened risk of impediments to school attendance and reduced opportunities for success

³⁵ Quentin Wodon, Chata Malé, Adenike Onagoruwa, *A Simple Approach To Measuring The Share Of Early Childbirths Likely Due To Child Marriage In Developing Countries*. *Forum For Social Economics* 49:2, 2020, Pgs. 166-179.

³⁶ Christine Ghati Alfons, *Child Early And Forced Marriage: A Norm Endangering Girls And Women*, 2022. Available At <https://www.royalcwsociety.org/post/child-early-and-forced-marriage-a-norm-endangering-girls-and-women> [Accessed On 12th March 2023].

in life.³⁷ Residing in rural localities is associated with a twofold increase in the probability of non-attendance in educational institutions.³⁸

Furthermore, children from poor households are subject to a five-fold higher likelihood of being absent from school in comparison to their counterparts from affluent backgrounds.³⁹ This is attributable to the financial hardships that certain parents face when procuring educational resources for their children, leading them to enlist the children in the practice of vending or trading for the purpose of augmenting their academic prospects. The challenges in the realm of education constitute a significant menace to the economic sustainability and prospect of Cameroon, as well as compromise the entitlement of children to a high-standard education.

The Cameroon National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms, being the primary mechanism for enforcing infractions pertaining to children's rights, faces impediments in carrying out its duties in this regard.⁴⁰ The trend can be attributed to two primary causes. Primarily, it has been observed that the National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms is lacking in impartiality as it appears to be under the influence or control of the government, thereby compromising its independence. The notion is clearly substantiated by the observable reality that the government assumes the responsibility of designating its principal personnel and allocating financial resources to the commission. Given this scenario, writing anything unfavourable about the government constitutes a challenging task for the commission. Consequently, egregious infringements upon the rights of minors are not duly reported. Moreover, it should be noted that determinations made by the commission regarding instances of infringement upon human rights possess no obligatory force. Therefore, it fails to discourage the breach of the civil liberties of minors.

There are various factors that might be responsible for the decrease in educational opportunities available to the youth population of Cameroon, including but not restricted to customary practices, corrupt practices, inadequate access to medical facilities, inadequate infrastructure, and community discord.

³⁷ United Nations Girls Initiative, *Gender Report: Building Bridges For Gender Equality Corporate, Global Education Monitoring Report Team*, 2019.

³⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific And Cultural Organization (Unesco) - International Institution For Educational Planning (Iiep) – R Verdier, *The Rural Education Division Of Yaoundé, Cameroon Conference: Seminar On Planning Out-Of-School Education For Development*, Iiep/S28, Paris, 1971, *Planning Out-Of-School Education For Development: An Iiep Seminar*, Pgs241-245.

³⁹ Cooper, K., Stewart, K. *Does Household Income Affect Children's Outcomes? A Systematic Review Of The Evidence Child*, Ind Res 14, 2021, Pgs. 981–1005. Available At <https://doi.org/10.1007/S12187-020-09782-0> [Accessed On 15th March 2023].

⁴⁰ U.S. Embassy In Cameroon, *2021 Country Reports On Human Rights Practices: Cameroon*, 2022. Available At <https://Cm.Usembassy.Gov/2021-Country-Reports-On-Human-Rights-Practices-Cameroon/> [Accessed On 11th March 2023].

b) Child Marriage

In accordance with the provisions of statutory law, the minimum age requirement for legal marriage is determined to be fifteen years for females with the requisite authorization from their parents or guardians, while for males, attaining the age of eighteen years is compulsory.⁴¹ In the year 2016, the governing body of the state implemented the revised Penal Code, which deems forced marriage a criminal offense, warranting a punishment of imprisonment lasting from five to ten years, accompanied by a monetary fine ranging between CFAF 25,000 to 1,000,000 (CFA franc).⁴² In the event that an individual's spouse is not yet eighteen years old at the time of marriage, any mitigating circumstances notwithstanding, the imposed sentence must not fall short of a term of imprisonment of two years.⁴³

The practice of child marriage was notably widespread in outlying regions, where a substantial number of adolescent females were wedded as young as twelve years of age.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding Cameroon's endorsement of the ACRWC and the CRC, which stipulate that the minimum age for marriage ought to be eighteen years for both genders, the practice persists.

The Cameroon Penal Code, as stipulated in Article 356, conforms to the international standard. However, the Civil Code, specifically Article 144, permits the marriage of girls aged fifteen years and below, provided that certain circumstances are deemed to be compelling motives for marriage, in accordance with Article 145. Concurrently, the Civil Code maintains certain provisions - Articles 294-303, that are supportive of child marriage, as they make provisions for marriages to be contracted with parental approval. Hence, it can be inferred that the revised edition of the Civil Code does not appear to be inclined toward prohibiting child marriage.

6. Purpose Of the Study

The reason for carrying out this research is to investigate the rights of the child to education in Cameroon while focusing on the impact of traditional practices i.e., child marriage has had especially since the pandemic and the Anglophone crisis.

The research also aims to ascertain the adequacy of existing Cameroonian laws in relation to safeguarding the rights of the child to education.

The researcher is seeking to understand the possibility of running a sustainable project focusing on sustainable development goals - focusing on quality education and promoting gender equality. While

⁴¹ Ordinance 81-02, 1981.

⁴² Article 356, *The Penal Code*, 2016.

⁴³ Article 356, *The Penal Code*, 2016.

⁴⁴ Social Institutions And Gender Index, *Reportedly, Child Marriage Was Prevalent In The Adamawa, North, And Particularly Far North Regions, Country Cameroon* Sigi, 2019.

reviewing existing traditional practices, finding a means to combat existing violations of children's rights, through empowering local community dwellers.

The specific objectives are:

- To examine the existing rights of the child to education in Cameroon.
- To critically examine child marriage as a violation of the child's rights in Cameroon, and
- To make policy recommendations.

7. Research Question (s)

- Which are the common causes and effects of child marriage in Cameroon?
- Is child marriage occurrence higher in the rural areas or in the urban areas in Cameroon?
- How to gauge the general attitude towards the right of a child to access education in Cameroon?
- How to gauge the general opinion of communities on child marriage in Cameroon?

8. Methodology

The research was conducted through a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data collected through a questionnaire. Issued both online and in person, remotely in rural and urban regions of the state of Cameroon. Assistance was sought from ALDEPA – a non-profit organization based in Cameroon through the team representatives. Collectively, 28 respondents voluntarily completed the questionnaire.

9. Definition of Terms

- Ambazonian - alternatively the "Federal Republic of Ambazonia" or "State of Ambazonia", is a political entity proclaimed by Anglophone separatists who are seeking independence from Cameroon. The separatists claim that Ambazonia should consist of the Northwest Region and Southwest Region of Cameroon.
- Borgop - a village in the municipality of Djohong, located in the Adamawa-Cameroon region, near the national borders with the Central African Republic. The Borgop refugee camp is a temporary settlement built to receive refugees and people in refugee-like situations. The refugee camp was developed in an impromptu manner with the aim of meeting the basic human needs of the population for a short time.
- Child - a person under the age of 18 years, even if the laws of a particular country set an earlier legal age for adulthood or allow for majority to be attained at an earlier age.⁴⁵ The term child includes both girls and boys.

⁴⁵ Article 1, UN General Assembly, *Convention On The Rights Of The Child*, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, Vol. 1577, P. 3, Available At: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html> [Accessed 1st March 2023] and

- Child marriage - It is any official marriage or any traditional or customary union between a child (person under the age of 18) and an adult or even another child.
- Community leader - It is anyone with a sense of organization and being able to lead others in various tasks or projects. It is precisely about a person having certain capacities more than the others of which those to be responsible. Ultimately, he/she is someone who has the knowledge and skills that allow him/her to work for the good of his/her community, to encourage the mobilization and commitment of others around common projects.
- Mbororo - Also referred to as Peuhl, Fula, Fulbé or Fulani are semi-nomadic Islamic pastoralists. They are found throughout the western grasslands. Generally, they are resented for their relative wealth in cattle, they have been subject to harassment, bandit attacks and police shakedowns
- Lebialem - is a department / division of Southwest Province in Cameroon. The department covers an area of 617 km² and as of 2005 had a total population of 113,736.
- Marriage - broadly to include both consensual or co-habiting unions whether formal or informal and whether formalised or recognised under any system of law, custom, society or religion, which are established to form a familial bond.
- Rights of the Child - the set of obligations of the group (parents, adults, public authorities, grassroots communities, etc.) towards all those under the age of 18.
- Teenager - It is any person, girl or boy, who is between child and adulthood. According to the WHO standards applied within the framework of the project, an adolescent is a person, girl or boy, aged 10 to 19 years.⁴⁶ It is still between child and not adult but tends towards youth.
- The Gbaya - Also referred to as Gbeya or Baya, are a people of western region of Central African Republic, east-central Cameroon, the north of the Republic of Congo, and the northwest of the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- Logone-Birni, Arrondissement, and Logone and Chari – different communes in Cameroon.

Article 2, Organization Of African Unity (Oau), *African Charter On The Rights And Welfare Of The Child*, 11 July 1990, Cab/Leg/24.9/49 (1990), Available At: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38c18.html> [Accessed 1st March 2023].

⁴⁶ Who Technical Report Series 886, *Programming For Adolescent Health And Development, Report*, World Health Organization Geneva 1999. Available At https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/42149/who_trs_886_p1-p144.pdf;jsessionid=Dd426e4e3cc9d383cd1d9c42495fe92a?Sequence=1 [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

10. Theoretical Framework

Natural law theory is an ethical theory that claims that humans are born with a certain moral compass that guides behaviours.⁴⁷ These inherited rules essentially distinguish the "rights" and "wrongs" in life.⁴⁸ Under natural law, everyone is afforded the same rights, such as the right to live and the right to happiness.⁴⁹

Authors such as John Locke propounded that human beings are by nature free and equal.⁵⁰ He also stated that people have rights such as the right to life, liberty, and property.⁵¹ Marcus Tullius Cicero propounded that natural law is true law in agreement with nature which is applied universally, unchanging, and everlasting.⁵² However, other authors have opposing views about the natural law theory.⁵³ This opposing view of natural law can be traced to Thomas Hobbes, whose writings are largely devoted to showing the anarchy and civil wars caused by appeals to natural and divine laws above the will of the sovereign.⁵⁴ Hobbes rejected traditional higher law doctrines and encouraged people to accept the established laws and customs of their nations, even if they seemed oppressive, for the sake of civil peace and security.⁵⁵ His critique has been a leading cause of the demise of natural law.⁵⁶

This theory is also reflected in publications like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 1 which states that all humans are born free with equal rights.⁵⁷ This study examines the influence of this theory on the protection of children's rights and welfare. Children have natural rights due to natural law, which must be protected. While in turn taking into consideration the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which include: the best interests of the child as a primary consideration; the right of children to survival and development; the right of children to express their views freely on

⁴⁷ Eric Esteve And Kirsten Rohrs Schmitt, *Natural Law In Ethics*, The Investopedia Team, 2023. Available At <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/n/natural-law.asp> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

⁴⁸ Eric Esteve And Kirsten Rohrs Schmitt, *Natural Law In Ethics*, The Investopedia Team, 2023. Available At <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/n/natural-law.asp> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

⁴⁹ Eric Esteve And Kirsten Rohrs Schmitt, *Natural Law In Ethics*, The Investopedia Team, 2023. Available At <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/n/natural-law.asp> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

⁵⁰ Lovet Ekwen, *Protection Of Children's Rights In Cameroon*, Master's Thesis, 2015, Grin Verla, 2017.

⁵¹ Lovet Ekwen, *Protection Of Children's Rights In Cameroon*, Master's Thesis, 2015, Grin Verla, 2017.

⁵² Lovet Ekwen, *Protection Of Children's Rights In Cameroon*, Master's Thesis, 2015, Grin Verla, 2017.

⁵³ Lovet Ekwen, *Protection Of Children's Rights In Cameroon*, Master's Thesis, 2015, Grin Verla, 2017.

⁵⁴ Robert P. Kraynak, *The Journal Of Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 1, The University Of Chicago Press (Feb., 1983), Pgs. 86-109. Available At <https://doi.org/10.2307/2130326> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

⁵⁵ Robert P. Kraynak, *The Journal Of Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 1, The University Of Chicago Press (Feb., 1983), Pgs. 86-109. Available At <https://doi.org/10.2307/2130326> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

⁵⁶ Robert P. Kraynak, *The Journal Of Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 1, The University Of Chicago Press (Feb., 1983), Pgs. 86-109. Available At <https://doi.org/10.2307/2130326> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

⁵⁷ Article 1, UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration Of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, 217 A (iii), Available At: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3712c.html> [Accessed 1st March 2023].

all matters affecting them and the right of all children to enjoy all the rights of the CRC without discrimination.

The basis of the principles of the CRC supports a child rights approach that recognises, respects, and protects the human rights of children in the development and implementation of laws, policies, practices and decisions affecting them. It focuses on genuine engagement with children and young people and taking action to promote their right to safety and their right to have their views heard.

11. Assumptions

An assumption in this research, that relies substantially on a survey conducted with 28 respondents to a questionnaire. A delimitation of the study is that the participants of the study are volunteers and are parents or guardians of children. That the participant's responses may not fully represent the norm for all children who are victims of child marriages or being neglected with the need to attain quality education. Also, that they were all from a similar community background. Findings may not be applicable across generations, as factors related to voluntary turnover are sometimes driven by societal expectations.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of previous research on knowledge child marriage in Cameroon. It introduces the causes of child marriage for the case study that comprises the focus of the research described in this thesis.

1. Introduction

Early marriage is not only a terrible violation of human rights brought on by sociocultural circumstances and poverty but also a substantial impediment to women's health. Child marriage has severe socioeconomic implications on families and communities. Children who marry are more likely to live in poverty because they are frequently required to drop out of school and work in low-wage occupations. Children who marry young are more likely to live in poverty because they are frequently required to drop out of school and work in low-wage occupations. As children born to teenage mothers are more likely to have low birth weights and endure malnutrition, which can result in delays in cognitive and developmental growth, child marriage further contributes to the cycle of poverty.⁵⁸

Another effect of this practice is the mortgage placed on the happiness and development of the girls, who are forced to choose between giving up and accepting lifelong marital issues brought on by generational strife with their husbands, a lack of sentimental ties that leads to conflict, the wife's infidelity and the consequent increase in domestic violence or running away. When girls are married before their bodies are prepared for sexual and reproductive life, they lose their youth and their right to an education and are also more likely to experience various reproductive health issues, such as sterility, difficult pregnancies, and deliveries, maternal and infant mortality, obstetric fistula, etc. One of these effects is that girls who marry too young end up having children.

Despite the lack of reliable statistics, discussions have emphasized how child marriage cases have increased since the arrival of the refugees. Regardless of the efforts of Cameroonian state services to raise awareness of their practices, the latter have developed several strategies to maintain their traditions such as wedding planning taking place at night, even in secret.

Child marriage continues to be practiced for fundamental social and cultural reasons that are deeply ingrained in the Gbaya and Peul, despite the numerous, equally detrimental consequences.⁵⁹ In Mbororo cultures, it is forbidden for girls to be unmarried. Eventually, they get married to avoid shame and to

⁵⁸ Andrea L. Ziegert And Dennis H. Sullivan, *Work And The Well-Being Of Poor Families With Children: When Work Is Not Enough Hardcover*, Lexington Books, September 2, 2022.

⁵⁹ Efevbera, Y., Bhabha, J., Farmer, P., & Fink, G., *Girl Child Marriage, Socioeconomic Status, And Undernutrition: Evidence From 35 Countries In Sub-Saharan Africa*. *Bmc Medicine*, 17(1), 55, 2021. Available At <https://doi.org/10.1186/S12916-019-1279-8> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

preserve the honour and dignity of the family. Girls are also forbidden from becoming pregnant before marriage. The girl must then experience her first period with her husband before the parents can arrange a marriage. This is highly practiced due to situational poverty, which forces parents to wed off their daughters at the first available chance. This not only leaves them with one less mouth to feed, but it also offers some benefits, such as the dowry.

The Civil code of Cameroon stipulates that a person must be fifteen years old before they can marry.⁶⁰ In actuality, this provision is not strictly followed, particularly in rural areas. Improvements have been made, but primarily in urban areas thanks to the Cameroonian government and partners. In rural areas, there has been little to no change. Convincing still requires a lot of work. Most reluctantly, a family in Borgop, where the father enrolled his two daughters in school at the age of thirteen, is an example of young girls who are over eighteen but can no longer find a husband because men already think they are too "old". Their mothers are concerned that they are not yet married and cite the example of other children who are no longer able to marry because community members already think they are too "old".⁶¹

2. Factors That Affect Child Marriage

A traditional African father, especially one from Lebialem, would like to educate their boy child more than their girl child, as much as parents want to see their children educated.⁶² This reflects the patriarchal structure of Cameroonian culture, where the education of a boy child is valued more highly than the girl child. For the reason that of their inferior status and low worth, girls do not have the same educational possibilities as boys. Girls will be compelled to leave school earlier on; this is the custom especially in homes where there is poverty and a lack of financial resources. The presumption for most parents is that boys are smarter than girls, do better in school, and make better educational investments.⁶³ The predominance of patrilineal inheritance systems is a feature that is sometimes overlooked in discussions of parental preference for boys' schooling. Boys are given preference when making investments in human capital because they are the main recipients of family assets. Parents often worry about squandering money on girls' education who are likely to get pregnant or married before finishing school.

⁶⁰ Article 52 of Order No. 81-02, *Civil Code*, 1981.

⁶¹ Yuying Tong, Yiqing Gan, Chunxue Zhang, *Whose Preference Matters More? Couple's Fertility Preferences And Realization In The Context Of China's Two-Child Policy*, *Journal Of Family Issues*, 2023.

⁶² Dr. Njungwa Zinkeng Martina and Dr. Diana Fobellah, *Cultural Issues Influencing Early Marriage And The Educational Attainment Of The Girl Child In Lebialem*, *Cameroon Merit Research Journal Of Art, Social Science And Humanities* (Issn: 2350-2258) Vol. 7(2) Pp. 027-037, August 2020. Available At <http://www.Meritresearchjournals.Org/Assh/Index.Htm> [Accessed On 1st March 2023].

⁶³ Michele Giannola, *Parental Investments And Intra-Household Inequality In Child Human Capital: Evidence From A Survey Experiment*, Working Paper No. 650, December 2022.

a) *The 'purity' of the bride*

The virginity of the bride is highly prized by people of all religions and social classes. Parents who want to have their girl marry early frequently cite the fear that she will lose her virginity before marriage as their driving force. The bride's "purity" is viewed as an unobservable asset in the marriage market in this theoretical model of young marriage. Agents in this model use a bride's age as a gauge of her expected "purity" based on the presumption that "purity" is constantly in danger and may be lost over time. This model has the intriguing ability to explain why child marriage may still be commonplace even in the absence of any inherent preference for young brides. The fact that parents view childbearing before marriage as taboo and a disgrace to the family makes this situation even worse.

Child marriages are frequently justified by cultural concerns about virginity, reproduction, and the upbringing of young girls. One way to make sure a wife is protected or firmly under male control, that she is submissive to her husband and puts in a lot of effort for her in-laws' household, and that the children she has are legitimate, is to marry her young. On the other hand, child marriage can take the form of a variety of customs intended to "protect" a girl from unrestricted sexual activity in many societies that value virginity before marriage. Child marriage has significant psychosocial and emotional repercussions due to the loss of adolescence, forced sexual relations, and denial of freedom and personal growth. The damage can be difficult to evaluate, and the impact can be stealthy and subtle. It includes abstract elements like the impact of a girl's reduced mobility and her confinement to the home and domestic duties.

b) *Payment of bride and dowry prices*

Among the most frequently mentioned potential causes of child marriage are bride and dowry prices. This system involves exchanging gifts or money for a bride because it provides strong financial incentives for families to think about child marriage. Over the course of history, most societies have adopted the cultural practice of making payments between the respective families of the bride and groom at the time of marriage. However, the frequency, magnitude, and direction of such payments differ between nations and over time. It has been suggested that dowries and bride prices are significant inducements for starting child marriage.⁶⁴ This is a general practice in some regions of Cameroon and is considered a traditional or customary norm and is part of the marital African traditional ceremonies. Furthermore, younger brides frequently must pay less dowry in comparison to older brides. This is likely because the former's youth is linked to virtues like beauty, virginity, fertility, and obedience. Due to the

⁶⁴ Lucia Corno, Alessandra Voena, *Selling Daughters: Child Marriage, Income Shocks And The Bride Price Tradition*, February 16, 2021.

lower dowries and reduced number of mouths to feed, parents may be motivated to marry off their daughters early. Girls may occasionally be married off to address financial difficulties. Negative economic shocks increase the likelihood of marriage. Girls who have access to education are more likely to be economically and socially independent, which lowers their risk of child marriage. Child marriage is typically prevalent in nations with lower levels of education and lack of access to education.⁶⁵ It also explains why raising the educational level of adolescent girls has contributed significantly to the rises in the average age of marriage that have been seen in the region so far.⁶⁶ Demographic and fertility studies have conclusively shown that the length of a girl's education and the decision to delay marriage are related.⁶⁷ Women who have seven or more years of education marry four years later average and give birth to fewer children than women with no education.⁶⁸ Since some of the girls are pulled out of school to get married while others do not have access to education, the precise nature of the interaction between education and marriage is not always obvious. As soon as a good marriage opportunity presents itself, girls are pulled out of school.

Young married children who wish to continue their education may be legally prohibited from doing so. The ability to facilitate and guarantee the effective enjoyment of other human rights is the essence of the rights to education and to health. Many lower-income families believe that the benefits of educating their girls will be too distant in the future to consider it a worthwhile investment. Families believe that a girl's education will only be advantageous to her husband's family, not her own.⁶⁹ Additionally, some parents think that girls do not need an education for their roles as wives and mothers, that education undermines cultural practices, and that it teaches the girl to reject tradition. The girl's inability to assert her own point of view as she matures and her lack of experience doing so are the most significant effects of this loss. Even at the most elementary level, education is about more than just acquiring technical skills and a means of subsistence. It also helps one develop the social "connectedness" or aptitude needed to access

⁶⁵ Missie Thurston, The Prevalence Of Child Marriage In Underdeveloped Nations Population Media Centre, 10th December 2020. Available At <https://www.Populationmedia.Org/The-Latest/The-Prevalence-Of-Child-Marriage-In-Underdeveloped-Nations> [Accessed On 15th March 2023].

⁶⁶ Andrea Lynch, When Girls' Lives Matter: Ending Forced And Early Marriage In Cameroon, Population Council. Available At <https://www.Ohchr.Org/Sites/Default/Files/Documents/Issues/Women/Wrgs/Forcedmarriage/Ngo/Populationcouncil17.Pdf> [Accessed On 15th March 2023].

⁶⁷ Demographics, Education, The Decline In Fertility: The Role Of Marriage And Education, 8th July 2022. Available At <https://Budgetmodel.Wharton.Upenn.Edu/Issues/2022/7/8/Decline-In-Fertility-The-Role-Of-Marriage-And-Education> [Accessed On 15th March 2023].

⁶⁸ Demographics, Education, The Decline In Fertility: The Role Of Marriage And Education, 8th July 2022. Available At <https://Budgetmodel.Wharton.Upenn.Edu/Issues/2022/7/8/Decline-In-Fertility-The-Role-Of-Marriage-And-Education> [Accessed On 15th March 2023].

⁶⁹ Johnson-Hanks, *Education, Ethnicity And Reproductive Practice In Cameroon, Population*, Année 2003 58-2 Pgs.153-179.

important resources for reducing poverty. By interacting with others, people develop the social skills and internal resources needed to take advantage of opportunities and resources, as well as to create social networks for future support and assistance. Evidence suggests that children of young, illiterate mothers are less likely to start their education, perform well in school, or continue their education beyond the requirements. Their daughters are more likely to quit school, get married young, and repeat the cycle. As shown in the conceptual diagram in the Appendix, it is evident from the literature that cultural factors influencing child marriage and the educational attainment of girls intersect.

c) Gender inequality

Most often, the concept of child marriage has been alluded to younger girls getting married to older men. As a result, none of the other social, cultural, or economic causes of child marriage can be understood without considering the lower status given to girls and women in all the societies under consideration. Child marriage has gender inequality as one of its three main causes, effects, and aggravating factors.

A significant variation in cultural beliefs and practices can frequently be seen in the rural areas of the Cameroon region. However, a lot of people still adhere to the notion that adults have very different roles in the home and that women generally have it worse. These beliefs may have their roots in customs and laws from colonial times, in traditional practices, and in the two most popular religions in the area, Islam and Christianity.

Girls are more susceptible to child marriage than boys are because of discriminatory formal and informal laws, social norms, cultural practices, and religious beliefs. Women are frequently excluded from decisions that affect them, their families, and the community. The male line typically holds authority over land and property as well as the formal family headship. Since boys are typically given more social value, investments in girls' health, education, and development are underfunded. Girls are made subservient and vulnerable by these social injustices, increasing their risk of child marriage and other social ills.

d) Cultural and religious norms

Religious and cultural norms that are upheld not only make girls more susceptible to child marriage but may even actively encourage it. Local customs interpret Islamic scripture as allowing and, in some cases, even encouraging child marriage with long-standing Islamic populations. This is a significant factor in why child marriage is so common in nations in the Northwest Southwest (NWSW) region of Cameroon with sizable Muslim populations. The practice of child marriage is occasionally openly supported by powerful religious figures, who also strongly oppose efforts to stop it.

Child marriage is widely regarded by practicing Muslim Cameroonians as being in line with the Quran, about 20% of the country's population practices Islam. Overall, child marriage is not seen as wrong or detrimental to the best interests of the child by the public.⁷⁰

According to reports, several community members think that child marriage is a beneficial part of culture and tradition and helps girls prepare for adulthood.⁷¹ With an emphasis on childrearing and household maintenance, these same community members also tend to prescribe specific roles for women and girls. According to reports, poor parents in Cameroon and Mali occasionally look for wealthy men specifically to give their daughters a way out of poverty.⁷² Three-quarters of the men who took child brides in Cameroon were wealthy compared to other members of the country's society, both in rural and urban areas.

The family of the bride typically receives a bride price or dowry during a marriage ceremony in many parts of Africa in the form of money, livestock, or other goods. Dowry or bride price negotiations can turn into a tactic for the survival of poor families in communities where economic transactions are essential to the marriage process. Children who are in transactional relationships - which can occasionally result in child marriage - are more susceptible to abuse and neglect due to poverty. The 'sugar daddies' phenomenon, where older men ask for sex from kids and teenagers in exchange for cash or other goods, is reported to exist in other African countries as well not limited to Cameroon such as Kenya, South Africa, and Uganda.⁷³ Even though these relationships frequently result in child marriage and premarital pregnancies, in some cases parents encourage transactional sex and relationships to secure resources for the family.

e) *Lack of access to education*

Girls are less likely to get married as children if education gives them the tools to be financially and socially independent. This explains why there is a consistent link between a lack of access to education and child marriage within nations as well as why rates of child marriage are highest in nations with lower

⁷⁰ Jude Thaddeus Njikem, *Imagining A Future Free Of Child Marriage In Cameroon*, 28 October 2016.

⁷¹ United Nations Children's Fund, *Innocenti Research Centre, Early Marriage – Child Spouses, Innocenti Digest*, No. 7 – March 2001.

⁷² Center For Human Rights, *A Report On Child Marriage In Africa*, 2018.

⁷³ Luke, Nancy, *Confronting The "Sugar Daddy" Stereotype: Age And Economic Asymmetries And Risky Sexual Behavior In Urban Kenya*. *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 2005, pgs. 6-14. 10.1363/Ifpp.31.06.05. Available At https://www.researchgate.net/publication/7853640_Confronting_The_Sugar_Daddy_Stereotype_Age_And_Economic_Asymmetries_And_Risky_Sexual_Behavior_In_Urban_Kenya [Accessed On 7th March 2023].

levels of education.⁷⁴ It also clarifies why raising adolescent girls' educational standards has been a key contributor to the rise in the average marriage age seen worldwide.

Even though both boys and girls in the rural areas of Cameroon have been reported to at least attain the minimum level of education, socio-cultural barriers undermine girls' performance.⁷⁵ Several risk factors come together in this area. If education is expensive, either directly or because it prevents a child from contributing to the household economy, a family living in poverty may choose to educate only some of its children. In this situation, boys will be given over girls due to the cultural belief that boys represent the family line.

f) Inadequacy of registration procedures

The prohibition of child marriage is significantly hampered by the inadequate birth and marriage registration processes in Cameroon, especially in rural areas.⁷⁶ Despite the Maputo Protocol's Article 6(d) requirement that all marriages "shall be registered," unrecorded and unregistered unions are frequent in Africa.⁷⁷ There are a few reasons why child marriage marriages are not registered or recorded. An example is, there are particularly few laws governing the registration of marriages conducted in accordance with religious and customary law. According to the type of marriage, marriage registries and registration procedures frequently vary in plural legal contexts. Various marriages are frequently governed by separate laws that are frequently unrelated. As a result of these discrepancies, registrations become inaccurate, which leads to non-compliance with registration rules. The resultant effect is that marriages continue to go unrecorded and unregistered even though the law requires and specifies clear procedures for registration of marriages, due to the logistical and administrative challenges that make registration laborious and expensive.

Travel expenses to the closest registration location add to the overall cost of registration, which explains why rural residents frequently have the lowest rates of marriage registration. The biggest impact on those is the marriage registration's accessibility. Communities most prone to child marriage include rural areas, those who are less wealthy and educated, as well as those who live in poverty.

⁷⁴ UNICEF, The Power of Education to End Child Marriage, September 19, 2022. Available At <https://Data.Unicef.Org/Resources/Child-Marriage-And-Education-Data-Brief/> [Accessed On 15th March 2023].

⁷⁵ Tchombe, Therese Mungah, *Access Of Girls To Basic Education In Cameroon*, Unesco Regional Office For Education In Africa (Senegal), *Éducation Des Femmes En Afrique*, 1993. Available At https://Unesdoc.Unesco.Org/Ark:/48223/Pf0000149321_Eng [Accessed On 15th March 2023].

⁷⁶ Dr. Ashwane Budoo And Darsheene Ramnauth, *A Report On Child Marriage In Africa*, The Centre For Human Rights At The University Of Pretoria, 2018. Available At https://Www.Chr.Up.Ac.Za/Images/Researchunits/Wru/News/Files/2018_Child_Marriage_Report_En.Pdf [Accessed On 13th March 2023].

⁷⁷ Article 6 (D) African Union, *Protocol To The African Charter On Human And People's Rights On The Rights Of Women In Africa*, 11 July 2003, Available At: <https://Www.Refworld.Org/Docid/3f4b139d4.Html> [Accessed On 10th July 2023].

In connection with this, the lack of birth registration procedures in most African countries makes it impossible to enforce the ban on child marriage. The best way to confirm that parties are of legal age to marry and can give their consent is through birth certificates issued at the time of the marriage.⁷⁸ In rural areas of Cameroon the lack of birth registration was cited as a contributing factor to early child marriage.⁷⁹ According to reports, girls would fabricate electoral cards or fake birth certificates to get married.⁸⁰

g) *Armed conflict and sexual violence*

Child marriage is much more likely to occur in environments marked by armed conflict and instability. To maintain control over and exercise dominance over communities, rebel groups and members of national armies frequently resort to rape, sexual violence, kidnapping, torture, and other atrocities. Child marriages happen as a direct and/or indirect result of these violations, putting women and children in particular danger. Existing risk factors for child marriage are aggravated by conflict as well. These factors cause young girls to be traded into marriage to relieve economic pressure because conflict disrupts education and other basic services.

Child marriage is occasionally seen as a way for girls to flee the conflict in the NWSW Cameroonian region. An example is in August 2021 the Logone-Birni Arrondissement, Logone and Chari Department, Far North Region of Cameroon, experienced communal clashes.⁸¹ These clashes caused the displacement of thousands of people. As peace began to settle in and a proportion of displaced populations returned to their places of origin, a new inter-communal conflict related to access to and control of natural resources erupted on 5th December 2021, leading to the destruction of more than forty villages and new population displacements.⁸² The main factors behind the return of populations are access to land and improved stability.

⁷⁸ African Committee Of Experts On The Rights And Welfare Of The Child, General Comment No. 2 *On Article 6 Of The Acrwc: "The Right To A Name, Registration At Birth, And To Acquire A Nationality"*, 16 April 2014, Acerwc/Gc/02 (2014), Available At: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/54db21734.html> [Accessed 10th July 2023].

⁷⁹ Andrea Lynch, *When Girls' Lives Matter: Ending Forced And Early Marriage In Cameroon*, Population Council. Available At <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/women/wrgs/forcedmarriage/ngo/populationcouncil17.pdf> [Accessed On 15th March 2023].

⁸⁰ Andrea Lynch, *When Girls' Lives Matter: Ending Forced And Early Marriage In Cameroon*, Population Council. Available At <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/women/wrgs/forcedmarriage/ngo/populationcouncil17.pdf> [Accessed On 15th March 2023].

⁸¹ OCHA, *Cameroon Humanitarian Bulletin Issue N°28 / December 2021*, Format Situation Report Source, 2022. Available At <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-bulletin-issue-n-28-december-2021> [Accessed On 12th July 2023].

⁸² The UNHCR And The World Bank Group, *Forced Displacement By The Boko Haram Conflict In The Lake Chad Region*, 2016. Available At <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/52535> [Accessed On 12th July 2023].

CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

This chapter will outline the research techniques the researcher will use to conduct the study, including the research design, study population, development of the research instrument and determining its validity and reliability, methods for collecting data, and the appropriate statistical treatment of data.

1. Introduction

The ongoing conflict between militant Ambazonian groups and the Cameroonian government in the NWSW regions of Cameroon is known as the Anglophone Crisis (French: Crise anglophone), also known as the Ambazonia War or the Cameroonian Civil War. It is a part of the country's long-standing Anglophone problem. Due to the Anglophone crisis, which started in 2016, 700,000 children have been impacted by school closures in Cameroon's NWSW regions.⁸³

An important aspect of the Anglophone crisis is lack of access to education. Strikes over educational issues have fuelled the conflict. Children who are impacted by the Anglophone crisis are more likely to be involved in child labour, child marriage, child abuse, and gender-based violence (GBV). Some parents rely on child marriages as a means of providing for their families, some adolescent girls even resort to prostitution as a means of subsistence.

People living in the affected regions have been impacted by the Anglophone crisis. No matter if they are homeless, raising kids on their own, voluntarily, or involuntarily taking part in child marriage marriages, struggling to make ends meet, or all the above. The hostile environment of hostility and pervasive sexual violence has been difficult for community members living in conflict regions to navigate.

2. Research Design

Following a review of most of the literature on the effect of child marriage on education in the state of Cameroon, whose results are presented in the previous sections of the thesis. I concluded that using a qualitative design and a questionnaire would be appropriate because it allowed the collection of data from the various regions of Cameroon collecting information from respondents hailing from both rural areas and urban areas to portray a difference in opinions in matters related to child marriage and children's right to access education. I tried to identify solutions to the issue, as well as to support and fulfil the study's goals. I also tried to determine how child marriage affected access to education.

The assumption that respondents will feel more at ease completing an anonymous questionnaire is another justification for choosing a questionnaire strategy in the context of the research goal. Respondents have a clear way to express their own opinions and are not constrained in thought thanks to

⁸³ Key Informant Interview 16/11/2020; OCHA 31/05/2019.

the open-ended nature of the questions. If an in-person interview had taken place, this would not have been the case unless specific preconditions were established to make the respondent feel at ease.

The main tool for gathering data was a questionnaire. The prepared instrument was designed to address child marriage's effects on education. The questionnaire had four sections: Section A was designed to collect anonymous general information from respondents, such as their age, gender, marital status, etc. With the aim of understanding the respondent's partner and the idea of marriage from their perspective. Section B was directed at the applicants who answered affirmatively, confirming that they were married or were divorced, or widowed. It explained the marital status of the respondents touching on the type of marriage and age at which the respondents were ideally married. The discussion of child marriage was the focus of Section C. The goal of section D, which was the last section, was to discuss education and understand how child marriage affects the idea of education, particularly for children.

The questionnaire was printed and given to the respondents in addition to being tabulated into an online answering format for those with the necessary technical know-how. An online link was shared to respondents for ease of access. In other words, the respondents must have internet access. Due to the researcher's geographic location, the ALDEPA team, a Non-Profit Organization with their headquarters in Cameroon, was contacted for assistance to collect data in the Cameroonian regions, particularly rural and urban areas. Thus, data was gathered using a questionnaire that was completed both online and remotely in person through assistance.

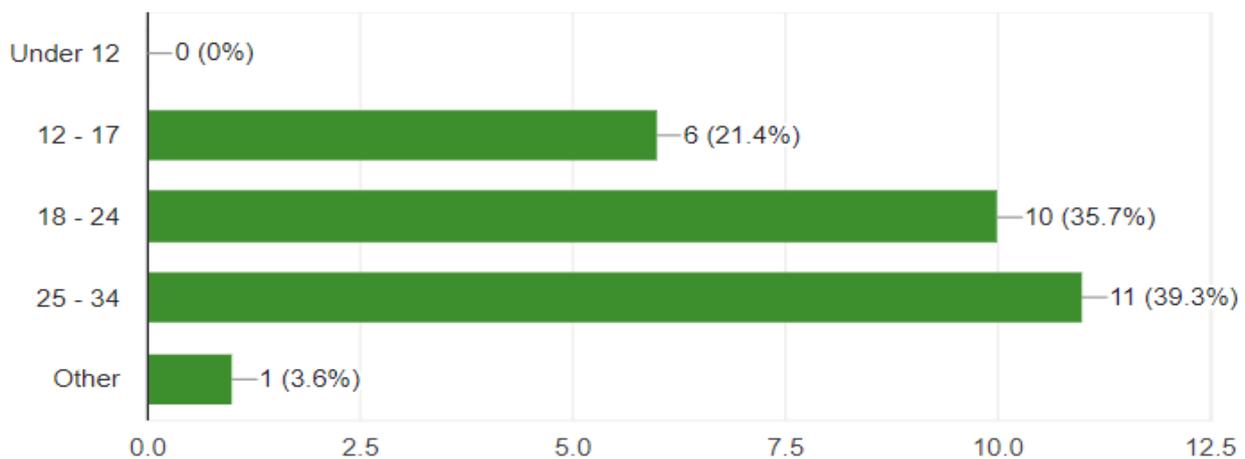
3. General Information - Respondents

Respondents in this study were from both urban and rural areas of Cameroon, not limited those hailing from the NWSW region. This was one of the most critical steps in maintaining the success of this study. All respondents were selected by random sampling. This sampling technique was selected to give room for a fair representation on the general Cameroonian population. This allowed the researcher to draw conclusions about the Cameroonian population based on data from a small sample of the population, rather than examining everyone, as this would have proved challenging.

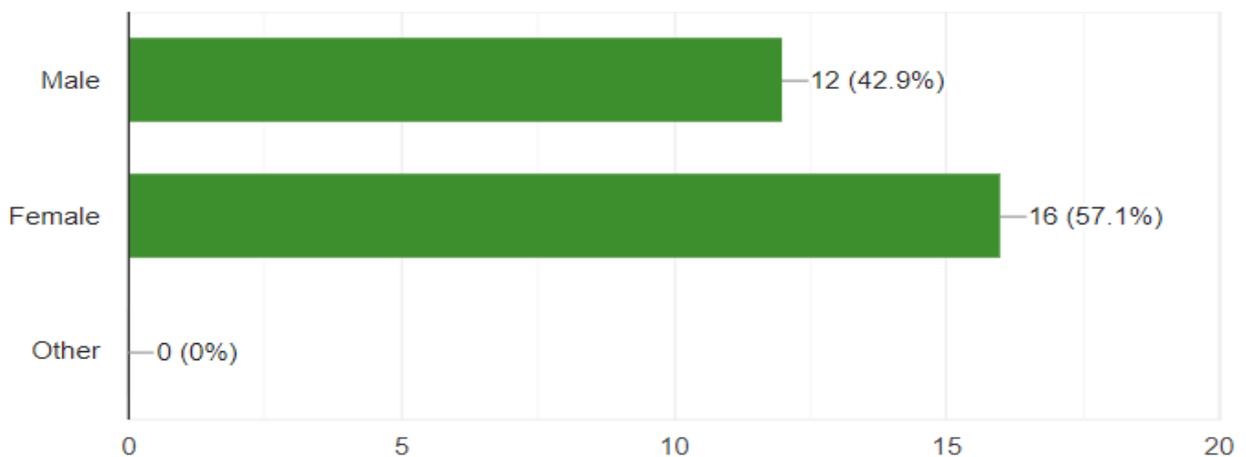
Both children and adults were included in the target population, which was inclusive of gender identities. In the case of children, consent forms were made available to obtain parental or guardian approval. The target respondents included Cameroonian nationals, refugees, and people with Cameroonian residency permits, with a focus on those affected by the internal regional crisis. The respondents were in a sense either employed or unemployed, homemakers or self-employed, students pursuing higher education, or had completed at least primary school.

Although the respondents gave brief informal account of how the internal regional crisis had affected child marriage, children's access to education, and how it had worsened gender inequality, their accounts only give a snapshot of life within the conflict zones.

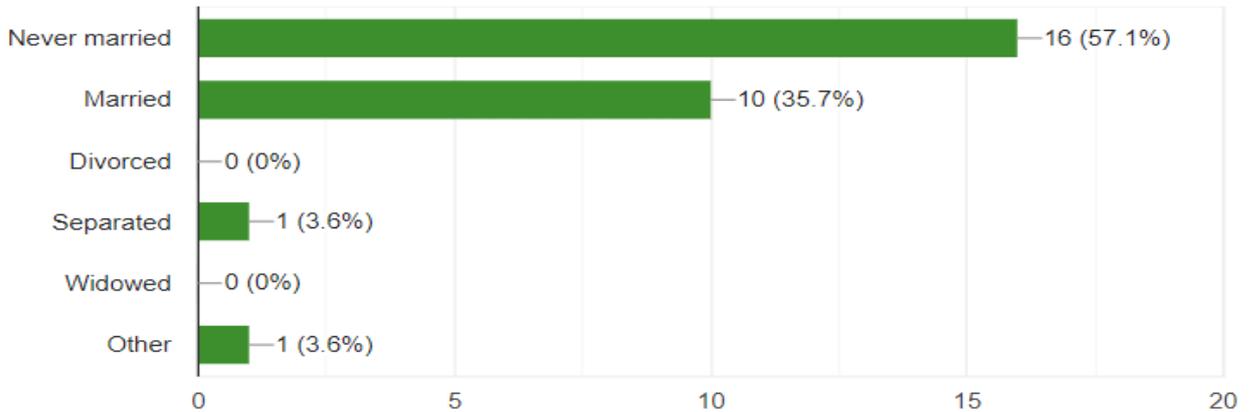
The information gathered only helped to better understand the remote situation in Cameroon as it was the primary focus of the research; it does not necessarily represent the general situation for the entire Cameroonian population. The collected data were organized into themes to aid in a better analysis, paying attention to both large-scale narratives and small, everyday narratives that emerged during the interviews. The general background information of the respondents is presented in the images below (personal identifying information has been withheld).



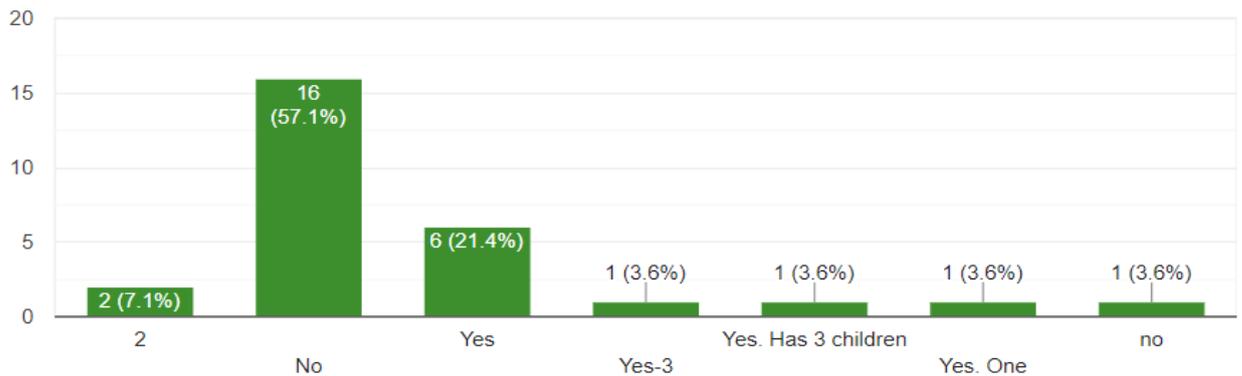
In relation to respondents who were below the age of 18, consent forms were issued by representatives from ALDEPA.



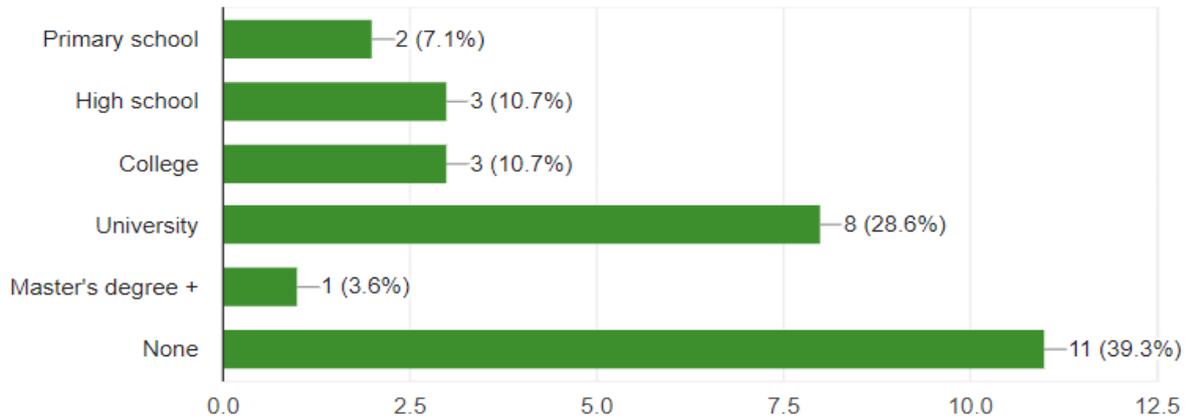
The representation of female respondents was higher than that of male respondents. With a difference of 14.2% in margin.



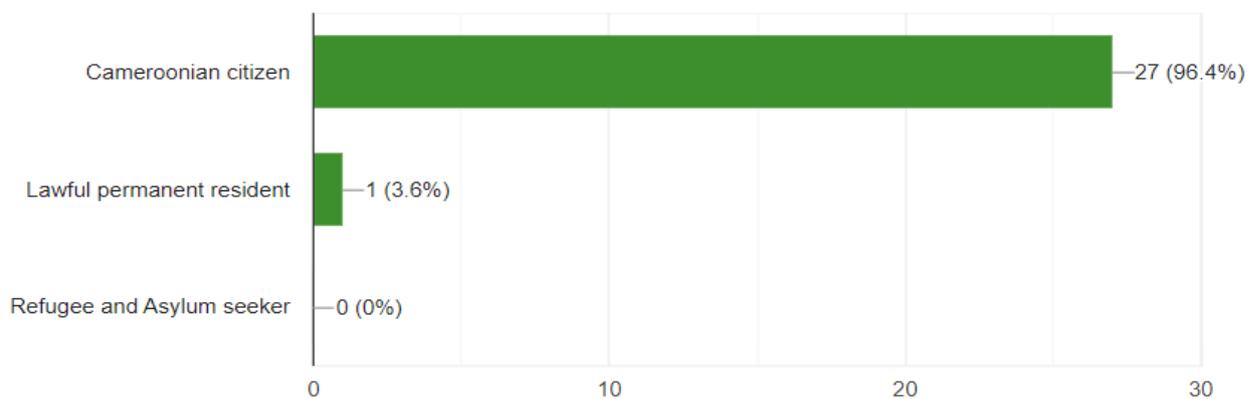
Majority of the respondents identified themselves as not been previously married. Regardless, their input was key since it brought to light to their opinions on the thematic topic of child marriage and a child’s right to education.



Some respondents indicated they had children; others did not reveal this information. Presumably because of the value for a private family life and were not comfortable sharing this information regardless of express anonymity to their identity. The highly indicative no. of children that was common for most respondents was three. While most respondents replied that they currently did not have children but were open to bearing some in the future should finances allow for such planning to be awarded.



When it came to educational advancements, the data indicates that majority of the respondents had attained a formal form of education till the university level. Some of them even commented that they had received informal form of education and recommended that this should be taken into consideration when reviewing educational development of children. However, at the very least, an attainment of primary school education was a thematic area while university education was a coveted by some respondents as an educational advancement. It was not ideally, a path many of whom pondered to follow or would have their children seek.



The specific region of focus for the thesis is the state of Cameroon. Cameroon hosts about two million persons of concern, including one million internally displaced persons, 460,000 refugees and asylum-seekers and 466,000 IDP returnees.⁸⁴ The refugees are predominantly from the Central African Republic and Nigeria, while the internally displaced persons mainly come from Cameroon's Far North, North-West, and South-West regions.⁸⁵ Most of the 332,000 CAR refugees reside in towns and villages in

⁸⁴ UNHCR Cameroon Website. Available At <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/cameroon> [Accessed On 1st July 2023].

⁸⁵ UNHCR Cameroon Website. Available At <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/cameroon> [Accessed On 1st July 2023].

Cameroon's eastern façade, while nearly 120,000 Nigerian refugees live in Cameroon's Far North Region.⁸⁶ 52% of the refugees are women and girls, and 55% are children.⁸⁷ 51% of internally displaced persons are children.⁸⁸

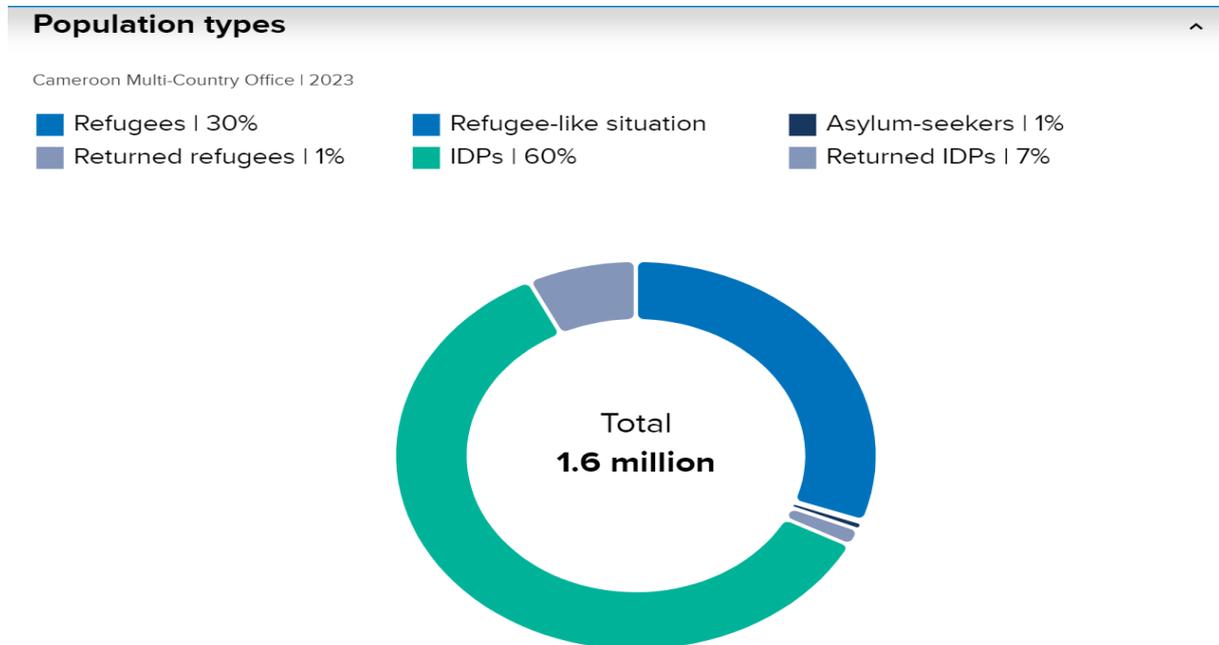
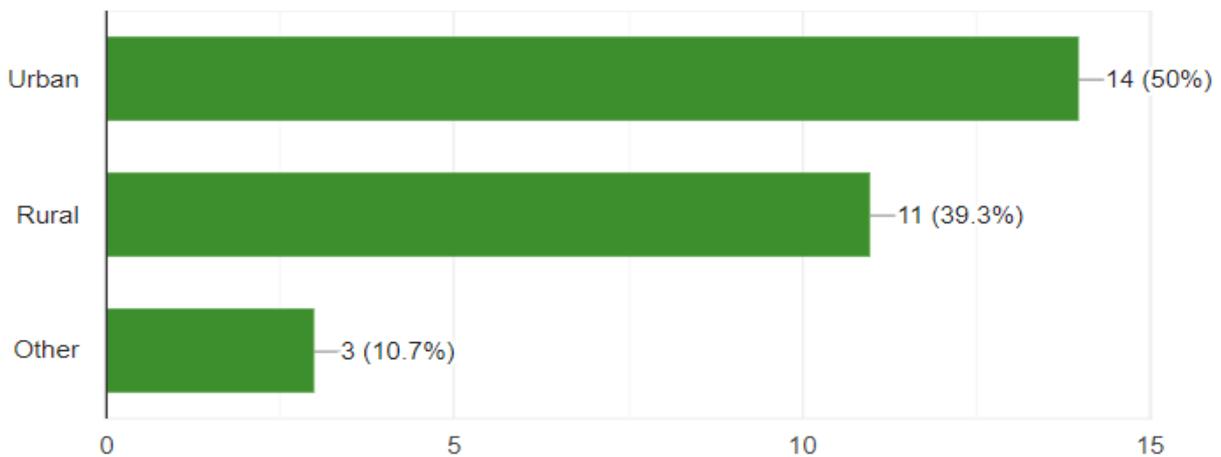


Image source: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/operations/cameroon-multi-country-office>

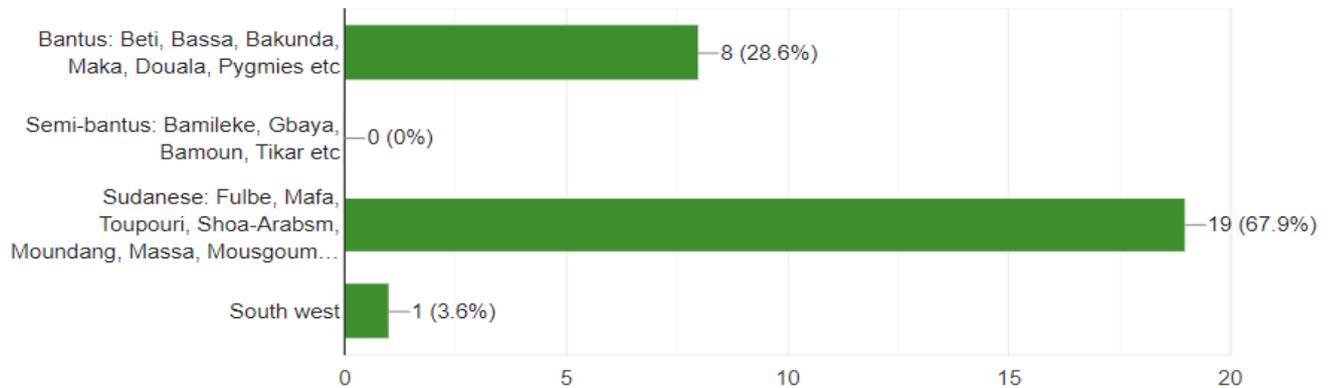


Majority of the respondents come from the urban region – industrialized towns. It is important to note that the prevalence of child marriage is higher in the rural community regions as opposed to the urban regions. A reason for this may be presumed to be due to difficulty in attaining formal form of education due to economic conditions experienced by community members.

⁸⁶ UNHCR Cameroon Website. Available At <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/cameroon> [Accessed On 1st July 2023].

⁸⁷ UNHCR Cameroon Website. Available At <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/cameroon> [Accessed On 1st July 2023].

⁸⁸ UNHCR Cameroon Website. Available At <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/cameroon> [Accessed On 1st July 2023].



Cameroon has an extraordinary mixture of populations with more than 250 tribes which are found in three main ethnic groups. The most notable tribes are:

- BANTUS: Beti, Bassa, Bakundu, Maka, Douala, Pygmies...
- SEMI-BANTUS: Bamileke, Gbaya, Bamoun, Tikar...
- SUDANESE: Fulbe, Mafa, Toupouri, Shoa-Arabs, Moundang, Massa, Mousgoum...

4. Data Analysis

The data analysis plan was to use the collected data to include several procedures that would ultimately lead to the study's conclusions or result regarding the effect of child marriage on education. The procedures followed are as follows:

- a) Summarizing the numerical data - this was done through a tally that will be based on the certain answers received from the respondents in the questionnaires using frequency and percentage.
- b) After the data was collected it was organized and analysed – for close-ended questions frequency tables were drawn and from these, the data was presented in pie diagrams and bar graphs. On the other hand, open-ended questions were analysed through reviewing quantitative content aiming to assess emerging trends and concepts around the thematic topic of child marriage and right to access to education.

Most of the data was collected in June 2023 when the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. The instructions attached to each questionnaire requested the respondents to complete the questionnaire by the end of the month of June 2023. The questionnaire was designed in the English language. However, the remote questions were conducted in either English, French language, or local languages to avoid any potential misinterpretation of the questions in the questionnaire.

An ALDEPA staff representative was consulted to assist in translating the questionnaire and engaging the respondents at the remote level of collecting data. The ALDEPA staff representative informed the selected respondents about the purpose of the questionnaire, either individually or during a group meeting, and distributed the printed pen-and-paper self-administered questionnaires.

All the respondents received the questionnaire in a similar order to ensure consistency when analyzing the responses to draw conclusions from the research results. The questionnaire was structured in such a way that similar questions were posed to all respondents in a similar order.

The ALDEPA staff representative received a detailed briefing via telephone, email, and the online form of the questionnaire prior to the distribution of the questionnaire. In these briefings, the researcher shared the purpose of the study, the process of data collection and the consent forms, and the cover letters that were attached to each questionnaire.

A few respondents complained about completing the questionnaire during their normal working hours at the expense of some business tasks they needed to accomplish. The respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire within a period of two weeks. The questionnaire responses were typed in English and sent to the researcher for analysis.

All respondents were informed about the ethical principles of this study, the requirement for consent, and the confidentiality/anonymity of the information shared in advance via the cover letters attached to each questionnaire. The cover letters explained the purpose of the study and informed the respondents that the questionnaire was authorized by the University of Padua – Human Rights Centre, under supervision. Participation in the questionnaire was purely voluntary and at the respondents' discretion. It was also stated in the cover letter that there would be no negative implications if someone decided not to participate. The respondents were then asked to return the questionnaires anonymously to the ALDEPA staff representative for remote responses and for online responses to simply click submit for the online version of the questionnaire.

5. Limitations

This thesis has the following limitations:

- a) The size of the sample was relatively small – 28 respondents. A larger sample would have been ideal to augment the reliability of the research.
- b) In some cases, respondents refused to offer their opinions, some expressed that the state of Cameroon has over 250 tribes, therefore, the question that asked them to identify their tribe was in their opinion 'too sensitive a topic' to allow for room for active participation.

6. Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis of this study is:

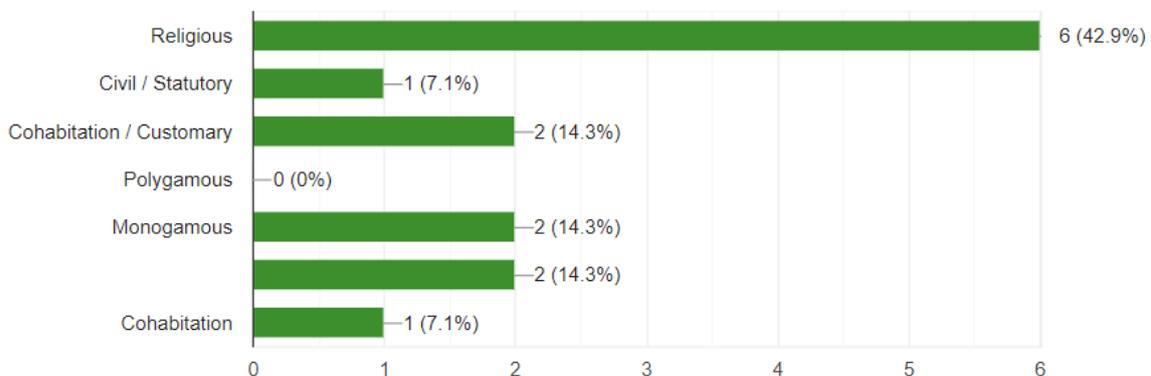
- a) Increased cases of child marriage are among the many causes of disinterest in educational goals among Cameroonian adolescents and adults.
- b) There is a difference in educational goal attainment for single and married adolescents especially among young girls as opposed to young boys.
- c) Children will have higher educational goals if one of their parents have a college degree.

CHAPTER IV - FINDINGS

This chapter analyses the quality data and reviews, the compilation of the questionnaire and the results and analysis of the quantitative findings of the study. The findings are also discussed in the light of previous research findings and available literature, where applicable, to identify similarities and differences between this study and previous studies and literature. A comprehensive description of the research methodology was given in Chapter III. To complete this study properly, it is necessary to analyse the data collected to test the hypothesis and answer the research questions.

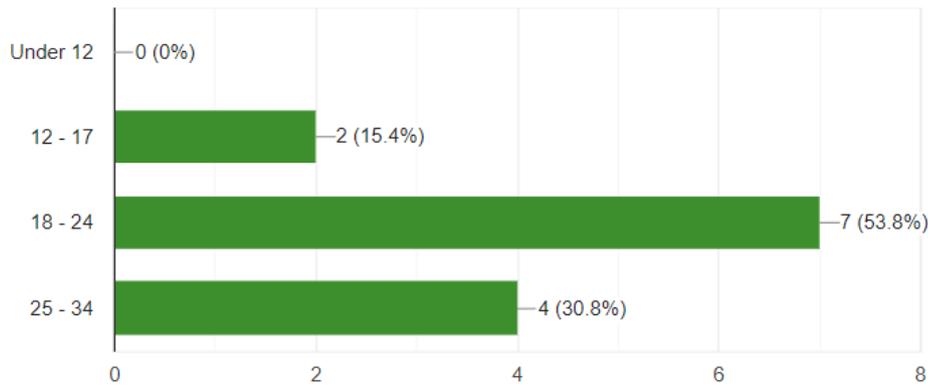
1. Questionnaire Section B: Summary of Respondents Replies

What type of marriage are/were you in?



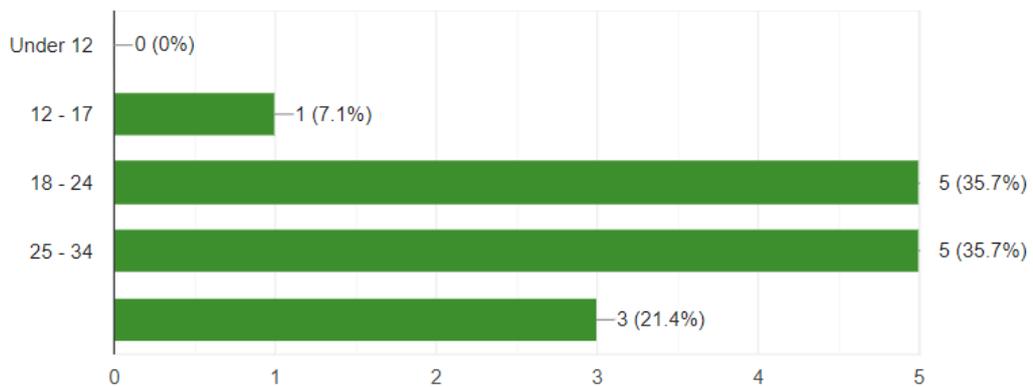
In response to the question on the type of marriage. The data collected indicates that: Religious received 6 responses, Civil / Statutory received 1 response, Cohabitation / Customary received 2 responses, Polygamous received 0 responses, Monogamous received 2 responses, Cohabitation received 1 response, Other received 14 responses.

How old were you when you were married?



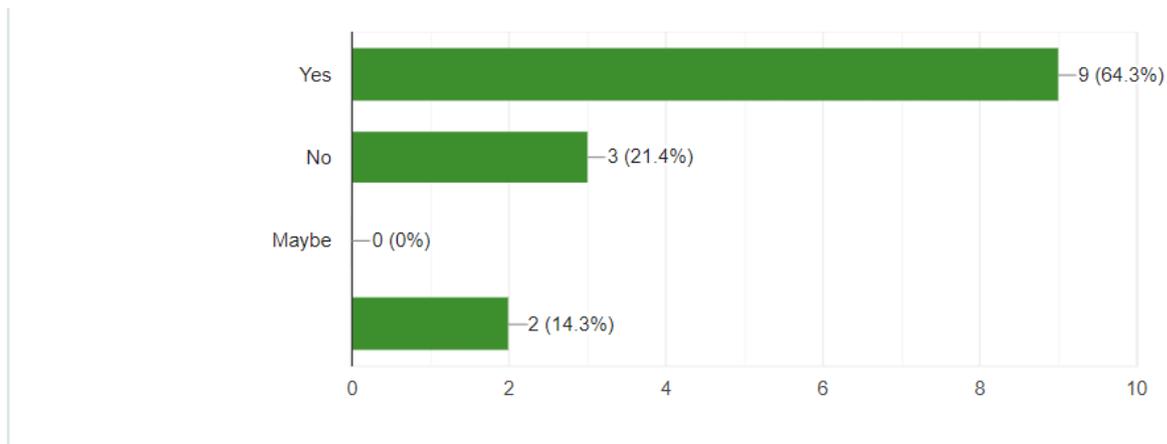
Between the age of 12 to 17 had 2 responses, 7 respondents indicated that they were married between the age of 18 -24. 4 respondents replied that they were married between the age of 25 to 34, 1 respondent did not indicate their age of marriage.

How old was your partner when he / she was married to you?



1 respondent indicated the age of their partner as being between the age of 12 to 17. 5 respondents indicated as the age between 18 to 24. 5 respondents mentioned that their partner was between the age of 25 – 34 and 3 respondents indicated that their partner married them at the age of beyond 34.

Were your parents involved in your marriage ceremony such as pre-planned marriage?



9 respondents replied that their parents were involved in the marriage ceremony, 3 respondents replied that they were not involved, and 2 respondents indicated other.

2. Questionnaire Section C : Summary of Respondents Replies

What is the usual age for marriage (boys / girls) in your community / tribe?



The respondent's majority response was that children especially girls should marry before attaining the age of 18. While in turn, young boys should marry at a later age, ideally between the age of 18 – 24 the main reason being due to the developmental differences and maturity among both genders.

What do you think is the appropriate age for boys / girls to marry? Explain why? Is this different for boys?



Summarized replies from respondents

Female gender

- Has a sense of maturity and taking care of a man and the household in gender especially from a submissiveness perspective.
- Should have a stable form of employment or be running a business to support two people in a home.
- Does not help parents at home.
- The girl is of age – meaning the age of puberty.
- Should find a husband early lest lose her ability to conceive healthy children in the future.
- Understands challenges to be faced when conceiving.

Male gender

- Boys must go to work and can take care of his family.
- Men will lose their sexual drive.
- Has the ability meet the needs of the family before committing.
- Has an understanding on how to keep his house in order – keeping the female gender submissive.

Both genders

- Are adults and more mature to handle the many different challenges that may arise from marriage.
- Have an idea of life and can produce healthy off springs.
- Have a sense of responsibility and accountability therefore can take care of themselves.
- Can flee from youthful temptations of life such as early pre-marital copulation.

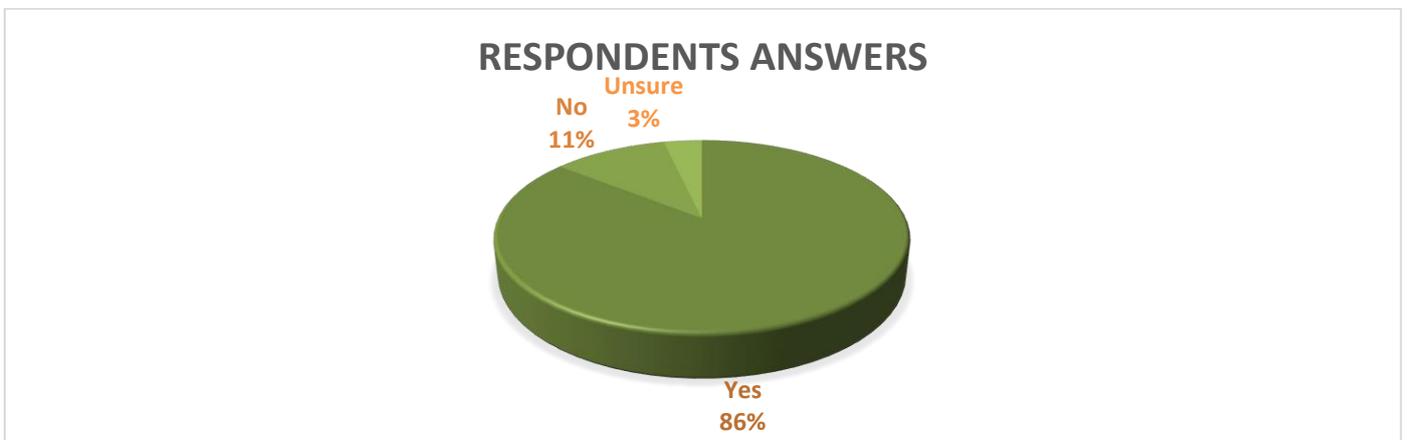
Do you know what the legal age for marriage? What do you think about this?



Summarized replies from respondents

- The age of eighteen is a globally accepted age since it is the age one can get employed and earn a living for his or her family.
- The age eighteen is too low. It should be increased, at least it protects children.
- The age eighteen is ideal since the girl is ready for pregnancy with lower risk and can maintain her household.
- At the age of eighteen the girl has reached maturity to stay at home and take care of her husband.
- The age of eighteen is too high and should be lowered.
- The age of eighteen is ideal since certain girl would have been fully developed and will have the capacity to procreate.

Do some girls/ boys marry later or not at all? If yes, why? What do the members of the tribe / community think about this?



Summarized replies from respondents

- As soon as a girl is close to turning the age of 18, a husband has been reserved for her. The community is in support of this.
- Since Cameroon is a third world country, majority of the people still live in rural areas. Their source of livelihood is farming and herding animals. Community members cherish and try to uphold traditional/cultural ways of doing things among them is the practice of child marriage – targeting them in their mid-teenage years.
- Marriage is seen as a better pursuit in life as opposed to further educational development.
- If not married, young girls turn out to be deviant, lack submissiveness to their husbands.
- Neglected or stale late marriages for most women are prominent because of the kind of promiscuous lifestyle girls lived before marrying their partner.
- Child marriage is seen as a form of respect to ancestors.
- Members of the tribes / community believe that if they marry early, they can support themselves as opposed to later since community members believe that they have means and do not necessarily require support.
- The community considers that they are already of marriageable age and can manage a household.
- Members of the community think that the reason for late marriages is due to advancement in education and technology.
- Child marriage is encouraged since the community encourages it.
- Child marriage is encouraged to avoid challenges during childbirth or not being as youthful.
- They marry later in life due to the lack of a suitable suitor or the girl is unlucky to find a husband, the community judges them for failure to achieve the marital goal at an early age.
- They marry later due to the boy not having the means to support the family.

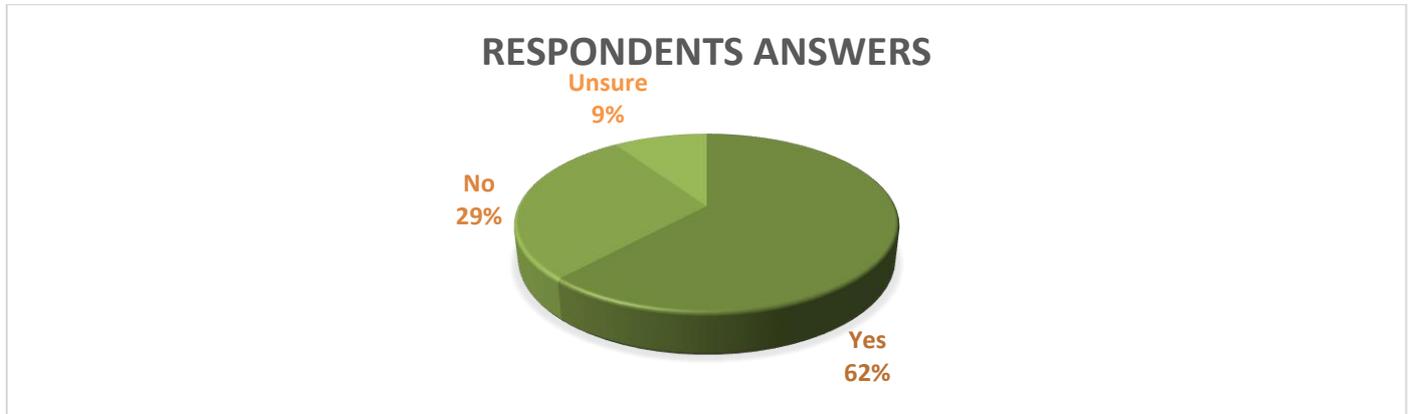
Has the attitude revolving child marriage evolved over time? If yes, how, and why? Are you able to link any of these changes to events in your timeline?



Summarized replies from respondents

- Community members are becoming aware that the aim is not to subject children to child marriage.
- Modernization is a factor which has really help with the aspect of child marriage this is because some parents were able to gain access to education or at least have been sensitized about the disadvantages of child marriages. As time goes by and as we continue to develop the practice is slowly loosing its 'value' among the community as people now know and understand better.
- It is part of the tradition, rooted to our ancestral ways changing the cultural norms is difficult.
- It is now an easily spotted as a crime to marry off children and punishable by law.
- There is also value of education and enjoying of life before marriage.
- There has been awareness created among community members a common sense of growth and development towards changing times and recognition that child marriage destroys a child's future.
- A little bit of change has come about children being busy in school has delayed courtship and the thoughts of child marriage.
- There is consideration and awareness of the risk of early pregnancies. The advent of the internet and education have contributed to this change.
- The community is advised on the risks of child marriage and try not to practice this. Awareness campaigns enlighten a lot.
- There is no change because everyone knows that at the age of fourteen, this is normal to get married.

Are there some ideas/customs/attitudes that promote or discourage child marriage? Have these ideas/attitudes, etc. changed over time? Why? In what ways?



Summarized replies from respondents

- Family members are already against child marriage thanks to the long tenure of education.
- In our community the older members have always believed that the primary role of a girl child is always bearing children, as they have always considered them as a source of wealth. The boy child has always been meant to start a family because the moment he transitions to adult hood his main purpose is to provide for his family. However, over the course of the past half a decade the efforts to do away with these marriages have really been stepped up because the governmental and non-governmental agencies dedicated to this topic have really been working hard and doing a good job.
- Before girls would study up to college and marry now girls' study up to professor level which prolongs/ delays the time to marriage.
- There are attitudes that encourage it for collection of bride price. The attitude has changed because a girl is more beneficial to her family educated.
- The belief that women cannot stay alone in a setting and be complete. Has not changed.
- Social media platforms have alluded to changes in community.
- Marriage is sweet when it is started early.
- There are ideas like education which has massively brought positive thinking and has managed to make people discourage child marriages
- What discourages child marriage is poverty and the risks of childbirth. Educating children is more important.
- The attitude of work, courage and even wealth can promote child marriage in boys. For the girl, when she learns how to take care of the house, she can get married. Nowadays, these ideas and attitude have

changed. The boy and the girl can get married at the desired time and most often after studies or after obtaining a stable source of income.

- The awareness campaigns against child marriage enlighten us more and the importance of education and the many risks that the young girl will face.
- Parents already prevent their daughters under the age of eighteen from getting married.
- Other community members do not mind about the age limit and already are sending girls to marriage before attaining the age of eighteen.
- Some people in the community find that the child is still very young. They are then asked to wait or find another woman.
- Men find women marriageable if they have a lower level of education.
- Custom favours the marriage of children at an early or matured age. These ideas have not changed over time as the community believes it is good practice. The practice is considered better for members of community.
- The community rather encourages marriage for fear that their daughter will end up without a husband and will not continue their generation.

What are some of the positive or negative consequences of child marriage?

Summarized replies from respondents

- Conception challenges that may lead to still birth etc.
- Homecare – knowledge or lack thereof.
- Lack of opportunities or educational advancement.
- Having families early is good children are raised early
- Financial instability, poverty.
- Divorce.
- Domestic violence cases and gender-based violence cases increase.
- High risk of infection with STIs and STDs.
- Poor family planning.
- Child marriage leads to increased education dropouts.
- Reproductive health issues arise.
- No negative consequences.
- Empowerment of young girls.
- Respect for religion and traditions increase.

- Responsibility of the girlchild increases.
- Jealousy from other community members.

3. Questionnaire Section D: Educational development as a right of the child

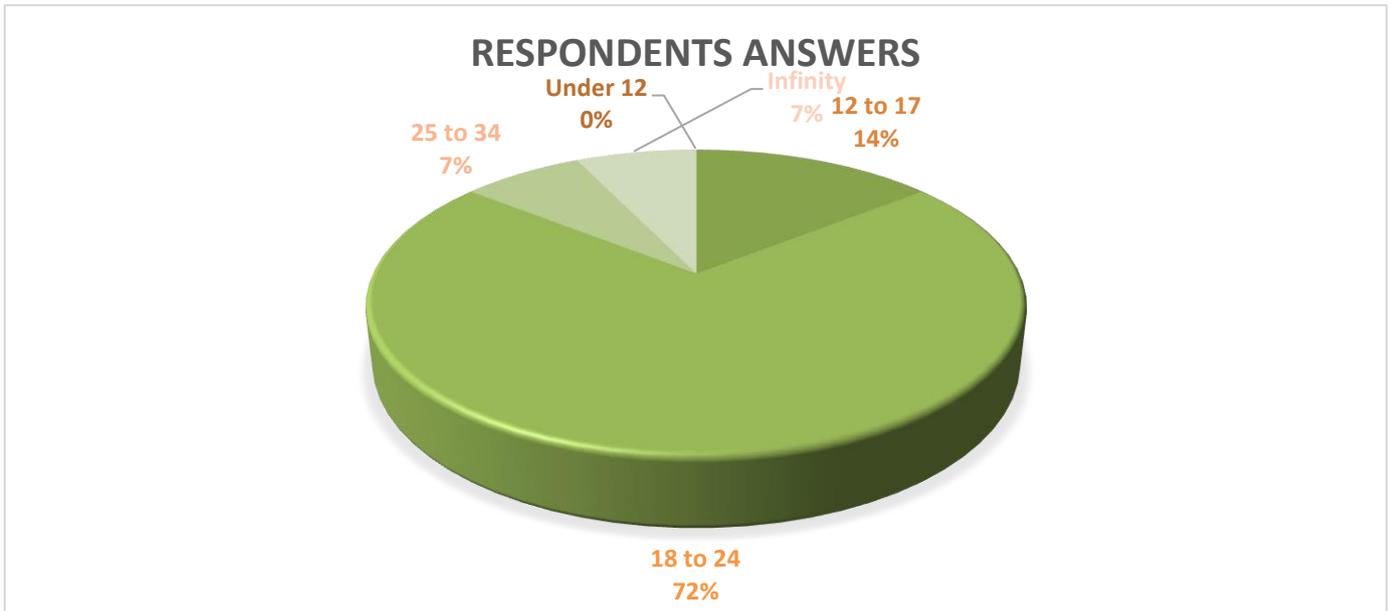
What are your views on education? Do you think it is valuable? Why/why not?



Summarized replies from respondents

- Education is essential and valuable since it helps create a better future, does away with ignorance, poverty.
- Education a positive change, however, the challenge comes in since the girl disrespects her husband upon attaining education.
- It brings with it civilization and opens doors of uncountable opportunities.
- Facilitates the growth of a country and empowerment of women.
- It is valuable because it leads to better economic opportunities.
- Education is the only thing that can save an African child.
- Education has been used as a tool for control and created a dependence on the western countries who's curricular we still follow even when we don't have the same didactic tools and facilities of learning. The curricular is just so outdated that it needs a complete and total review.
- Allows one to obtain a good job and promotes development.
- Teaches children and makes them intelligent.
- Allows an individual to become a good and noble citizen, to stabilize education is necessary for any individual.

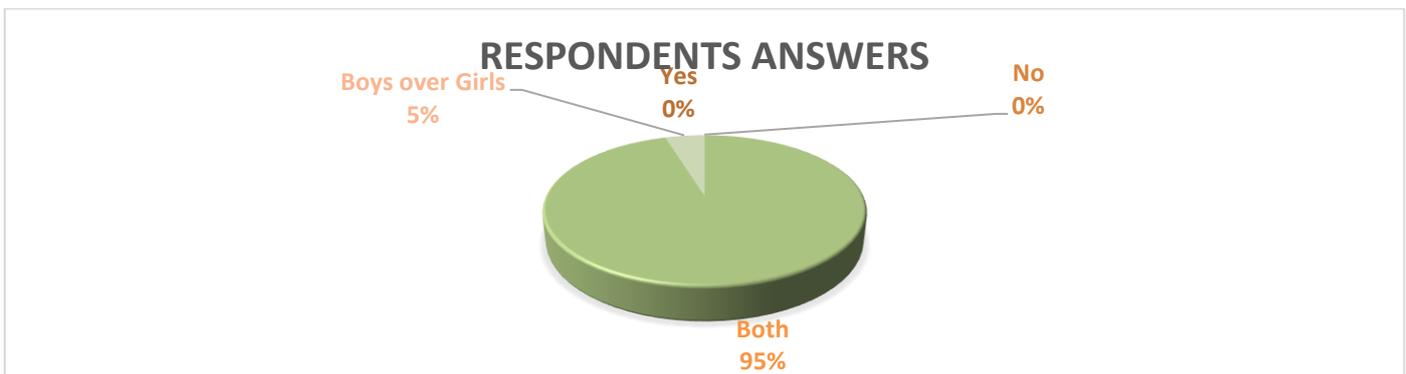
Until what age do you ideally think children should be educated? Why?



Summarized replies from respondents

- The child can learn and can develop quickly through learning new skills.
- Indefinitely because we are always learning.
- At least till they complete their diploma or first university degree.
- Until you get a job because school doesn't end.
- The girlchild must be married at an early age and have a husband. She does not deserve to be educated.

Should boys and girls have access to education, or should it be different?



Summarized replies from respondents

- Both boys and girls should have access to education.
- Boys should have access to education, as for girls it is not relevant to their future.

- Both boys and girls should get an equal chance and emphasis when it comes to education because for a country to progress in this modern world both genders should be able to be utilized as vessels of change.
- They should both have equal access to education so that they don't arrive at a point on is forced to settle with an illiterate age set member.
- Equal access to education would yield equal access to the opportunities that result.

Do you think it is feasible for a child of a poor family to reach the highest level of education?



Summarized replies from respondents

- It is quite difficult for that to happen considering the huge amounts of fees required as one advances their education, but it is quite doable and recommended for the child from a poor background to strive and achieve the highest form of education possible.
- Unfortunately, likely if they're intelligent and sponsored to pursue education.
- It's very difficult due to lack of basic needs like food and must look for odd jobs to cater for this during school time.
- Chances in today's world are very slim.
- Education nowadays is very expensive.
- Children cannot reach a higher level of education.

If someone is uneducated, are they treated differently in this community? Why? By whom? Does this vary if they are either male or female?



Summarized replies from respondents

- There is no problem, the community does not worry about whether a child receives education or not.
- Everyone should be treated the same or equally.
- The discrimination is always there especially from people who got the chance to acquire education, and this is because they feel that when someone has not gone to school, they are incompetent and cannot possess any positives with them.
- Due to limited knowledge or ignorance.
- A girlchild's status is attached to her husband's standing in society.
- Most uneducated people live in poverty and that is frowned upon.
- It is worse for young boys as they're seen as providers. An uneducated young girl can still easily get married to a well-off man, but the reverse is harder.
- Community values educated people and are treated with respect. They are seen as brilliant and well exposed. By the community leaders.
- Males are more listened to and respected yes because they are not held to the same standards as those who are more educated. However, this is more common in less developed societies than in more advanced civilizations.
- Educated people are respected a lot.
- The girlchild or boychild will be considered a less intelligent person by the whole community.
- All are treated the same since all members of the community contribute to decision-making.
- None of them is treated the same due to lack of education or awareness.

Do men find girls more / less marriageable if they have a higher level of education?



Summarized replies from respondents

- Men find young girls marriageable if they have a higher level of education.
- In traditional set up we have always believed that the girl child's main purpose is to be at home raising the children and taking care of the family. So, with a higher education means she can secure job opportunity which brings independence, and some men believe it is hard to marry a lady who is independent or self-sufficient.
- Less marriageable if they have higher education.
- Community does not like young, educated girls and men find them as competition. For men they are the top layer that every girl wants.
- Education is not key to marriage, discipline, and behaviour is what is needed.
- They do find girls marriageable since they can reason properly and make informed decisions.
- More marriageable girls are those with a high level of education because they are well behaved.
- They find them less marriageable in relation to their high level of education. However, they are more so if they are already working to help their husband with expenses.
- Men marry more girls who have a high level of education because they are intelligent.
- The most marriageable girls are those who have attained a higher level of education than the boy.
- Men find girls less marriageable if they have a higher level of education.

Are there good role models for children in this community in terms of encouraging children to attain education? If yes, kindly share brief details.



Summarized replies from respondents

- People who have had the opportunity to acquire an education then proceed on to pursue their dreams and careers are always a source of encouragement to parents and good role models to the younger boys and girls.
- Not much apart from the religious leaders in the community.
- These role models advise us to go to school, offer us school supplies, gifts and give us gifts when children do well in school and the donations help further studies.

4. Discussion

In the male-dominated society of Cameroon, women often have home responsibilities. Young females who are kept at home in child relational unions are forced to forsake their education and employment chances. Poor households lack the resources to support the costs of their female offspring, thus the parents want to marry off their young daughters as soon as is practical to relieve themselves of the responsibility. Furthermore, sending them to live with their spouse where there are no further plans for their future. A broken family may view the girls as a financial burden that must be advertised through early marriage. Since the costs of marriage are reduced when young females get married, it makes more financial sense. Child marriage commonly serves as a method for some parents, particularly in rural communities with little resources for employment, they get the opportunity to escape their parental commitment. Most of the young females who lack literacy will be required to labour on fields growing oil palm, peanuts (groundnuts), millet, and cassava in the north and plantains, beans, potatoes, yams, cassava (manioc), and potatoes. Most young brides who married before maturity later end up regretting their decision owing to the negative consequences and misery, they experienced because of their lack of earning power and money.

These findings imply that child marriage is a serious obstacle to obtaining a higher degree and has consequences for Cameroon's development strategy. If these issues are not addressed, the nation will probably not achieve sustainable development Goals 4.2 and 5.3. It is important to implement social change initiatives that target adults and dispel myths regarding teenage sexuality and prepubescent marriage. Interventions that maintain adolescent females in school through the first year of high school should also be given priority. The research base has long shown that girls' education is one of the most important determinants influencing age at marriage, with a large body of work showing a substantial correlation between lower levels of schooling and a lower age at marriage.

Education also has a significant impact on how girls view their futures, equips them with the abilities to contribute positively to society and the workforce, and strengthens their sense of agency in interpersonal interactions. Additionally, it has a significant impact on how well they and their children will age and is likely to have an impact on how well they will educate themselves. As noted in a different brief in this thesis research, determining the effect of child marriage on education is important for calculating the economic consequences of the practice. However, it has been difficult to estimate the effects of child marriage on educational results and to comprehend the costs associated with these effects, in part due to the choice to marry young and the choice to divorce.

a) Knowledge, attitude, and behaviours

It was clear from some respondents' responses that the community as a whole was unaware of the legal definition of a child. Physical maturation and other puberty-related changes were associated with adulthood, and these things made a person eligible for marriage and childbirth. Respondents from both rural and urban areas showed distinct differences in their comprehension of the discussion's thematic areas. Even outside of the thematic areas of early marriage and access to education, the lack of knowledge on the subject may have an impact on the rights and protection of children.

Traditional marriages can be arranged or forced or involve courtship and "consensual" bride price payment. People are aware of what constitutes child marriage and are generally aware of the required legal age for marriage. Due to most unfavourable effects on the married child, respondents across all categories generally believed that child marriage was a bad practice. According to the respondents, women should be able to marry as early as age 21, while men should wait until age 25, which is a much higher age. This may be interpreted as a criticism of child marriage in some way.

b) Factors that cause child marriages

All respondents agreed that the most prevalent risk factor for child marriage was poverty. Many rural Cameroonian communities have long accepted child marriage as the norm. As a result, it has become

customary to treat children who have reached puberty as adults who may marry them off. Occasionally, girls become pregnant and are then compelled to get married as children. Other factors that may contribute to first-time pregnancies include a lack of knowledge about sexual and reproductive health and an unmet need for contraceptives.

c) The effects of child carriage on the child and community

Poor educational success, poor health results, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, deprivation of child experiences, and husband abandonment are all effects of child marriage. It was discovered that most children who marry young frequently drop out of school, resulting in unemployment and a cycle of poverty. Arranged marriages were thought to have high divorce rates because there was a lack of respect and maturity as the foundation for marriage. Due to their immature bodies and lack of maturity, young pregnant girls are also more likely to experience pre-natal, peri-natal, and postnatal complications. Since they lack autonomy, girls in child marriages are also more likely to experience gender-based violence and have their rights to sexual and reproductive health violated.

d) Utilization and knowledge of current laws, policies, and interventions

Children's rights, such as the rights to education, identity, health, shelter, and parental protection, are only partially understood by government officials, community members, and children. Most respondents to the questionnaire showed a lack of concrete awareness of any specific laws that give children the right to access education, protect them from abuse or child marriage, or both. The procedures to be followed in actively managing child marriage abuse cases were not well understood.

e) Linkages between child marriage, HIV, GBV and SRHR

The quantitative data did not reveal any statistically significant relationships between child marriage, HIV status, or gender-based violence (GBV). However, qualitative data indicates that the much older husbands of these children may have abused them sexually, physically, and emotionally.

f) Cultural customs that may have an impact on child marriage

Arranged marriages, initiations, and adulthood celebrations were identified as cultural practices that encouraged child marriage. The majority of these practices that commemorate and mark the start of puberty appear to encourage child marriage.

g) Prevention of child marriage: best practices / protective elements

Mentioned as some of the elements that assist in preventing child marriage are the imposition of fines on the men who marry young women, parental opposition to child marriage, religious teaching against immorality, including early copulation, and maintaining the enrolment of children in school. However, some respondents seemed not to agree that the distribution of fines and penalties stops child marriage.

5. Conclusion

The analysis' findings that child marriage reduces young girls' and children's educational achievement are not particularly surprising. On the other hand, and critically for policy, the analysis also suggests that enhancing children's educational opportunities is one of the best ways to prevent child marriage. The consensus among majority of the respondents and community dwellers regarding the protective value of formal education in terms of preventing child marriage is growing, this is encouraging.

In fact, child marriage may affect the chances of education for the children of child brides in addition to hindering children's education. There is no question that child marriage affects at least some children - both boys and girls - of child brides' educational prospects, which results in additional economic costs given the impact of child marriage on lowering children's educational attainment. Since child marriage keeps people in poverty, it is also more likely that intergenerational effects will be at work.

CHAPTER V - CONCLUSION

In this chapter the conclusions derived from the findings of this study on the experiences of Cameroonian citizens or lawfully registered residents who had opinions to share based on their thoughts on the concept of the impact of child marriage to education as a traditional practice. The implications of these findings are explained in detail in Chapter IV of this thesis.

1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on the relationship between child marriage and educational attainment as well as how this relationship affects the educational attainment of the children of those who got married when they were young. The examination postulation has demonstrated the presence of the traditional practice of child marriage and its impact on protecting children in some regions of Cameroon. Additionally, this thesis has examined from a global, local, and public perspective the legal frameworks governing the assurance of children regarding their rights to marriage and education. It did highlight the various treaties that protect children's right to education while discussing the effects that child marriage has on this endeavour. Additionally, it demonstrated the impact child marriage has on this aspect as well as the open public resources that guarantee children's overall right to education in Cameroon as envisioned by the Constitution.

2. Recommendations

It was discovered that the most successful interventions are those that are spread out across numerous industries and are incorporated into already-running programming. It is important to talk about risk factors for child marriage in strategies because they have an impact on children's educational growth. The following actions ought to be taken in order to lessen the effects of child marriage in the rural regions of Cameroon in light of the study's findings:

a) Gaps In Combatting Child Marriage

Most often because child marriage awareness is sufficient in some societies, there are gaps in the execution and authorization of laws that protect children from abuse and child marriage. Due to child marriage's pervasive cultural influence, duty bearers occasionally struggle to uphold the law, especially in local communities. The community's poor reporting and the non-enforcement of current laws occur in this situation.

Two additional factors that contribute to the low reporting of child marriages are the fear of losing income if the perpetrator is a potential breadwinner and the loss of revenue from compensation from the

perpetrator. By paying fines in the form of livestock or cash compensation to some traditional authorities, the offenders can avoid formal prosecution. marriages.

The isolation of some villages also contributes to the lack of reporting because victims must travel great distances to the closest police station. Additionally, it was believed that policing is brittle when it comes to matters of custom that result in pointless indictments of offenders. Gaps in the coordination of services regarding illegal child marriages between medical professionals and law enforcement authorities. At the very least, there was no awareness or discussion of the procedures that needed to be followed for children who were denied access to their right to education because of pregnancies brought on by child marriage.

b) Cameroon's legal framework for child marriage

Even though child marriage is punishable under the Penal Code, the law fails to define child marriage clearly and does not deter those who aid, abet, or fail to report early relationships. There have been no cases reported under the Penal Code, which suggests that Cameroon's law enforcement is ineffective. The Penal Code needs to be strengthened to include a clear definition of child marriage, criminalize, and punish all child marriage offenders, including those who aid and abet the practice. It should also be made a crime and punishable to fail to report child marriages. Research is required to determine the prevalence of cross-border child marriage and whether it should be criminalized in either the production or the performance stages. All members of society must be able to access and understand Cameroonian laws, which must be made clear in all the nation's dialects.

Its varied legal systems are one thing that binds the various parts of Cameroon together. A common law or civil law system that has been influenced by European law⁸⁹ typically coexists with one or more traditional, religious, or customary systems that may or may not be acknowledged by the constitution but are nonetheless upheld. Since nearly every religious and traditional system aims to control family-related matters, it can be challenging to determine which law is in effect when there are at least two different legal systems in place. When child marriage is present, these challenges frequently surface. For instance, in the Gambia, Mali, and Mauritania, the legal recognition of marriage extends to civil, Muslim, not one, but four different types. In a sense, it is possible to assume that a similar situation is developing in the various regions of Cameroon. The legal standing of such unions in these countries is unclear because child marriage is permitted under various interpretations of both Sharia law and customary law. Due to

⁸⁹ Cameroon Has a Dual System of Both French Civil Law and English Common Law Which Operate in Coexistence. Both French Civil Law and English Common Law Apply in Coexistence with Traditional Laws, As Long as The Traditional Laws Are Not Repugnant to Justice, Equality, And Good Conscience.

the Anglophone crisis and the fact that Cameroon is home to more than 250 tribes, this has turned out to be a test.

c) Education policies

Due to the correlations between poverty, poor educational outcomes for girls, and child marriage, government authorities in the region have attempted to end child marriage by addressing the unequal effects of poverty on women.⁹⁰ Consequently, efforts have been made to increase children's access to healthcare and education. The national policies on youth, gender, and empowerment, as well as those on reproductive and children's health, have all been put into practice. On these policies, various government agencies frequently work together, including those in charge of family, gender, education, social welfare, and health issues. A National Policy on Gender has been implemented in Cameroon with the aim of eradicating gender disparities, including child marriage, and placing a special emphasis on giving girls access to education and expanding opportunities for women in the workplace.⁹¹ Education is the most important factor that delays the age at which children marry, so it should come as no surprise that a significant number of child marriage prevention programs are focused on keeping kids in school.

The state of Cameroon needs to put in place several initiatives to encourage children to go to school. Several programs aimed at encouraging children to attend school should be implemented by the state of Cameroon. For example, school taking care of projects have been organized in grade schools and government is urged to endeavour to give more latrine offices in schools. This is significant because, once girls reach adolescence, concerns about sanitation frequently discourage them from attending school. Girls are more likely to pursue secondary education thanks in part to government scholarships, the introduction of evening classes in day schools, and the growth of public boarding schools. This will lessen gender-based violence in schools as a result. Finally, to mitigate gender disparities in tertiary education, more university residences to be constructed for female students.

Due to COVID-19, climate change, and humanitarian crises, poverty in the area, which is already pervasive, is getting worse. Social protection programs that strengthen families' resistance to economic shocks, lower financial strains on families, and enhance girls' educational opportunities should be given top priority if child marriage is to be eradicated on a large scale. Expanded coverage of national social protection programs is crucial, along with child-friendly programs and services for social protection,

⁹⁰ Bengesai, A. V., Amusa, L. B., & Makonye, F., *The Impact of Girl Child Marriage on The Completion of The First Cycle of Secondary Education in Zimbabwe: A Propensity Score Analysis*. Plos One, 16(6), E0252413, 2021. Available At <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0252413> [Accessed On 10th July 2023].

⁹¹ Jude Thaddues Njikem, Executive Director, *Community Centre For Integrated Development And Director*, Center For Sustainable Development At Saint Monica University, United Nations Foundation. Available At <https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/ending-inequality-women-cameroon/> [Accessed On 10th July 2023].

poverty reduction, and economic empowerment that are available to the poorest girls and their families. The social costs of poverty that increase a girl's likelihood of marriage include low educational attainment, decision-making restrictions, and insufficient access to knowledge- and skill-building opportunities (e.g., sexual, and reproductive rights) - must also be addressed.

d) Encourage the development of resilience in girls through education and learning

Maintaining girls' enrolment in school is a critical safeguard and strategy for preventing and ending child marriage. A high-quality education expands young girls' knowledge and skills, introduces them to new opportunities, and ultimately delays the planning of marriage. Utilizing the educational system, including agreements, financial plans, and educational initiatives that place an emphasis on keeping young girls in school, supports counteraction. Girls who have dropped out of school need to have access to programs that teach them literacy and life skills, as well as programs, services, and data for economic empowerment that can assist them in making wiser decisions and being more resilient.

Since gender inequality is one of the main causes of child marriage, positive social norms and gender roles are essential for prevention. It's crucial to use social and behaviour change strategies to alter gender and societal norms. Programs for social and behaviour change need to be evidence-based and adapted to the local environment to make a significant and long-lasting impact. Community-led interventions demand a systematic approach that concentrates on changing norms as opposed to simply increasing awareness. Interventions that lessen child marriage and expand access to quality education and other services should support efforts to change discriminatory standards within families and networks.

Children, especially young girls, need access to high-quality basic services like child and social protection, social welfare, and legal, educational, and health care. For the delivery of these services, interoperability across industries is essential. The underlying issues that make it difficult for young girls and their families to access services must also be addressed. The needs of children and adults of various ages across settings and conditions who are defenceless against marriage must be met using tailored approaches, including reference administrations.

e. Legal age identification for children – especially girls

To fully understand the differences between younger and older married or at-risk children's circumstances and experiences, additional research must be conducted. Even though both age groups share many of the same risk factors for child marriage, the ways in which the practice is experienced and how it affects people vary by age group. The needs of children of various ages must be better understood by policymakers and service providers to best meet these needs.

Laws should be just one part of a comprehensive and integrated strategy to end child marriage that also includes giving children more power, collaborating with communities, and making it simpler for children to access services and education. Laws alone won't be enough to prevent child marriage. However, they are a significant indicator of the public authority's position on the matter. They can aid in reducing crime if properly implemented and enforced. They can also try to reinforce or alter social norms. Having legal backing helps common society organizations in the work they do to address child marriage.

It is crucial that regulatory changes are combined with alternative strategies to support child-rearing when marriage is in jeopardy. To reduce the number of child marriages, it is highly recommended to use a combination of intercessions, and changing the law should be just one of them. For example, considering the most affected region in Cameroon, with emphasis on preventing child marriage and protecting already-married adults of all genders. Changing the marriage age has been requested by respondents in this research, this could also be taken into consideration and since legislation is a major barrier to advancement in many tribes.

3. Recommendations for Additional Study

A suggestion for future research would be to examine the educational outcomes of both these adults and children over time. Remedial investigation of the viewpoint of child marriage and educational goals for both children and adults would make for an interesting review. A study on how children from both genders view women in higher education would be a fascinating addition to the body of knowledge.

4. Overall Conclusion

Child marriage has a significant negative impact on children's education. This effect is prevalent throughout Cameroon's rural areas and has a variety of potential effects. The lower lifetime earnings of women who married as children, which are the subject of a separate brief in this series, is a very significant economic outcome. Beyond acquiring knowledge and fundamental skills and enhancing employability and lifetime earnings, formal education is also an essential way for children to develop social skills and general development. Most children who marry young miss out on significant opportunities because of child marriage and eventually drop out of school.

Additionally, there are intergenerational effects at play, decreasing the likelihood of secondary education completion for boys and especially for girls whose mothers married when they were young. A mother's educational level also seems to have sizable detrimental effects on her health and the health of her children, as was also covered in another Chapter in this thesis.

Effective policies and interventions need to be created and put into place to end the practice of child marriage. Moreover, to extend to reframe the issue of girls entering marriage, it is important to emphasize that policy discussions with community and religious leaders who have a significant impact on these issues are necessary. Meeting with these pioneers to essentially examine the causes and effects of child marriage on the right to access education can help with developing support for countermeasures.

APPENDIX

1. Appendix I : International and Regional Treaties

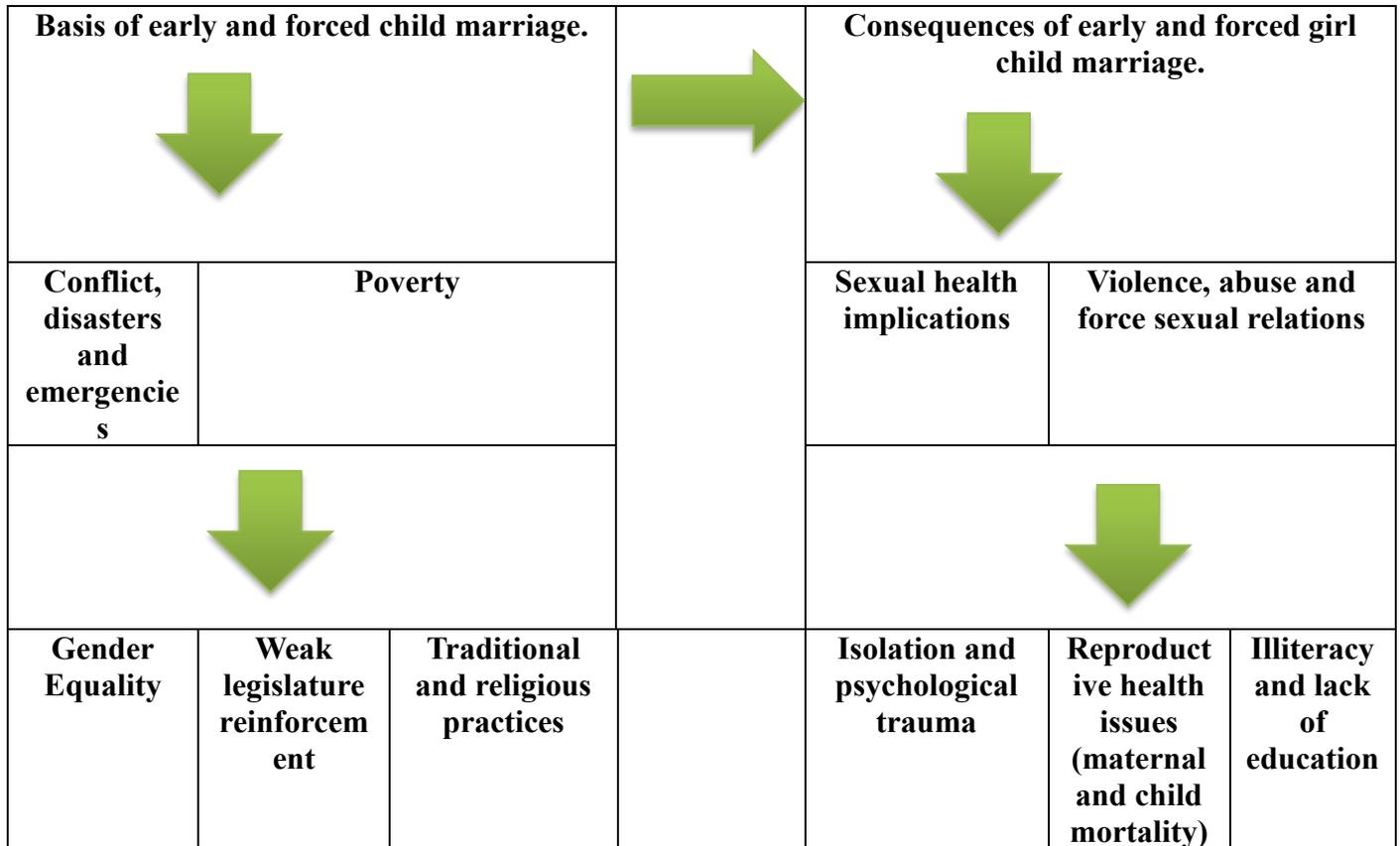
CAMEROON	Signed	Ratified	Acceded	Reservations on reporting
International				
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1996) (ICCPR)			1984	
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) (ICESCR)			1984	
Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) (CEDAW)	1983	1994		
Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984) (CTOCIDTP)			1986	
Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)	1990	1993		
Regional				
African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1981) (ACHPR) (Banjul Charter)	1987	1989		
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) (ACRWC)	1992	1997		
African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of the Women in Africa (2003) (ACHPRRWA) (Maputo Protocol)	2006	2012		

Signed: a treaty is signed by countries following negotiation and agreement of its contents.

Ratified: once signed, most treaties and conventions must be ratified (i.e., approved through the standard national legislative procedure) to be legally effective in that country

Acceded: when a country ratifies a treaty that has already been negotiated by other states.

2. Appendix 2 : Conceptual Framework



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