Exploration of child marriages in Ghana: Experiences of young female spouses, parents, elders and professionals

By

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Declaration

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Abstract

Early marriage is the practice of marrying an individual below the age of 18 years. It is a widespread global practice that is believed to have a myriad of effects on its victims, their offspring and the practising communities. While Ghana is one of the many countries worldwide in which early marriage is being practised, literature on the reasons, cultural underpinnings and implications of the practice in this context is sparse.

My aim in this study, therefore, was to identify and examine factors that contribute to the practice of early marriage and their related implications on the psychological wellbeing of adolescent married girls in the Northern region of Ghana. Specifically, I sought to gain an understanding of adolescent girls' reasons for marrying early and their subjective experiences in their marriage. I also sought to understand the social constructions of marriage and adolescence from the perspective of the female spouses' parents and elders in the community and their respective role, if any, in influencing the early marriage of adolescent girls. Finally, to gain insight into the perspectives of child marriage from professionals working in the area of child marriage, I explored the role of governmental and non-governmental organisations in preventing and engaging with the practice through the possible interventions and measures they have employed in eradicating early marriage in the communities they work in.

Twenty-one married girls, eight parents and seven elders from selected communities in the Northern region of Ghana were engaged in individual in-depth interviews to garner their views and experiences on the possible reasons and implications of early marriage on adolescent girls. Nine staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations in the Northern region participated in a focus group discussion on their experiences with working with married girls and the interventions they employed in preventing the practice in the communities they work in.

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Findings indicated that, although some adolescent girls choose to marry, their motivations were influenced by economic and socio-cultural reasons in addition to their own perspectives of life, personal struggles and difficulties they encountered. Similar to the adolescent girls' reasons for marrying, parents proffered economic and sociocultural factors as core reasons for marrying their daughters off. Additional reasons for supporting early marriage pertained to difficulty in nurturing their children, power imbalances between child and parent as well as intergenerational differences between parents and children on compliance with cultural norms and values.

Early marriage had both positive and negative implications on the psychological health of the young girls and the implications were basically reflective of age at marriage, expectations for marriage and relations with the husband and in-laws, stressful chores and abuse. Findings also indicated a strong influence of cultural values and constructions of marriage, adolescence, gender and sexuality on the practice of child marriage in Ghana.

Possible interventions for the prevention or eradication of early marriage among adolescent girls are reflected based on the adolescents' motivations for marriage, and other interventions suggested by parents and staff of governmental and nongovernmental organisations.

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Opsomming

Vroeë huwelik is die praktyk om met 'n individu onder die ouderdom van 18 jaar te trou. Dit is 'n wydverspreide wêreldwye praktyk wat vermoedelik 'n groot aantal gevolge op die slagoffers, hul nageslag en praktiserende gemeenskappe het. Terwyl Ghana wêreldwyd een van die vele lande is waarin vroeë huwelik beoefen word, is literatuur oor die redes, kulturele onderbou en implikasies van die praktyk in hierdie konteks beperk.

My doel in hierdie studie was dus om faktore te identifiseer en te ondersoek wat bydra tot die beoefening van vroeë huwelik en die verwante implikasies daarvan op die sielkundige welstand van getroude adolessente meisies in die Noordelike streek van Ghana. Spesifiek het ek probeer om 'n begrip te kry van adolessente meisies se redes waarom hulle vroeg getrou het en hul subjektiewe ervarings in hul huwelik. Ek het ook probeer om die sosiale konstruksie van huwelik en adolessensie te verstaan vanuit die perspektief van die vroulike eggenote se ouers en ouderlinge in die gemeenskap en hul onderskeie rol, indien enige, om die vroeë huwelik van adolessente meisies te beïnvloed. Ten slotte, om insig te verkry oor die perspektiewe van professionele persone wat in die gebied van kinderhuwelik werk, het ek die rol van regerings- en nie-regeringsorganisasies in die voorkoming van dié praktyk ondersoek, deur die moontlike ingrypings en maatreëls wat hulle ingespan het om die vroeë huwelik in die gemeenskappe waarin hulle werk uit te wis.

Een-en-twintig getroude meisies, agt ouers en sewe ouderlinge uit geselekteerde gemeenskappe in die Noordelike streek van Ghana was betrek met individuele in-diepte onderhoude om hul siening en ervarings oor die moontlike redes en implikasies van vroeë huwelik op adolessente meisies te bekom. Ses personeellede van regerings- en nie-regeringsorganisasies in die Noordelike streek het deelgeneem aan 'n fokusgroepbespreking oor hul ervarings om met getroude meisies te werk en die ingrypings wat hulle gebruik het om die praktyk in die gemeenskappe waarin hulle werk te voorkom.

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Die bevindinge het aangedui dat, alhoewel sommige adolessente meisies kies om te trou, hul motiverings beïnvloed word deur ekonomiese en sosiokulturele redes benewens hul eie lewensbeskouing, persoonlike stryd en probleme wat hulle ondervind het. Soortgelyk aan die redes van adolessente meisies, het ouers ook ekonomiese en sosiokulturele faktore voorgehou as kern-redes waarom hulle hul dogters laat trou. Bykomende redes vir die ondersteuning van vroeë huwelike het te make gehad met probleme om hul kinders te koester, wanbalans in die mag tussen kind en ouer, sowel as intergenerasieverskille tussen ouers en kinders oor die nakoming van kulturele norme en waardes.

Vroeë huwelike het positiewe sowel as negatiewe gevolge gehad vir die sielkundige gesondheid van die jong meisies, en die implikasies weerspieël basies die ouderdom tydens die huwelik, verwagtinge vir huwelik en verhoudings met die man en skoonouers, stresvolle huistake en mishandeling. Bevindinge het ook aangedui dat die kulturele waardes en konstruksies van die huwelik, adolessensie, geslag en seksualiteit op die praktyk van kinderhuwelik in Ghana sterk beïnvloed het.

Moontlike intervensies vir die voorkoming of uitroei van vroeë huwelik onder adolessente meisies word weerspieël op grond van die adolessente se motivering vir die huwelik, en ander ingrypings wat deur ouers en personeel van regerings- en nie-regeringsorganisasies voorgestel word.

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Statement Regarding Bursary and Manuscripts in the Dissertation

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It should be noted that manuscripts presented in Chapters 6 to 11 have been developed and submitted to various journals. The manuscript in Chapter 6: "*Understanding Child marriage in Ghana: The constructions of gender and sexuality and implications for married girls*" has been published in *Child Care in Practice* (Sarfo, Salifu Yendork, & Naidoo, 2020). The other manuscripts in Chapters 7 to 11 are under consideration (review) for possible publication at various journals. It is expected that there will be some duplication and similarities between parts of this dissertation and the manuscripts that might be published in various journals.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents (Mr K. A. Sarfo and Ms Veronica Boadi) and Mr Daniel Fordjour, my husband, for your love, support and belief in me.

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List of Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
FST	Feminist Standpoint Theory
GDHS	Ghana Demographic and Health Survey
GIQM	Generic Inductive Qualitative Model or Approach
GLSS	Ghana Living Standards Survey
GO	Government Organisation
ICRW	International Centre for Research on Women
JHS	Junior High School
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MoGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PPCT	Process, Person, Context and Time
SHS	Senior High School
SRI	Sexual Rights Initiative
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UG-CSPS	University of Ghana Centre for Social Policy studies
WLUML	Women Living Under Muslim Laws
WRC	Women's Refugee Commission
WVG	World Vision Ghana

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"Abofra bo nnwa na ommo akyekyedee"

"A child breaks the shell of a snail and not that of a tortoise."

Akan proverb

The above proverb purports that children should be involved with activities pertinent to their status as children. Thus, the girl-child is expected to do things pertaining to her domain and stage of development and not things that pertain to adulthood. This has implications for how marriage is construed and practised as marriage is traditionally seen to be an adult institution and not for the child.

1.1. Background and rationale

Marriage is usually a rite that is celebrated with joy in all cultures as it is recognised as a union between spouses and affords them the opportunity to establish roles and responsibilities between them and their family, both nuclear and extended (Haviland, Prins, McBride, & Walrath, 2011). Though deemed an adult institution, increasing numbers of children, especially in Africa and Asia, find themselves getting married due to various reasons (African Union, 2015; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2001, 2015a). United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF (2010) have defined child marriage as a marriage that occurs when one or both of the spouses are below the age of 18 years.

Recent statistics indicate that in Ghana one in every five girls is being married before her 18th birthday (Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey [MICS], 2018). This ratio is significantly increased for girls in the three northern regions of Ghana where the prevalence is 1 out of 3 girls (34%). Although the country has seen a decline in prevalence (MICS, 2018), child marriages continue to persist despite being unlawful.

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A review of the literature indicates a host of intersecting underlying reasons for the persistence of child marriage that includes strong cultural beliefs and practices, religion, poverty, education and gender inequalities (African Union, 2015; WiLDAF Ghana, 2014). The consequences of child marriage have also been widely documented and include the violation of the human rights of the girls and women (UNFPA, 2012), hindering high educational attainment (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008; Psaki, 2014), posing serious reproductive health risks (Nour, 2008; WiLDAF Ghana, 2014), and increasing maternal and child health risks (International Centre for Research on Women [ICRW], 2010), among others.

Additionally, child marriages may be the foundation of myriad psychological problems. Although research in this field is limited (Glinski, Sexton, & Meyers, 2015; John, Edmeades, & Murithi, 2019), studies have found that girls who marry at an early age show poor mental health and report higher rates of social isolation and depression (Khanna, Verma, & Weiss, 2013; Le Strat, Dubertret, & Le Foll, 2011). This may be due to restricted access to social support and information (ICRW, 2010). Moreover, early marriage has detrimental effects on the development of such children since it brings an abrupt shift from childhood activities and pastimes to adulthood and its accompanying roles, duties and responsibilities without adequate preparations such as those typically available at the adolescence stage (Bruce & Bongaarts, 2009; Engelman, Levy, Luchsinger, Merrick, & Rosen, 2014). Some of the married girls may not have fully grasped what is expected of them in marriage as their understanding of sexuality and gender-related issues may not have been fully developed.

Despite the numerous deleterious effects of child marriages, little has been documented on the potential positive impact on the married girls and the community as a whole. Positive outcomes or benefits that have been reported include increasing the chance for the girls to acquire suitable marriage partners (ICRW, 2010; Loaiza &Wong, 2012), and reducing the incidence of premarital sexual activities among the girls which may lead to the

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contraction of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies (African Union, 2015; WiLDAF Ghana, 2014). However, these seemingly positive impacts can be considered as double-edged because they are the precipitants for early marriages which lead to the negative consequences that the children may face. Moreover, these reports of positive and negative outcomes of child marriages are usually not drawn from the perspectives of the married girls but rather the perspectives of the researchers and media reports on the phenomenon. While including the perspectives of parents, elders and other community stakeholders are important in understanding this complex phenomenon, few studies explored the experiences and the perspectives of the young brides directly. Hence, the primary aims of this study to present the accounts of married girls, their parents, community elders and staff of governmental and NGO's in Northern Ghana on their experiences of the phenomenon and their perceptions of the possible outcomes of their experiences. Secondary aims of the study are to gain a broader understanding of the social and cultural factors that underlie this practice in this region through the perspectives of parents and elders in the community. Perspectives of NGOs working in this field in the region will also be solicited especially in relation to the types of interventions being implemented and its effectiveness in reducing the practice of child marriage while providing solutions to some of the difficulties faced by married girls and other people affected by their early marriage.

To understand the nature of child marriage in the Ghanaian context, the ensuing sections of the introduction present a brief background of adolescent sexuality and development and the expected gender roles and behaviour in relation to sex and marriage in Ghana.

1.1.1. Sexuality and adolescent development

Child marriage involves the marrying of usually an adolescent who is expected to engage in sexual relations with her/his partner. Many of the young brides may be described as

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being in early to mid-adolescence. Adolescence is the period between the development of secondary sexual characteristics and the transition from childhood to adulthood (Mensch, Bagah, Clark, & Binka, 1999). For girls in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in Ghana, this seems to be a very significant period in their lives as they are confronted with the developmental changes in their bodies as well as receiving sexual pressure from men and boys (Mensch et al., 1999).

Studies conducted on adolescent sexuality revealed that in western cultures most teenagers become sexually active with some having their first sexual experiences between 16 to 18 years (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2004). This situation is not different in Ghana, however, with adolescent girls having their first sexual debut earlier than boys (Ghana Demographic and Health Survey [GDHS], 2014). Studies have indicated that early sexual debut is linked to social and environmental influences such as the adolescent's relationship with peers and family (McBride, Paikoff, & Holmbeck, 2003; Whitbeck, Yoder, Hoyt, & Conger, 1999). Early sexual relationship may also be linked to early maturation (Zimmer-Gembeck & Helfand, 2007) and to cultural and religious beliefs on virginity and premarital sex (Asampong, Osafo, Bingenheimer, & Ahiadeke, 2013). It is at this stage in their lives that most girls get married as they are perceived to have developed adult sexual characteristics and may be deemed ready for such sexual activities.

In relation to the above, Pattman and Bhana (2006) aver that sexuality plays an important role for adolescent girls in complex ways. Accounts from their participants indicated sexuality as not only being associated with desire and pleasure but also with parental and peer control and cultural prescription.

1.1.2. Gender roles, sexuality and marriage in Ghana

The literature on gender roles in Ghana indicates that Ghana is largely a patriarchal society where most households are traditionally headed by males who are the sole decision-

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makers of their families (Alhasaan & Odame, 2015; Wringley-Asante, 2011). The women, however, have the responsibility of catering for the household chores and in instances where a decision is being taken, the women are to seek permission from their male counterparts before contributing (Alhassan & Odame, 2015). Even though this may not be the case in recent times (Alhasaan & Odame, 2015; Dako-Gyeke & Owusu, 2013), in the Northern region of Ghana, which remains deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of child marriages, may have seen minor changes in this trend (Alhassan, 2012).

When it comes to decisions on sexuality (sexual and reproductive issues), in most patriarchal societies in Ghana, men have the sole decision-making rights (Dako-Gyeke & Owusu, 2013; Takyi & Dodoo, 2005). Women are not allowed to speak about sex and sexual pleasure as this is deemed to indicate promiscuity (Bochow, 2012). A study conducted in the Northern region of Ghana on the use of contraceptives revealed that systems in the patriarchal societies prevented women from taking decisions regarding their own sexual reproductive health (Bawah, Akweongo, Simmons, & Phillips, 1999), despite their primary role as mother, wife and homemaker. The will or the ability of girls is reduced or rendered non-existent in deciding on when and whom to marry. The father usually makes this decision for the girl when he considers her to have reached marriageable age.

Given the significant interplay between the construction of gender, sexuality and gender roles in patriarchal communities, the present study examined the experience of married girls in light of the developmental adjustments they experience in relation to their gender roles.

1.2. Rationale

Although the implications of child marriage are very important to the design and implementation of policies and interventions, literature suggests little research on this field of enquiry (Davis, Postles, & Rosa, 2013; Glinski et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2001) especially in

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Ghana. Most studies conducted in this field (Alhassan, 2013; de Groot et al., 2018; Tsekpo, Afram, Boateng, & Sefa-Nyarko, 2016) focused on the prevalence, risks factors and consequences of child marriage without seeking to understand the practice of child marriage from individual and societal experiential levels. The social and cultural construction of gender, sexuality and adolescence was perceived to be the underlying factors that seemed to perpetuate the practice of child marriage in those societies. Rao, Vidya and Sriramya (2015) maintained that child marriage seems to be prevalent in societies where there is an emphasis on the different gender roles for males and females and where sexual debut was associated with the onset of puberty. Gagnon (1990) posited that sexuality is not a universal phenomenon but is created and defined by cultural spaces. This may imply that to understand the concept of marriage and sexuality, one needs to examine the cultural and societal definitions of marriage and sexuality as well as the experiences of the individuals who are continuously engaging in such practises. Against this backdrop, the study sought to understand the phenomenon of child marriage by examining the interactions between gender, sexuality, culture and adolescent development.

1.3. Research Questions

This study examined the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of being a girl-child who is married?
2. What are the positive and negative experiences of being married as a girl-child?
3. How does child marriage affect the psychological wellbeing of the married girl?
4. What are the societal factors that contribute to the cultural practice of child marriage in the Ghanaian society?
5. What are the interventions being implemented to prevent and alleviate the effect of the practice of child marriage in the Ghanaian society?

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1.4. Research Objectives

The main purpose of the study was to identify the factors that contribute to child marriage and explore the lived experiences of married girls in the Northern region of Ghana. Specifically, this study sought to:

1. Gain a rich understanding of the subjective experiences of married girls in order to access the narratives (or the "lived experiences") of affected girls through the use of in-depth interviews.
2. To explore the positive and negative experiences of child marriage for the wife since being married. This was pursued through in-depth interviews with married girls.
3. Present the perspectives of parents of married girls, community elders and staff of governmental and non-governmental on the factors that contribute to the practice of child marriage in the research setting. This was pursued through individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with these participant groups.
4. To present the perceived implications of child marriage for the well-being of married girl, parents and community. This was pursued through individual in-depth interviews with married girls, parents of married girls and focus group discussion with staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations.
5. To present the various interventions being implemented to alleviate the impact of and prevent the practice of child marriage in the Northern region of Ghana. This was pursued through focus group discussions with staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations.

1.5. Scope of the study

The practice of child marriage has been studied in many countries and across many cultures in the world. Though studies have produced information on the practice of child

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marriage, little is known about the Ghanaian context especially in Northern Ghana where it is widely practised. Additionally, the impact of the practice of child marriage on the mental health of the marriage girls has not been adequately researched. This study focused on the social construction of gender, sexuality and adolescent development and its influence on child marriage in Ghana. This was achieved through interviews that were conducted with married girls and parents of married girls as well as community elders and staff of non-governmental organisations. The interviews focused on discussing the experiences of the married girls and the social construction of gender and sexuality among the Dagomba of the Mion, Tamale, Sanarigu and Tolon districts of the Northern region of Ghana. The participants' perceptions of the positive and negative impact of early marriage on the mental health of the married girls were explored. This brought to light the benefits and deleterious factors that were associated with the practice of child marriage as well as their impact on the mental health of the married girls.

1.6. Chapter Outline

This dissertation is presented in the dissertation-by-publication format and comprises twelve chapters. The twelve chapters are made up of six traditional chapters: Introduction, Literature review, Methodology, Subjective experiences and self-reflection and Summaries and Conclusion as well as six scholarly articles (chapters six to eleven). The first two scholarly articles (see Chapters six and seven) provide information on the socio-cultural and religious underpinning of child marriage through the examination of Ghanaian literature on child marriage (Chapter 6) as well as the views and experiences of community elders who are believed to be the custodians of the cultural mores of a group of people (Chapter 7). Chapters eight to eleven provide the views and experiences of married adolescent girls, their parents and staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations in their day-to-day encounters with child marriage as a phenomenon. The details of the 12 chapters are set out below.

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Chapter 1: The first chapter provides an introduction of the research and the rationale for the study, outlines the aims and objectives of the study and articulates the research questions that I sought to answer in the study. The chapter concludes with an overview of the outline of the dissertation and chapters of the study.

Chapter 2: In the second chapter, I explore and discuss the literature on the social construction of marriage, gender and sexuality as a whole and in the Ghanaian context. Other related concepts such as culture, gender roles, and the characteristics of Ghanaian customary marriage are discussed. The chapter ends with a discussion of the impact of child marriage on the individual and society.

Chapter 3: The third chapter presents the theoretical framework in which I discuss the theories that will form the foundation for the research. Social constructionist theories, feminist theories and the ecological systems theories are discussed in relation to child marriage. The chapter concludes with a summary of the theories and their relevance to my study.

Chapter 4: In the fourth chapter, I present the methods that were employed in obtaining the data pertinent to executing the aims of this study. Here, the philosophical assumptions, research design, the research settings and participants are described. I also discuss the methods I employed in gaining access to the research setting and further explain the ethical considerations, procedure, and methods of data analysis.

Chapter 5: Chapter five presents my personal reflections on the researcher process and I situate myself as a researcher. I discuss the various challenges and experiences I encountered and how I navigated through the research setting. Given the social constructionist approach adopted in this study, I also engage reflexively with my role as a participant researcher in this process of meaning-making.

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Chapter 6: In the sixth chapter, a conceptual paper entitled *Understanding child marriage in Ghana: The constructions of gender and sexuality and implications for married girls* is presented. In this paper, I explore and examine the literature pertaining to the practice of child marriage and provide a picture of research and literature in relation to its practice. I discuss issues on the construction of gender and sexuality in a patriarchal society and its influence on the practice of child marriage in the Northern region of Ghana. The implications of this practice on the mental health of married girls are also discussed. The chapter concludes by arguing for relevant research on the psychological impact of child marriage in Africa.

Chapter 7: Chapter seven is an empirical manuscript that discusses the cultural and religious influences that underpin the promotion of child marriage in the Ghanaian society. This manuscript presents detailed accounts of cultural and religious factors that promote child marriage gathered through in-depth interviews with traditional elders in the Ghanaian society.

Chapter 8: The eighth chapter discusses the motivations for marrying from the perspectives of married adolescent girls in the Northern region of Ghana. Recommendations that are geared towards the needs of unmarried and married adolescent girls are also discussed with the view to address the concern with the practice of early marriage in Ghana.

Chapter 9: Chapter nine presents the subjective experiences of being a married girl and its perceived impact on the psychological wellbeing of the married girls. Recommendations to mitigate the psychological impact of early marriage on married girls are discussed from the different social and governmental levels.

Chapter 10: The tenth chapter presents a manuscript that examines the views of parents on the practice of child marriage as well as their experiences as parents of married girls. Their views about the reasons for the marriage of their daughters and implications on the wellbeing of the married girls and themselves are discussed.

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Chapter 11: The eleventh chapter presents the perceptions of professionals who work with organisations in the Northern regions of Ghana that aim to reduce the impact of child marriage and eradicate the practice. Specifically, their views on the possible causes and effects of the practice, the nature and effectiveness of those interventions that are being implemented to end child marriage are explored. The challenges that prevent the success of those interventions and recommendations for improving the intervention at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels are also discussed.

Chapter 12: In the last chapter, Chapter twelve, I summarise the findings and conclusions of the entire study. This is where I synthesise all the findings that are discussed in other sections of this dissertation. The discussion touches on the implications of the results for theory development and research. I give recommendations for future researchers and policymakers to enable them to plan interventions engaging with the practice of child marriage in the Northern region of Ghana.

The dissertation adopts the APA (6th Edition) guidelines for thesis writing throughout the dissertation including the manuscript chapters. All references in this thesis (for manuscripts and chapters) have been compiled at the end of the dissertation.

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Chapter 2

Literature Review

"Marriage is like a groundnut, you must crack it to see what is inside."

Akan proverb

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter I discuss child marriage focusing on the social and cultural norms surrounding this phenomenon. I start off this chapter by examining the definition of child marriage and defining who a child is as well as discussing issues of consent and age of majority which are crucial in understanding child marriage. I further discuss the socio-cultural factors affecting the practice of child marriage in Ghana by examining the constructions of gender, adolescence, sexuality and marriage and how it affects the practice of child marriage. I finally present a summary of the literature discussed in this study.

2.2. Defining child marriage and concepts

Early or child marriage is any marriage or union where one or both spouses is/are under the age of 18 (Alhassan, 2013; Mourtada, Schlecht, & DeJong, 2017). According to Sexual Rights Initiative (2013), there is no general consensus on the term (e.g., child marriage, early marriage, forced marriage or child early and forced marriage) to use in defining the marriage of an individual who is below 18 years. In discussing child marriage, one needs to consider some important terms (child, consent and maturity or age of majority) that are frequently used in defining child marriage. These terms are used to distinguish between early marriage, forced marriage and child marriage.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child ([CRC], Part 1, Article 1, p. 2) mentions that "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." Based on this definition, child marriage is

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the marriage of an individual who is less than 18 years (Neetu, Edmeades, Murithi, & Barre, 2019). This definition of child marriage is perceived to be problematic as the definition of a child is not universal (Sexual Rights Initiative [SRI], 2013). The phrase 'unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier' as indicated in the definition of a child reveals that to be considered a child is subjected to the country an individual finds herself/himself in. The concept of child marriage, therefore, is reported to be a western ideology since most practising communities do not consider child marriage as an infringement on the rights of the child until western policies were enacted and adopted by the United Nations and its member countries (SRI, 2013). While other countries allow the attainment of majority based on age, others allow the attainment of majority when an individual gets married or when physical signs of puberty are noticed (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Lansdown, 2005). For instance, in Iran, the age of attainment of majority for girls is nine lunar years while 15 years for boys (Justice for Iran, 2015). In Saudi Arabia, the age for the attainment of majority is based on the onset of puberty with 15 years being the lower age limit for being perceived as an adult (Human Rights Watch, 2008). For these reasons, the concept of child marriage and the notion of 18 years being the accepted minimum age for marriage is perceived to be socially constructed based on the cultural and religious values of a society (Bledsoe & Cohen, 1993; Stark, 2018).

Early marriage, on the other hand, has been used interchangeably with child marriage since it is perceived to be synonymous with it (see UNICEF, 2001, 2005). In some cases, early marriage is perceived to be more inclusive of other factors affecting the definition of the marriage of individuals below 18 years than the term child marriage (SRI, 2013). This is because 'early' in this context does not only mean a child below 18 years but incorporates other factors that are salient for human development. Early marriage, according to SRI (2013), has been defined as any marriage in which the individual's physical, emotional,

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sexual and psychosocial development does not permit them to consent to the marriage. These developmental milestones are believed to be necessary for marriage since physical and sexual development may denote the presence of secondary sexual characteristics that are needed for reproductions (Ampofo, 2001; UNICEF, 2001) while emotional development may mean the ability of the individual to deal with the stress of marriage, manage and cater for the family and home among others (Tenkorang, 2019).

Issues pertaining to consent in child marriage are also a subject for debate. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (Article 16[2] p.34) has stipulated that "marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses." The right to freely choose a spouse and to provide consent freely and fully is further reiterated by the Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women's (CEDAW), Article 16(1)(b). The issue of consent leads to the perception that most child/early marriages are forced since the individual who is younger than 18 years is considered not mature enough to consent to marry. Furthermore, forcing an individual to consent can involve physical, psychological and or financial coercion. Children due to their psychological, physical and cognitive development are also perceived as incapable of consenting to marriage (SRI, 2013). Despite these views, studies (Basazinewu, 2018; SRI, 2013; Tsekpo et al., 2016; University of Ghana Centre for Social Policy studies & World Vision Ghana [UG-CSPS & WVG], 2017) have indicated that some adolescent girls choose to marry early usually for the love of their husbands, for better life prospects, from peer pressure and sometimes circumstances in their own life. Although the Criminal Code of Ghana does not explicitly define consent, Section 14 has provided the circumstances under which consent is void. Here the age of consent is stated to be 16 years. By placing the age of consent at 16 years, it is not a crime for parents to marry off adolescent girls who engage in sexual acts at that age and get pregnant.

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In view of the issues discussed above, I choose to use the term child marriage and early marriage interchangeably and to denote the marriage of any individual who is below 18 years.

2.3. Child marriage: Global trends

About 650 million women were married globally before their 18th birthday (UNICEF, 2018) while about 250 million were married before their 15th birthday equivalent to more than one in three girls (Prameswari & Agustin, 2018; UNICEF, 2014). Currently, UNICEF reports (2018) indicate a decline from 25% to 21% in the prevalence of child marriage globally over the last 10 years. This decrease is due to the decline in South Asia where there has been a decrease from more than 50% to 30% (UNICEF, 2018). Reports from sub-Saharan, west and central Africa on the prevalence of child marriage indicate a rather slow decline although reports from North Africa indicate high decline rates in the practice of child marriage (UNICEF, 2015a, 2018). This trend is shifting the practice of child marriage, which was predominant in South Asia, to sub-Saharan Africa where the decrease in the practice of child marriage is slow compared to other parts of the world (UNICEF, 2018).

Rates from other parts of the world indicate decreases in the prevalence of the practice of child marriage. For example, the Middle East and North Africa have seen a substantial decline in the prevalence of child marriage over the past 25 years though this progress has slowed in the past 10 years. In Latin America and the Caribbean, however, UNICEF (2018) reports no evidence of decline stating that the prevalence of child marriage in this region is as high as it was 25 years ago. The prevalence of this practice in East Asia and the Pacific as well as in Eastern Europe and Central Asia continues to remain low (UNICEF, 2018).

Globally, child marriage has been reported to predominantly affect females although a minority of males may also be forced to marry early (Alhassan, 2013; UNICEF, 2014). According to Alhassan (2013), there has not been any research done on married boys in

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Ghana even though this study does not address this issue, it is worth considering for future research. In addition to the above, girl victims of child marriage are usually married off to considerably older men. For example, research indicates that in Mauritania and Nigeria, more than half of married girls aged 15 to 19 are married to men who are 10 or more years older than they are (UNICEF, 2014).

2.4. Child marriage in Ghana

Successive governments in Ghana have tried to curb the practice of child marriage due to its impact on the victims, the society and the nation. The Children's Act of Ghana, Act 560 (1998 – Section 1) defines a child as 'a person below the age of eighteen (18) years. The Act in Section 14 specifically prohibits the betrothal or marriage whether forceful or not of a child while it gives the child the right to refuse any form of marriage or betrothal. This makes it unlawful for an individual below age 18 to be either betrothed or married. Although most of the laws stated above prohibit the marriage of an individual who is below 18 years, there appear to be some disparities between the marriage age and age of consent which is believed to be significant when it comes to the practice of child marriage in Ghana.

The age of consent, according to the Criminal Offences Act (29) Section 14, is 16 years while the marriageable age is 18 years. By allowing individuals below 18 years the freedom to consent to sexual activities, adolescent girls are likely to engage in sexual activities which may result in early pregnancy.

Teenage pregnancy appears to be one of the main factors driving the early marriage of adolescent girls in communities where child marriage is rampant (MoGCSP, 2016). Girls who after engaging in sexual activities find themselves pregnant are usually married off to the men responsible for the pregnancy to protect the adolescent girl and her family's honour among other cultural customs surrounding marriage (Tsekpo et al., 2016; UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017).

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According to the 2018 Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS, 2018), one out of every five girls is married before her 18th birthday. The prevalence of child marriage nationwide has slightly reduced by 7.9% between 2014 (27.2%) and 2018 (19.3%) (See Table 2.1 and Table 2.2). The MICS (2018) indicated that currently 5% of women between ages 20-24 in Ghana were married before age 15 and 19.3% of women between ages 20-24 were married by age 18 - this percentage increases with the inclusion of older age cohorts. Among the different age cohorts, women aged 35 to 39 and 40 to 44 years had the highest rates of child marriage in Ghana. The highest rates of child marriage were recorded in the Northern and Upper East regions while the lowest rates were recorded in the Greater Accra region.

Table 2.1
MICS 2018 regional data on child marriage

Region	Percentage %
Northern	28
Upper West	22
Upper East	28
Western	23
Central	22
Eastern	23
Ashanti	17
Volta	21
Brong Ahafo	17
Greater Accra	8
National Average	19.3

Table 2.2
DHS 2014 regional data on child marriage

Region	Percentage %
Northern	39.6
Upper West	37.3
Upper East	36.1
Western	32.9
Central	29.5
Eastern	27.5
Ashanti	25.9
Volta	25.9
Brong Ahafo	23.9
Greater Accra	18.5
National Average	27.2

Note: Table 2.1 and 2.2 depicts women aged 20-49 who were married or in a union by 18 years. Tables were adapted from MoGCSP (2016) and the Ghana MICS (2017)

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2.4.1. The practice of child marriage: Ghanaian socio-cultural contributions.

Research (UNICEF, 2001) has indicated that the constructions of gender, sexuality, adolescence and marriage are the fundamental factors that affect the practice of child marriage. This means that to understand child marriage, an examination of individuals' subjective experiences of the social institutions, practices and constructions of gender, sexuality, marriage and adolescence become significant. In the ensuing sections, the concept of child marriage is examined in relation to how the Ghanaian society constructs marriage, gender, sexuality and adolescence to help understand the persistence of child marriage in the Ghanaian society despite government and instructional interventions to curb it. The experiences of married girls, their parents, elders and staff of governmental and non-governmental institutions was shared in the articles presented in the various chapters later in this dissertation to help understand how these constructions and experiences affect the practice of child marriage in the research setting.

2.4.2. Construction of gender in Ghanaian society.

In Ghana, as in most of Africa, there are socially prescribed roles for both men and women, which affect how the different sexes are perceived and expected to behave (Ampofo, 2001). Individuals become socialised into these roles. The culture of the Ghanaian society ensures the respect and enforcement of appropriate gender positions in society through, for example, the use of linguistic nuances such as proverbs in the daily discourse of the individual to explain, describe and reinforce stereotypes about men and women (Asimeng-Boahene, 2013; Dako-Gyeke & Owusu, 2013).

Traditional gender roles and socialisation patterns in Ghana implicitly or explicitly dictate gender roles and responsibilities (Mann & Takyi 2009; Shettima 1998). Ampofo, Beoku-Betts, Njambi and Osirim (2004) have argued that a lot of the different aspects of married life in Ghana, such as decision-making authority, reproductive behaviour,

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responsibility for caregiving as well as control over economic resources, are gender stratified. The gender roles and responsibilities place females as subordinates to their male counterparts and are reflected in how individuals are socialised from childhood (Ampofo, 2001). The responsibilities of females culturally are to support their husbands, conduct domestic work and care for the children while the responsibilities of males are to head the family and be the sole breadwinner and decision-maker of the family (Ampofo et al., 2004; Boateng, Ampofo, Flanagan, Gallay, & Yakah, 2006).

Furthermore, women are expected to be obedient wives and respect their elders. A wife who does not respect her husband can be disciplined by her husband and a man who feels his wife threatens his masculinity and power is allowed to discipline her (Kishor & Johnson, 2004; Mann & Takyi, 2009).

Due to these gender roles and inequalities placed on the female by the society, the early marriage of girls becomes an easy decision to take since girls are thought to be less intelligent than boys and will likely become wives and mothers (MoGCSP, 2016; Tsekpo et al., 2016; UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017).

Gender roles among the Dagomba (the ethnic group of most key informants recruited for this research) are defined by the cultural prescriptions of males and females. Ibrahim (2015) states that role prescription in the Dagomba society cuts across all aspects of the lives of individuals. Children are trained at very early stages of their lives to associate with members of their own gender (Alhassan, 2012; Ibrahim, 2015). For instance, women are brought up to be restrained in speech and talk with respect to men. Girls are trained to be good wives with a good wife being synonymous with a submissive and humble wife who speaks to her husband respectfully, does not refer to him by his name alone and does not speak to him in public (Abdul-Hamid, 2010; Alhassan, 2012).

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Domestic duties are separated according to gender with males expected to engage chores outside of the house such as cleaning the outside compound, farming, hunting and being trained to protect the home. Women, on the other hand, are expected to engage in the cleaning of the inner yard and rooms in the house, catering for the children, food processing and cooking as well as performing other house chores (Abdul-Hamid, 2010; Alhassan, 2012; Ibrahim, 2015). A 'self-respecting' man is not expected to engage in chores that are specifically reserved for women since he will be regarded as weak with lack of authority over his household. A wife who allows her husband to perform her chores is insulted severely (Alhassan, 2012).

2.4.3. Construction of sexuality and adolescence.

Koops and Zuckerman (2003, p. 346) defined adolescence as "the period in life that bridges the gap between childhood and adulthood". By this definition, adolescence is seen as the transitional period and is marked by the onset of puberty. The concept of adolescence as a separate transitional period in the life of an individual is considered a modern perspective (Macleod, 2006). The construction of adolescence is believed not to be the same across cultures and historical contexts (Saltman, 2005). Hall (1904) is associated with the development of the current concept of adolescence as a developmental stage in the life of an individual. Before then, children were perceived as small adults (Burr, 1995).

In Ghana, the cultural construction of adolescence is alien since an individual is a child until s/he reaches puberty and is considered then to be an adult. Among the various tribes, adolescence is believed to be the prepubertal period after childhood where the individual attains physical, sexual and social developmental milestones. The onset of menarche plunges girls into adulthood and starts the process of her initiation into adulthood, marriage and child-bearing (Awusabo-Asare, Abane, & Kumi-Kyereme, 2004). For males, the development of a range of pubertal characteristics marks puberty and are important

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milestones leading to initiation into adulthood (Awusabo-Asare et al., 2004). Aside from preparing individuals for adulthood, initiation rites also serve as a tool for educating individuals for the cultural prescriptions of their gendered adult roles, sexual and reproductive health and responsibilities and to control premarital sex (Shefer, 2004).

Maintaining virginity before marriage, though upheld by society, is not practised by most young people. In view of this, part of initiation rites is a test of virginity (Asampong et al., 2013; Osafo, Asampong, Langmagne, & Ahiedeke, 2014). Culturally, premarital sex is considered a taboo bringing dishonour to the family of the adolescent, especially the girl, who is perceived to have engaged in any form of sexual promiscuity (Awusabo-Asare et al., 2004, UNICEF, 2001). Although Ghana has undergone social change due to modernity and westernisation, early marriage persists especially in rural areas and poor urban areas (Awusabo-Asare et al., 2004) due to entrenched cultural and religious traditions still being practised and financial considerations. Most ethnic groups in Ghana historically encouraged early marriage and childbearing (Awusabo-Asare et al., 2004; Nukunya, 1992). Females are usually married off right after puberty rites have been performed, which occur immediately after menarche (Awusabo-Asare et al., 2004). The practice of marrying adolescent girls after their first menstrual period perpetuates the practice of child marriage especially in communities where these constructions of adolescence still persist.

The cultural demand for chastity before marriage among the Dagomba is very paramount, especially for the girl. Alhassan (2012) notes that the importance of a girl maintaining her virginity as compared to the boy is seen in the lack words describing a virgin male compared to the wide variety of words that describe a virgin female. Being a virgin before marriage among the Dagomba, just as in other Ghanaian cultures, confers honour on the girl and her family (especially the person who raised her) (Alhassan, 2012). Since the

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Dagomba do not practice any initiation rites, virginity of the individual is tested instead at the consummation of marriage with the presence of blood on the white calico bed sheet the couple consummate their marriage on used as indication of the girl's virginity (this is an adopted Islamic practice; Abdul-Hamid, 2010; Alhassan, 2012). Although the testing of virginity is not currently practised, it is still upheld and perceived to be an important indicator of being a morally upright individual in the Dagomba society (Alhassan, 2012).

2.4.4. Characteristics of marital practices in Ghana.

Marriage is the desired status expected of every individual in Ghana. Irrespective of educational, socioeconomic or employment status, social expectations to marry and have children are paramount (Addai, Opoku-Agyeman, & Amanfu, 2015; Agyeman, Brown, & Awusabo- Asare, 1990). Defined as a union between two individuals who have agreed to stay together usually with legal and or cultural backing for the posterity, honour, social and economic gains (Wimalasena, 2016), marriage is recognised as an essential part of the social system through which society is propagated (Ankrah, 2016).

Though Ghana has been influenced by westernisation and modernity, customs surrounding marriage still persists. Customs such as family influence (Manuh, 1997), disregard for romantic relationships (Nukunya, 2003), enforcement of virginity before marriage and the payment of bridewealth (Nukunya, 2003; Takyi, Miller, Kitson, & Oheneba-Sakyi, 2003) are still practised in most ethnic and religious groups in the country. Literature has suggested that the practice of child marriage is underpinned by some of these traditional customs and practices (Africa Union, 2015; UNICEF, 2001). Early marriage, polygyny and spousal age differences continue to be a dominant feature of traditional marriage in Ghana as in most African countries south of the Sahara (Westoff, 2003).

Marriage is practised differently among the various ethnicities and religious faiths in Ghana. In view of this, marriage in Ghana is guided by customary, religious and common

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laws (Addai et al., 2015; Ankrah, 2016). These traditions, religious practices and values surrounding marriage present different avenues for the individual to marry. An individual in Ghana can, therefore, marry in the customary, religious (Islamic or Christian) way and/or by ordinance.

Customary marriages in Ghana are seen as a union of not only the couple but their families as well (Ankrah, 2016; Kyerematen, 1967). Traditionally, marriage is viewed as an establishment of a permanent relationship between the families which does not end in the death of the couple. Marriages were traditionally arranged by the family sometimes before or as soon as the child is born (Danquah, 2008; Nukunya, 2003). Kyerematen (1967) notes that finding a marriage partner for a child was the inescapable duty of a father which made parental influence in partner selection very essential. Child betrothal is known as *asiwa* among the Ashanti's, *ngugu* with the Dagomba, and *bi twi opi* ("they promise a woman") among the Konkomba of Ghana and still is a common marital partner selection practice (Alhassan, 2013; Awusabo-Asare et al., 2004; Füllekruss, 2008). Among the Konkomba, for example, Alhassan (2013) reports that parents of girls found it better to know the husband of the child before reaching marriageable age. The prospective husband was also responsible for the care and upkeep of his wife who then no longer is the responsibility of the parents (Alhassan, 2013).

Exchange marriage, which is another kind of betrothal, involves the marriage of a girl into a family in which her brother or relative intends to or may have married from (Füllekruss, 2008; Tait, 1956). The girl who is married into the family is perceived to be used as an exchange for a bride from her in-law's family for her male relative (Froko, 2016; Füllekruss, 2008). In other instances, exchange marriage can be contracted to pay for family debt usually as a form of exchange for cattle debt (UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017). The consent of the girl to be married is usually not needed although she may be asked. When the girl refuses

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to consent, she may be abducted by the man she has been promised to in order to commence the marriage. The man who may have already paid her bride price in the form of cattle, years of labour on his in-law's farm or gifts to his in-laws is expected to inform the family of the girl of her abduction and marriage (Froko, 2016; Tait, 1956).

Marriage by abduction is a common custom practised among most tribes in northern Ghana (e.g., the Dagaari, Konkomba, and Kassena); a girl (prospective bride) may be abducted by her future husband and his friends and taken to his home and married (Froko, 2016; Füllekruss, 2008; Tait, 1956). Bride abduction can be consensual between the couple or between the prospective husband and the parents and/or brother of the intended bride (Froko, 2016). When permission from the girl's family was not sought, the man who has abducted the girl goes to inform his in-laws of 'stealing' the girl and then performs the marriage rites to signify the marriage contract. Girls who do not consent to the marriage are usually forced to stay married to the man who abducted them (Froko, 2016).

Elopement is another kind of practice that is widely accepted among some tribes (Kassena, Konkomba, Dagaaba, Sissala) in Ghana (Füllekruss, 2008). Since the traditional practice does not place love and romantic relationships as the basis for marriage (Nukunya, 2003), young couples who feel in love and want to marry may elope especially when their families do not support their relationship or the woman has been betrothed to another man (Mwakikagile, 2017). The couple may return to the girl's family after some time to perform their marriage rites in order to be recognised by society as married (Füllekruss, 2008).

What is prominent among all these customary marriage ceremonial practices is the payment of bridewealth which is practised in most societies and ethnic groups in Ghana (Bawa, 2015). When this price is paid the husband usually expects total surrender of the woman's rights to him and his kin due to the high amount he may have paid for her and the marriage ceremony (Bawa, 2015; Dodoo, 1998; Fuseini & Dodoo, 2012). These expectations

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are believed to have an effect on how a man may treat his wife, his influence on her social and economic autonomy as well as her role in household decision making (Bawa, 2015).

Although these practices to some extent exist in most communities in Ghana, other forms of courtship and marriage are currently being practised. A lot of the youth in Ghana are now marrying after they have courted for months or even years. Courtship has become more prominent due to acculturation of foreign religious practices, westernisation, and the influence of social and electronic media (Nukunya, 2003). The rights and choice of partner by individuals are now considered by their family although their parents' approval of a partner is still relevant (Addai et al., 2015; Manuh, 1997; Yin & Black, 2014). When parental and familial approval has been given, the couple then performs their marriage ceremony depending on their ethnic, socioeconomic and religious background. It is important to note that in most ethnic and religious groups in Ghana, customary marriage rites are expected to be performed before other marriage (whether religious or legal) rites are performed. Due to the role and influence of the extended family in the marital process, customary marriage is usually the first marriage rite to be performed by the couple and without which the marriage is not recognised by the family of the couple and the society. On its own, customary marriage is not recognised by the constitution unless it has been registered following requirements provided in the *Marriage Act 1884/5* (Addai et al., 2015). Religious marriage ceremonies, which among Christians is the church or white wedding and among Muslims is *Amariya* or *Awuriya,* follow the traditional marriage rites. Marriages customs among other religious faiths in Ghana are also accepted although among a small group of adherents.

Marriage by ordinance as stated in the *Marriage Act 1884/5* is another type of marriage performed in Ghana. Unlike the customary and Islamic marriage which is polygamous, marriage by ordinance is monogamous in nature and is recognised by the constitution of Ghana (Yin & Black, 2014).

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2.4.5. Marriage practices and influence on child marriage.

In Ghana and in many other African countries, the literature (African Union, 2015; UNICEF, 2001) has revealed that marriage customs and practices are the main catalysts for the practice of child marriage in practising communities. For instance, the need to control the sexual behaviours of young individuals in the community is believed to be one of the reasons for the practice of child marriage. In communities where it is practised, parents, family and the society have defined spaces, institutions and periods in which an individual is expected to engage in sexual relations (Anarfi & Owusu, 2011) - a deviation from this may be considered a taboo which may have consequences for the individual and the society. Out-of-wedlock sex and pregnancy are believed to bring shame and dishonour to the individual, her/his family and the community. Hence, societies where premarital sexual relations are perceived to be immoral, tend to control such behaviours by marrying individuals who are believed to reach sexual maturity (African Union, 2015; WiLDAF Ghana, 2014). Child marriage, therefore, becomes an avenue to marry off a child or an adolescent who is perceived to be mature for marriage and/or at risk of becoming sexually immoral.

The emphasis on bridewealth in the Ghanaian customary marriage process is believed to be a contributing factor for the practice of child marriage (Bawa, 2015). Bride price, which may be the exchange of livestock (cows, sheep, goats, guinea fowls), labour or cash between the bride's husband and the bride's family, is intended to be paid for the acquisition of a marriage partner and the formalisation of a marriage contract (Bawa, 2015). Research indicates that the parents, guardians and family members- due to the economic benefits of bride price - tend to marry off their daughters early (Alhassan 2013; MoGCSP, 2016). Bride price becomes a way of acquiring wealth especially for families who are experiencing economic challenges or poverty. The Ghana MICS 2018 report and other studies (Alhassan, 2013; Paul, 2019) revealed that child marriage was highest among the poorest population.

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Other cultural practices present in the Ghanaian marriage customs that influence the practice of child marriage are the cultural emphasis on childbirth and procreation, the strong emphasis on familial involvement in the marital process. Due to the need to continue the family's lineage, families encourage the early marriage of individuals since early marriage is believed to widen the fertility window of a woman (UNICEF, 2001; WLUML, 2013). Due to parental and familial involvement in the marital process, individuals are unable to resist the pressure to marry early even when they are not ready to do so. A dominant feature of the Ghanaian marriage process is the involvement of the family in the marriage process (Manuh, 1997; Nukunya, 2003). In some instances, parents may feel the need to select their child's partner for them or encourage them to marry a partner of their choice (Tsekpo et al., 2016). The UG-CSPS and WVG (2017) reported that parents in some communities in Ghana felt the need to select a partner for their children or encouraged their children to marry a particular individual due to the perceived cultural role of the parent in the selection of a marriage partner for their children. They may also encourage the selection of a particular individual for economic benefits. Their study also revealed that the practice of exchange marriage and betrothal among the Konkomba of the Northern and Volta region increased the incidence of early marriages in those regions (UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017). The practice of exchange marriage and betrothal is usually enforced by the family in order to secure a bride price for the sons/males in the families and to keep family wealth.

2.5. Impact of child marriage

The impact of child marriage on its victims, their children and on their society has been reported in a number of studies across the globe. Although some studies (for example Raj, Gomez, & Silverman, 2014) have reported positive impact on the victims and their families, most studies (Alhassan, 2013; de Groot et al., 2018; Parsons et al., 2015; Raj et al., 2014; UNICEF, 2001) report damaging effects of child marriage that include the violation of

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the rights of victims, physical and mental health implications, economic implications for the individual and the society among others. The impacts of child marriage are discussed below.

2.5.1. Education.

The role of education in the practice of child marriage has been described as double-edged as it is reported to be a protective factor as well as a cause (Glinski et al., 2015; Malé & Wodon, 2016; Steinhaus, Gregowski, Fenn, & Petroni, 2016). Literature indicates that girls who married early have their educational trajectory altered (Efevbera, Bhabha, Farmer, & Fink, 2019). Compared to unmarried girls, married girls have lower education levels (Nguyen & Wodon, 2012; Psaki, 2014; Semba et al., 2008; Wachs, 2008). Reports indicate that married girls with some form of education are less likely to be sent back to school after marriage due to the responsibilities they are expected to perform when they marry (Jenson & Thornton, 2003; Lloyd & Mensch, 2008). Furthermore, Paul (2019) reports that girls with no schooling and primary level of education are more likely to marry early compared to girls with secondary and tertiary education. This means that for girls, having higher educational levels significantly reduce the prevalence of girl child marriage (Paul, 2019).

When the education of a married girl ceases, the acquisition of knowledge and skills she may need to manage her family and become a productive adult in her community also ceases (Parsons et al., 2015). Additionally, they are cut off from friends and a space to develop social skills and networks as well as support systems provided by the school environment which empower them for their future and that of their children (UNICEF 2014b). The lack of education has been reported to hinder married girls' access to information that is necessary for them and their children's health and well-being (Abu-Ghaida & Klasen, 2004; Semba et al., 2008); the consequences of this are seen in the negative reports on their physical health and wellbeing.

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2.5.2. Economic.

Having low educational attainment has been linked to economic implications for victims of child marriage. Klugman et al. (2014) aver that when a girl/woman is economically empowered, she is able to easily make decisions for herself and her children as well as contribute to the family's finance and decision making. Additionally, women who have economic autonomy in their families, are able to influence the allocation of resources for themselves and their children in the household expenditures on key areas such as education and health (International Food Policy Research Institute [IFPRI], 2003; Seymour & Peterman, 2017). Child marriage robs its victims of these rights since most of them are uneducated, immature and poor thereby subdued by their husbands and their families (Parsons et al., 2015).

Studies indicate that most married girls are reported to be economically vulnerable due to their lack of access to work and livelihood opportunities which may help them earn an income since they usually are either under-educated or under-skilled (Klasen & Pieters, 2012; Mikhail, 2002). This makes them solely dependent on their husbands and in-laws who may use their situation to restrict and isolate them from social engagements (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008; Nguyen & Wodon, 2014).

Furthermore, married girls who work usually do not have control over their incomes and finances since they are, in most cases, considered the properties of their partners and their families (Parsons et al., 2015). The lack of economic autonomy may influence their decisions on their economic wellbeing. The economic effect of child marriage on victims is seen in their lack of economic engagement which is reported to significantly reduce economic growth in communities or societies and even at national levels (Chaaban & Cunningham, 2011; Smith & Haddad, 2015).

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2.5.3. Health.

Early marriage reportedly has implications for the physical and mental health of married girls. Literature indicates that girls who married early experience greater levels of malnutrition, sexually transmitted infection, cervical cancer, malaria, obstetric fistula (which is the perforation of the bladder or bowel, as a result of protracted labour), obstructed labour and higher maternal mortality and morbidity than women who marry later (Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Hampton, 2010; Nour, 2009). Children born to married girls are also reported to have a higher risk of malnutrition than those born to older women (Efevbera1 et al., 2019; Hampton, 2010; Raj, Saggurti, Balaiah, & Silverman, 2010). Even after surviving their first year, research indicates that children born to married adolescent girls have 28% higher mortality (Adhikari, 2003) which has been associated with the mother's poor nutrition, emotional and physical immaturity, reduced access to social and reproductive health and their high susceptibility to infectious diseases (Nuor, 2009; Raj et al., 2010).

Silverman, Decker, Saggurti, Balaiah, and Raj (2008) further report that pregnant married girls who are in abusive marriages have a high likelihood of experiencing pregnancy complications, give birth prematurely, deliver infants under low birth weight and are likely to miscarry. The reason for this is reported to be due to the tendency of their husbands and in-laws to deny married girls the medical assistance they may need during their pregnancy and childbirth (Hampton, 2010; Silverman et al., 2008). Furthermore, reports indicate that child marriage is associated with a risk of married girls being underweight due to frequent pregnancy and repeated childbearing (Efevbera et al., 2019).

In addition to the above, the literature indicates that married girls are more likely to contract sexually transmitted infections (STIs) compared to their unmarried colleagues. Nuor (2009) reports that 50% of married girls in Kenya and 59% in Zambia had a likelihood of contracting HIV compared to unmarried counterparts. The contraction of HIV and other STIs,

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according to Nuor (2009), is further enhanced by the physical immaturity of married girls, their lack of sexual education on protective and preventive measures and the early detection of the STIs. Moreover, married girls are usually married to older men who are in polygamous marriages or have multiple partners and are usually junior wives (Clark, Bruce, & Dude, 2006). Using protective and preventive measures are not realistic options for married girls who have no bargaining power in their marriages especially when it comes to their sexual and reproductive health (Clark et al., 2006).

Married girls are reported to face pain during sexual intercourse as a result of their physiologically underdeveloped sexual organs (Sofi, 2017). Child marriage is in itself traumatic for girls, especially in situations where they were abducted and may have lifelong consequences for mental (Parsons et al., 2015).

2.5.4. Psychological.

The psychological implications of child marriage have been reported by several researchers although studies on the effects of child marriage for the mental health of victims of child marriage are limited (Gage, 2013; Le Strat et al., 2011; Nour, 2009; Sezgin & Punamäki, 2019). Some of the reported impacts of child marriage include depression, suicidal ideation, social isolation and low self-esteem (Douki, Zenib, Nacef, & Halbreich, 2007; Gage, 2013; Khanna et al., 2013; Le Strat et al., 2011).

Victims of child marriage are reported to be socially isolated from their friends, school, family and other social support systems they may need for their emotional development and well-being (Le Strat et al., 2011; John, Edmeades, Murithi, & Barre, 2019). Most married girls lack the autonomy and agency they need to make important decisions essential to their well-being due to restrictions they face in their marital homes enforced by their husbands and in-laws (Parsons et al., 2015). Their lack of agency, social restrictions and

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alienation usually are reported to be deeply rooted in gender inequality and may lead to the development of low self-esteem (Parsons et al., 2015).

Additionally, some married girls in some cultures are considered to be their husband's possession and bonded for life (Mikhail, 2002; Raj, 2010). The concept of being a property allows their husbands and their in-laws to abuse married girls by making them perform stressful chores and controlling their lives (Mikhail, 2002; UNICEF, 2001). Married girls in such situations also find it difficult to divorce their husbands since they are bonded for life, in situations where they able to divorce, they would be socially ridiculed and shunned or even receive physical threats since divorce is frowned on by those communities (UNICEF, 2001).

Many girls are usually married off by their parents in their bid to protect them from sexual harassment. Conversely, reports indicate that most girls who are married off early find themselves in abusive and stressful marriages (Amin, 2014; Parsons et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2014b; UNFPA 2012). Child marriage itself is considered a form of violence against girls (Amin, 2014; Solotaroff & Pande, 2014). Furthermore, gender norms that undervalue girls and form the basis of the practice of child marriage, usually promote intimate partner violence and the abuse of girls (Parsons et al., 2015). Married girls usually experience emotional, psychical and/or sexual abuse which may lead to the development of severe depression and suicide (Gage, 2013). They are also unable to speak against the acts of violence they experience at the hands of their husbands and in-laws due to their lack of autonomy and dependence on their husbands and their families (Parsons et al., 2015).

A study conducted in 34 countries reported that globally, girls who married before 18 reported higher rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) compared to women who married as adults (Kidman, 2016). Marriage before age 15 was reported to be associated with the report of physical and/or sexual IPV over the past year in nine countries while women who married

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between 15 and 17 years had a heightened risk of physical and/or sexual IPV in 19 countries (Kidman, 2016).

In Ghana, Tenkorang (2019) reported that, compared to women who married as adults, child marriage victims were more likely to approve patriarchal gender norms and had lower levels of autonomy within their households. Additionally, he found significant associations between child marriage and the likelihood of experiencing all or at least one of three the dimensions of IPV (physical, sexual and emotional).

2.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented and discussed the available literature on the practice of child marriage and other aspects relevant to this study. The focus of this chapter was to present an overview of the global and Ghanaian trends on the prevalence of child marriage as well as the implications thereof. I also discussed the sociocultural underpinnings of child marriage by examining the constructions of gender, adolescence, sexuality and marriage in the Ghanaian context.

In the next chapter, I examine theories that were adopted to inform and guide the understanding of child marriage from the perspectives of the various participants (married girls, parents of married girls, community elders and staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations) selected for the study.

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Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

"Ti koro nko agyina"

"One head (or person) does not hold council."

(Akan proverb)

The proverb above calls for the gathering of ideas and perspectives about a particular phenomenon as there is a belief among the Akans that wisdom does not reside in the mind of one individual but in the minds of every individual. This chapter is the gathering of ideas and theories to understand the practice of child marriage.

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I give an overview of the theoretical foundations that were employed to aid my examination and understanding of the lived experiences of married girls, their parents and staff of government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as the cultural underpinnings of the concept and practice of child marriage from the perspectives of community elders. This research adopts an integration of social constructionism and feminist standpoint perspective as well as the ecological systems theory proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986). These theoretical frameworks were adopted for this study because they enabled me to unfold subjective experiences of the cultural construction and practice of child marriage from the participants' worldview within the context of the society's definition of gender and sexuality. This allowed for meaning-making to be examined from micro to macro levels of analysis. First, I present an overview of the social constructionist perspective and discuss the history and assumptions of this approach. I further discuss the criticisms and strengths of the social constructionist approach. After this, I briefly discuss the

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ecological systems model as well as the feminist standpoint perspective. I conclude by discussing the relevance of these theories for this study.

3.2. Theoretical underpinnings

3.2.1. Social constructionism.

Social constructionism is a concept that seeks to explain and describe the processes by which individuals understand the world in which they live based on their own experiences of the world and their social reality (Gergen, 1985). It is believed to have arisen from a point in history (the 1970s) when social scientists raised sceptical questions against the dominant epistemologies employed in understanding the world and social reality (Rogers & Rogers, 2001). The scepticism towards the universalised concepts of truth, objectivity, rationality and the moral principle led to the theoretical revolutions such as "*postempiricism, poststructuralism,* and *postmodernism*" among others (Gergen, Lightfoot, & Sydow, 2004). This then led to the development of the social constructionism (developed by Berger and Luckmann 1966) based on symbolic interactionism and phenomenology perspectives (Gergen et al., 2004).

Social constructionism attempts to explain how knowledge about the world is acquired by examining past, present and anticipated experiences as individuals interact with the environment and the world (Gergen, 1985). These experiences are based on individuals' social and interpersonal experiences and influences with and from the world (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998; Owen, 1995). According to DeLamater and Hyde (1998), the fundamental assumption of social reality, as proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 13), is that "reality is socially constructed". The construction of social reality is the process by which individuals continuously create or make sense of their shared experience of the world which they believe as objectively factual, through the actions and interactions with individuals, social institutions and structures (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

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Berger and Luckmann (1966) proposed three concepts that affect how social reality is constructed: externalisation, objectification and internalisation. Externalisation is the processes whereby individuals, cultures and societies by their own activities create and make sense of social institutions in their social world. Objectification is how the social institutions and constructs are objectified and made to be real and "out there just as nature is out there" to be discovered (Rogers & Rogers, 2001, p. 106). Internalisation, on the other hand, is the process whereby the objectified social construct becomes known as an existing entity and is made familiar to the individual through socialisation and enculturation. The process of internalisation is ongoing and fluid though taken for granted since these knowledge or "objects of knowledge" exist in our societies and we encounter them every day through social interactions (Rogers & Rogers, 2001; Van Wyk, 2015).

Since its introduction into academia, social constructionism has influenced the creation of theories, methodologies and research to help the understanding of social concepts and phenomena especially in the field of psychology. Social constructionism is proposed to be based on four key assumptions (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1985, 1999a, 1999b; Gergen et al., 2004). These assumptions are discussed below.

3.2.1.1. Assumptions of social constructionism.

First of all, social constructionism challenges the positivist and empiricist assumption that knowledge and "truth" is a product of induction and can be understood through objectivity and the unbiased observation of the world. Our experience of the world does not dictate the nature of the world and the way it should be understood (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985). Based on this, constructionists believe that there cannot be a universal or objective "truth" in the world but rather different versions of the social reality exist.

Furthermore, social constructionism suggests that our understanding of the world, concepts and categories is historically and culturally situated and based on our interactions

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with others. According to Gergen (1985, p. 267), our understanding of social reality is "not driven by the forces of nature, but is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship." Our understanding of the world, therefore, is considered a product of culture and history and also based on the prevailing perceptions and knowledge that is shared at that time. Knowledge, therefore, becomes artefacts of our societies (Burr, 1995; Owen, 1995).

The third assumption of social constructionism posits that knowledge is maintained by social process and that "the degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes" (Gergen, 1985, p. 268). Simply put, knowledge is not created by the perceived objective reality nor does it reside in the minds of specific individuals but formed through interactions with people and activities we encounter in our daily lives (Burr, 1995; MacKay, 1997). As a result of this, social constructionism pays particular attention to language and how it is used to construct social reality.

Lastly, social constructionism, according to Burr (1995), is connected with knowledge and social action. Social constructionist postulates that our understanding of the social reality is negotiated since they are intertwined with the activities and interactions with others. These negotiated understandings of the world lead to the creation of varieties of perceptions and constructions of the world and social reality. Our explanations of the world themselves, according to Gergen (1985), constitute different kinds of social actions.

Based on the above assumptions, social constructionism highlights the collective nature of human consciousness developed through historical and cultural experiences and interactions with others (Durrheim, 1997). Social constructionists strongly reject essentialism and its assumption that different phenomena have some kind of essence or core properties which can be discovered (Alvesson, 2009). For example, gender and sexuality are believed to

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be a product of a particular culture and how the language and institutions in that culture are used to define gender (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). The social constructionist approach begs the use of alternative methods or pursuit of knowledge of a particular phenomenon. The aim of the investigation should not be to discover the truth about the phenomenon under study but rather to gain an understanding of that phenomenon as it exists in the world. The researcher must, therefore, reject the empiricist way of acquiring knowledge which, according to them, is "mechanistic, dualistic, and individualistic understanding of their object of study" (Durrheim, 1997, p. 181).

The social constructionist perspective is relevant for this study because I aim to understand child marriage as a social phenomenon from the perspectives and experiences of married girls, their parents, community elders and staff of governmental and NGOs in the selected research setting. By so doing, the different truths about child marriage will be garnered from the various participant groups contributing a broader perspective rather than presenting the views from just one perspective.

3.2.2. The ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986).

The ecological systems model propounded by Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposes four nested environmental levels – the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem – influencing an individual's socialisation in proximal and distal ways. He later developed the bioecological systems theory and added a fifth environmental level which he termed the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986a). The ecological systems theory evolved to become the bioecological theory of human development with an introduction of a process, person, context and time (PPCT) framework. This theory is based on the role of the interactions between gene and the environment in the development of the human and proposes that development takes place through a process of reciprocal interactions between an individual and the persons, objects, and symbols in her immediate environment

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(Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). These interactions in the individual's immediate environment he termed as proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). However, for the purpose of this research, the ecological systems theory, which is his earlier version, will be adopted.

The ecological environment, according to Bronfenbrenner (1994), is conceived as a set of environmental levels moving from the innermost level to the outermost with the individual being at the centre of the ecological system. These systems he believed to be interconnected as well as intrinsically connected to the developing individual.

The microsystem which is the first level involves the interactions between the individual and her immediate environment (home, village, classroom, playground, and religious institution). At this level, the focus is on the different patterns of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations that are developed by the individual through constant interactions with the physical, social, and symbolic structures in her immediate environment. Bronfenbrenner (1986b) opined that these experiences either invite, permit, or inhibit the individual's interactions with these structures. The interactions are usually seen to be progressive and complex. The various characteristics that are evident at the microsystems level that influence the early marriage of an individual are gender and economic status of the family of an individual. Literature (Alhassan, 2013; MoGCSP, 2016) indicates that girls from poor families compared to their counterparts from rich families are more likely to marry early due to their parents' inability to cater for their basic needs due to the lack of economic wealth. Furthermore, studies (Alhassan, 2013; Tsekpo et al., 2016) also indicate that parents are more likely to educate their male children rather than females due to perceived high economic responsibilities of educating girls compared to boys and gender roles of a girl becoming a mother and wife. In other instances, personalities of the girls can influence their parents' decision to marry them off early; adolescent girls who are perceived to be engaging

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in immoral behaviours are likely to be married off early in order to prevent teenage pregnancy and shame or dishonour her behaviour may bring to the family (Sabbe et al., 2015; WLUML, 2013).

The second level is the mesosystem, which is the interrelations among two or more of the settings at the microsystems level in which the individual actively interacts examples of which are the interactions between family and school experiences, between family experiences and peer experiences among others. The mesosystem is seen as a system of microsystems. Rosa and Tudge (2013) explain that it expands when the individual enters a new environment with the opposite also being true. The difference between the mesosystem and the microsystems is that the relations and interactions that occur with the microsystem is not only limited to the individual and the microsystem but extends to the interactions across microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The examples of characteristics within this system that influence the practice of child marriage are family and peer pressure (MoGCSP, 2016; Tsekpo et al., 2016; UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017) also recorded to affect the practice of child marriage especially in Ghana. Family and peer pressure are likely to influence the early marriage of a girl when the parents and friends of a girl child may coerce her into marriage due to either the family's poor economic status and her friends influencing her to marry to alleviate her financial needs which are not being met by her parents due to the poverty in the family. In this case, the girl's interaction with her immediate family and peers (microsystems) affects her early marriage.

The exosystem, on the other hand, is characterised by links between an environment in which the individual does not play an active role but is affected by those interactions events that occur in those systems. The individual may also indirectly affect the structures in these systems. For example, the girl child's experience at home might be influenced by her parents' engagement with their workplace, families and friends in the community. In relation

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to the practice of child marriage, a girl may be forced to marry early due to her parents' need to prevent the loss of financial and social support from other members families and members of the community. Studies (Amin & Bajracharya, 2011; Davis et al., 2013; Vogelstein, 2013) have indicated that delaying the marriage of girls reduced the likelihood of them getting a suitable husband thereby reducing the financial support that a family may receive from the husband's family and the community. Here, the interactions between the family of the girl and the community (perceptions about marriage) have influenced her early marriage.

The macrosystem, which is the highest more distal level, involves the influence of society, culture or community in which the person resides and includes society's cultural norms and belief systems, ideologies, policies, and/or laws that directly or indirectly influence the person. According to Rosa and Tudge (2013), Bronfenbrenner saw the macrosystem as systems that embrace the social, political, educational and other systems that are found in society, subculture or culture of the individual. He referred to the macrosystem as the blue-print of the society, culture or subculture (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). At the macrosystems level, the practice of child marriage is believed to be influenced by cultural and religious beliefs surrounding gender, adolescence, marriage, and family systems. Literature (Glinski et al., 2015; Nasrullah et al., 2014; UNICEF, 2001) indicates that countries or communities with cultures that have strong gender inequalities, regard for extended families, and practice polygynous marriages have a higher prevalence of child marriage. Girls who find themselves in communities such as these are more likely to marry early compared to their peers who are not.

Bronfenbrenner (1986) introduced another level of influence called at the chronosystem that depicts the influence of change and constancy within the individual and in her environment that she lives that may impact her development over a period of time. The chronosystem may thus include a change in family structure such as the birth of a child, death

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of a parent, a parent's employment status, pending marriage of a sibling in addition to immense societal changes such as poverty, wars that may influence the family, and a father losing his job.

Based on the ecological systems theory, this study will seek to understand the concept of child marriage from the different environmental levels and how the interactions between these levels affect the perceptions and experiences of married girls, their parents and other key individuals in the society on the practice of child marriage. What is important to note is the married girl is the individual at the centre and is nested in the interactions within the various interacting subsystems; she may or may not be aware of being influenced or influencing the recursive interactions she has with these subsystems, or with these subsystems impact on her. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model will enable an understanding of the practice of child marriage from the different nested systems and units in the society that help maintain its practice. It will also throw light on the roles married girls play within these social interactions.

3.2.3. Feminist standpoint theory.

A standpoint, according to Swigonski (1994), is a position in society which affords an individual a level of awareness of certain features and experiences of reality in that society that may be obscured to other individuals who may not be in that position. Introduced in the 1970s and 80s (Collins, 1991; Harding, 1986, 1991; Hartsock, 1983; Rose, 1983; Smith, 1974), feminist standpoint theory (FST) is rooted in the Marxist analysis of the oppression of women in working-class (Swigonski, 1994). The FST posits that oppressed and subdued individuals in the society experience social reality differently from their disadvantaged position due to their experience of oppression.

Intemann (2010) mentions that the standpoint theory proposes two theses in helping one understand the experiences of the oppressed in society. The first thesis is the situated

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knowledge theory which states that the social location of the individuals influences their experiences by shaping and limiting the knowledge they acquire to the extent that the experience will be from a particular standpoint (Wylie, 2003). The second thesis which is the thesis of epistemic advantage states that some standpoints, especially of the oppressed, are in some contexts epistemically advantaged (Wylie, 2003).

Harding (1991, 1997), using the standpoint theory, explained that in order to be less biased in understanding social reality, a researcher must begin the study from the standpoint of the marginalised group. Research grounded in the standpoint theory refuses to apply western standards and cultures to knowledge acquisition and asserts that knowledge is socially situated and cultures best explain a phenomenon that is being studied (Swigonski, 1994). It, therefore, offers an unbiased approach to acquiring and understanding the nature and scope of a phenomenon under study. Wylie (2003) explains that the FST offers a framework for understanding from an epistemic position how diversity (gender, race, religious, and cultural for example) enriches the process of knowledge acquisition.

Smith (1974) recommends that to understand a phenomenon from the standpoint perspective is to approach the topic of inquiring from the perspective of the insider (the marginalised individual) rather than imposing on the insider external views and categories which then enforces oppression. Swigonski (1994) notes that in order to consider a position as a standpoint, an objective location (such as individuals who have lived and experienced the phenomenon) must be identified since they are believed to be experts of the study topic and are able to present the true nature of the phenomenon (Collins, 1991).

Standpoint theory also helps in understanding how power relations and social injustice perpetuate social inequality in society. By presenting the voice of the less powerful, the feminist standpoint theory challenges and seeks to change the power structures that exist in the society and establish a more equitable opportunity by illuminating the voices and

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experiences of the less powerful in the society (Wylie, 2003). Based on the voices and experiences of the underprivileged, knowledge on power relations and its impact on the oppressed and underprivileged individuals as well as their opposition to the social structures are revealed. These different standpoints, therefore, through a process of individual and collective self-reflection, deepen social knowledge and facilitate the development of critical problem-solving skills and resources to fight these oppressive social norms (Collins, 1991; Swigonski, 1994).

In applying the standpoint theory to this study, I first of all aimed to understand the experience of child marriage, from the perspective of married adolescent girls who are considered to be in a position (insider) that allows them to experience child marriage and its potential impact (both positive and negative) for their mental wellbeing. With the married girls as a starting point, the study will further gather the views of the parents, elders and other social individuals in the society who in themselves provide varying standpoints in understanding child marriage. In presenting the views and experiences of the marginalised (married adolescent girls) and the other key stakeholders (parents, elders and professionals who work with married girls) in the community, the study sought to provide an explanation and knowledge on the systems in the society that seeks to suppress the marginalised.

3.3. Relevance of theoretical framework for the study

The main aims of the study were to identify the factors that contribute to child marriage and explore the lived experiences of married girls in the Northern region of Ghana and its impact on their mental wellbeing. In order to understand the social factors that influence this practice, I examined the cultural, social and religious factors that affect the practice. I found the aforementioned theoretical perspective relevant for this study because, individually, they allowed me to navigate and understand the experiences of married girls and their parents and elders in relation to the practice of child marriage in the research setting.

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The social constructionist perspective, for instance, gave me the opportunity to understand the cultural and historical foundations of child marriage and how it is constructed by the participants and their society. This was achieved through the examination of the socio-cultural constructions of marriage, adolescence, gender and sexuality from the experiential accounts of married girls, their parents and elders in the community. The experiential accounts of married girls also helped to understand how they constructed marriage and the positions and roles they played in influencing their early marriage.

The feminist standpoint theory helped me understand the experiences of child marriage from the perspective of married girls who served as a starting point to understand the practice of child marriage. With the married girls as the starting point, the study further sought the views of the parents, elders and other social individuals in the society. The feminist perspectives also helped me understand how they were perceived as women by their parents, elders and other individuals in the society and the rights, responsibilities and roles they were afforded and were expected to receive form their communities. As a researcher (outsider), I had to explore ways to gain an understanding and access to the communities in which the research will be located.

The ecological systems theory helped me situate the study in the different social levels that exist in the society where child marriage is being practised. By examining child marriage at the different levels proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1986), I studied the experiences of married girls through their accounts of their interactions with the different levels in the ecological systems that influenced their early marriage. Furthermore, the ecological systems theory helped me connect the interactions between those social levels (married girl, parents, elders/society and non-governmental organisations/nation) through the accounts and experiences of parents, elders and staff of (non-) governmental organisations and how they influenced the early marriage of an adolescent girl in the research setting.

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The integration among these theoretical frameworks provides an understanding of the practice of child marriage and its effects on the married girl from a holistic perspective given that it affords a critical discussion and examination of the most salient issues that affect the practice in the research setting and in the Ghanaian community as a whole.

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Chapter 4

Methodology

"After all, the ultimate goal of all research is not objectivity, but truth."

(Helene Deutsch)

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology of this study. Methodology is described as a process of rationalising, understanding and studying social reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Crotty (1998, p. 3) also defined methodology as "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods, and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes". In line with Crotty's (1998) delineation, in this chapter, I will describe the strategies and processes that I utilised in executing this study while providing the reason for making the choices I made in order to achieve the aims of the study. I will discuss the choice of qualitative methods, research design and the philosophical assumptions such as social constructionism and feminism underlying these choices. I will also discuss the research setting and the particular places where the data was collected from and the reasons for making these decisions. Furthermore, the selection of participants and the data gathering process will be described to provide a description of who the participants in the study were and why they were selected to be part of this study. Finally, I discuss how data were analysed to achieve the goals of the research and the ethical considerations that guided the study.

4.2. Philosophical assumptions: Situating the research methodology

Epistemology and ontology are two tenets of philosophy that shape the discovery of information and ultimately shape and guide the research (Guba, 1990; Sullivan, Gibson, & Riley, 2012). Epistemology is a theory of knowledge and is concerned with the 'what and how' we can acquire knowledge, while ontology is the theory of existence that deals with

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what and how a phenomenon exists (Sullivan et al., 2012; Willig, 2001). These worldviews present the philosophical assumptions that influence the direction or methodology the researcher chooses to adopt in the research (Creswell, 2014). The chosen philosophical assumption often reflects the researcher's thinking and epistemology of what s/he believes is relevant about a phenomenon and how this phenomenon should be studied. In this research project, I sought to understand the phenomenon under study by examining how the participants construct their social reality that is rooted in their culture.

4.3. Research design: The qualitative approach

The aim of this study is to identify the factors that contribute to the practice of child marriage and explore the lived experiences of married girls in the Northern region of Ghana. Although several research approaches can be employed to conduct this study, the most appropriate approach to adopt given the study's objectives and theoretical foundations is a qualitative research approach. This approach helps me answer questions on how social experience is created and helps me establish the given meaning of the social reality under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The word 'qualitative' signifies the emphasis on the qualities of a phenomenon rather than focusing on the quantity, intensity or frequency of that phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative research employs a process that gives the researcher the opportunity to examine empirical material (instead of numbers), and focuses on the social construction of realities; it affords the researcher an engaged or 'intimate relationship' with the subject of inquiry. It examines the participants' views and experiences about everyday activities and practices in relation to the phenomenon under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Flick, 2007; Yardley, 2000). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that qualitative research helps the researcher explain how individuals in specific places and settings "come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations" (p. 7).

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Although a qualitative approach has strengths and advantages, it has been criticised for being subjective in nature since its findings are based on the subjective experiences and views of the participant and the researcher (Mays & Pope, 1995). Secondly, it is argued that qualitative research cannot be replicated and, thirdly, it has also been said to lack generalisability as the research is limited to a small number of settings and participants (Mays & Pope, 1995). Creswell (2014), however, avers that the intent of qualitative study is not to generalise but rather to give a description of themes that are peculiar to the research setting under study. This then means that the aim of qualitative research is not that of generalisability but rather of particularity (Greene & Caracelli, 1997).

Adopting a qualitative approach gave me the opportunity to understand the meaning given to the practice of child marriage in the Northern region of Ghana through the experiences of the married girls and that of their parents and elders in the community who were interviewed. Further, in qualitative research, researchers usually use small sample sizes in order to be able to collect and provide detailed and thick (rich and particular) descriptions and explanations of the phenomenon under study instead of trying to establish causal factors (Barbour, 2008; Willig, 2001). Morse (1994) cautions that the number of participants to be selected for a study should also be based on data saturation, that is, when no new information comes up while collecting data as well as other factors such as the scope of the study, the nature of the topic being studied among others.

Specifically, I adopted the qualitative exploratory research design to gather data for this study. This methodology employs a naturalistic approach with the aim of understanding a phenomenon in context-specific settings, with very little manipulations by the researcher in order to understand the phenomenon of interest (Golafshani, 2003; Patton, 2002). More specifically, I adopted the Generic Inductive Qualitative Model or Approach (GIQM) for analysing the data gathered for this research. The aim of GIQM is to understand the

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phenomenon understudy instead to trying to generate theory (Merriam, 1998). The GIQM has been described as a qualitative method that either employs several methodologies or claims no methodological approach (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). The generic inductive methodological approach affords the researcher methodological flexibility since it is not guided by any specific qualitative methodology (Liu, 2016), allows for the use of existing theories to develop interview questions, analyse and interpret the data gathered (Hood, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). The data collection method for GIQM is purposeful while data saturation is reached when no new information is being gathered from the research participants. The basic data analytic techniques employed in the GIQM are the development of core themes and subthemes which are derived from analysing the raw data and generating a model or framework from the themes developed (Thomas, 2006).

4.4. Research settings and participants

In selecting the research site and the participants for the research, Miles and Huberman (1994) propose four steps that the researcher needs to consider in making these decisions. The four areas of consideration include: a) the research setting, b) the actors - in this case, the participants, c) the events that entail what the participants will be observed on or interviewed about, and d) the data collection processes that the participants and the researcher will undertake within the research setting. These areas of consideration will be addressed in the ensuing paragraphs below.

Currently, the Northern region and Upper East region have the highest recording of child marriage in Ghana according to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS, 2017) report. At the time of data collection, the most recent national report on child marriage was the Demographic Health Survey (DHS, 2014) which reported the Northern region as having the highest prevalence (39.6%) of child marriage whereas the Greater Accra region has the lowest (18.5%) recording of child marriage. The report also indicated a high probability of

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girls in the three northern regions (Northern -39.6%, Upper West -37.3% and Upper East -36.1%) recording 33.6% of girls marrying before age 18 with a reduction towards the southern regions. The regions in the middle belt Ashanti (25.9%) and Brong Ahafo (23.9%) regions collectively recorded 18.5% while the southern regions Western (36.7%), Eastern (27.4%), Central (31.2%) and Greater Accra region (12.2%) recorded the lowest rate of early child marriage of 18.5%. Based on findings in the DHS (2014) report, I elected to conduct the research on married girls in the Northern region of Ghana where the highest prevalence of child marriage was recorded.

4.4.1. Location and background of Ghana.

As mentioned earlier, the data for this research were collected in Ghana, a country located on the coast of West Africa. Ghana is made up of very diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic groups with 79 indigenous languages and dialects being spoken by her inhabitants (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2018). Ghana's population was estimated to be about 30,795,490 (World Population Review, 2020). At the time of data collection, the country was divided into 10 administrative regions as shown in Figure 1 below. This has subsequently changed to 16 administrative regions. Currently, the Northern region has been divided into three administrative regions (Northern, Savannah and North East regions) and data were collected from Northern (Tamale and Mion districts) and Savannah regions (Tolon district). These districts were selected for various reasons; Tolon and Mion were selected because they were reported to have the highest rates of child marriage in the Northern regions (Naatogmah, 2016), while Tamale was selected for the diversity of its inhabitants. Since Tamale is the regional and metropolitan capital it is inhabited by individuals from diverse ethnic groups in the three northern regions and the country at large and provides the opportunity for the recruitment of key informants from diverse backgrounds. Although new regions have been created, the information pertaining to the research setting is based on the 2010 census since

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no new census has been conducted after the creation of the new regions. I will, therefore, keep to the old regional demarcations and demographic information provided by the 2010 census since it is the most current.

Figure 1. The political map of Ghana based on the regional divisions (Google, 2018)

4.4.2. The Northern region.

The Northern region, the location where the data for this study were collected, had a total population of 2,479,461 in the most recent population census conducted in 2010 (Ghana Statistical Services, 2010). The most predominant religion of the Northern region is Islam, for 56.1% of the population; Traditional African Religion is the next dominant faith with 21.3%,

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and the smallest is Christianity representing 19.3% of the population. The major ethnic groups are the Mole Dagbon, Gurma, Akan and the Guan, with the predominant ethnic group being the Mole-Dagbon; Dagomba is the largest subgroup of the Mole-Dagbon ethnic group (GSS, 2010). The indigenous languages spoken are Gonja, Dagbani, and Kokomba. The Northern region of Ghana is further divided into 26 districts and data were collected specifically in the Tamale Metropolitan assembly, Tolon district and Mion districts (see Figure 1.2). The Ghana Statistical Services (2010) reported that 38.9 % of individuals in the Northern region who were aged 12 years and/or older have never married while more than half (54.3%) are married.

Figure 2. Map representing the districts of the Northern region (Wikipedia, 2017).

4.4.2.1. Tamale Metropolitan Assembly

Tamale is both the metropolitan and regional capital of the Northern region. The majority of the population live in urban localities (80.8%) as compared to the 19.1% living in rural localities with the Dagombas being the major ethnic group. Religious distribution of the population is Muslims (90.5%), Christians (8.8%), spiritualists and traditionalists (0.3%), and less than one per cent (0.4%) with no religious affiliation (GSS, 2010).

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Individuals aged 12 years and above who are married form 48.6% of the population. It is estimated that 4% of the population are widowed while the divorced make-up is 1.6%; individuals in consensual relationships constitute only 0.7 per cent of the population. Most of the married population (57.5%) have had no formal education and 23.3 % had attained only basic education.

4.4.2.2. Mion District

According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, Mion District has a population of 81,812 with marginally more females (50.3%). Additionally, the majority of the population live in rural areas while 8.9 % live in urban areas. The population of the District is relatively young with about two-fifths (46.7%) aged below 15 years. The majority of the youthful population (60.6%) who are aged 12 years and older are married. Only 34.3% have never been married and 2.8% are widowed. Notable among the married is that 88.6% have no education and 8.9 per cent have basic education (GSS, 2010). The large proportion (58.0 %) of the unmarried population have no formal education while 34.5 % have acquired basic education. Ghana Statistical Service (2010) reports that nine in ten (88.1%) of the married population are employed, with less than one per cent (0.9%) being unemployed; 11.0 % are not actively looking for any means of employment. About 61.8% of the district population identify as Muslims, 17.3% as Christians, 17.3% as Traditionalists and 2.7% have no religious affiliation.

4.4.2.3. Tolon District Assembly

The Mole-Dagomba is the predominant ethnic group in Tolon District accounting for 98.2% of the population; other tribes include the Akan, Ga-Adangbe, Guan, and Gurma. The larger majority of the population profess Islam (94.1%) as their religion; Christians form 3.7% and Traditional believers (1.5%) (GSS, 2010). About 6 in 10 individuals (60.2 %) aged 12 years and older are married, 33.6 % have never been married, 4.4 per cent are widowed,

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one per cent is divorced while 0.6% of the population are separated. Almost ninety per cent of females (86.7%) between 25 to 29 years are married compared to 55.6% of the male population. Among the married, 86.8% have no education while 49.4% of the unmarried have never been to school. Over 80% of the married population are employed, with over one per cent (1.7%) unemployed and 12.1% are economically not active. The Tolon district was originally part of the Northern region but it is now a district in the Savannah region of Ghana.

These population and districts statistics provide valuable contextual data that may assist in placing the findings of the study in perspective.

4.5. Sampling

The current study used purposive and convenience sampling to recruit married girls, parents of married girls, community elders and staff of non-governmental organisations as participants for the study. The snowballing technique was also used in particular to recruit married girl participants for the study. These types of non-probability sampling are believed to be useful when a researcher wants to conduct a pilot study and when the population or the questions to be asked are considered sensitive (Babbie, 1990; Fink, 1995). While convenience sampling is contacting participants who are readily available for data collection, purposive sampling is used in selecting participants based on the aims and objectives of the research and of the researcher's knowledge of the characteristics (such as age, gender, status and experiences) that are central to the aims of the research of the participants (Patton, 2002; Willig, 2001). According to Babbie (1990), this type of purposive sampling is done when conducting research with a small sample size of a larger population which may be difficult to acquire. Patton (2002) also concurs that in non-probability sampling, such as purposive sampling, the primary participants are selected because they are the main custodians of the information that the researcher seeks to access.

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The snowballing sampling technique is a technique whereby participants are asked to recruit future participants from among their friends and acquaintances through a process of reference from one person to the next (Denscombe, 1997; Streeton, Cooke, & Campbell, 2004). It is used when conducting research among participants who are difficult to reach or when the researcher is investigating a sensitive topic such as child marriage (Ehlers, Zuyderduin, & Oosthuizen, 2001).

4.5.1. Participants.

For this study, participants were grouped into four distinct samples in line with the aims and objectives as well as the research questions that I had set out to answer. According to Smith (2007), in order to understand a phenomenon in detail and multifaceted, the phenomenon should be explored from different perspectives.

In order to achieve the first three objectives of the study (see page 7, Research Objectives in Chapter One), twenty-one (N=21) married girls were recruited in the Tolon and Mion districts and Tamale Metropolis of the Northern region of Ghana. The ages of the married girls at the time of data collection ranged between 13 and 17 years with a mean age of 15.56 (SD=1.15). All had been married for more than one year with one being married for 5years, two being married for 4 years, and 13 married for one year (see Table 4.1 below). The mean age at their time of marriage was 14.89 (SD=1.63) and ranged between 12 and 16 years. Four married girls could not remember their age or did not know their ages because they were never told their date of birth. All girls were Dagomba (one of the major ethnic groups in the Northern region of Ghana). For those who had been to school, I and my research assistant tried to ascertain their age by interpolating it to the current education level of their age mates who were in school. About 28% of the married girls had received some form of basic education. Most who had received basic education dropped out or fully completed up to the sixth grade. Eight (38 %) married girls mentioned having junior high

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school education, however, some dropped out and never went back due to marriage. Three (14 %) married girls started senior high school but dropped out while four (19%) had never been to senior high school. See Table 4.1 for the demographic information of the married girl participants.

Most married girls (52.4%) did not know the ages of their husbands with most expressing surprise and shock at being asked about their husband's age. There appeared to be a cultural explanation for the inability of most married girls to tell the ages of their spouses. Rahma (RH) explains that "…For Dagombas, they say that if he [your husband] shows you his age you will not respect him anymore..." The oldest reported age of the husbands of married girls was 25 years while the youngest age was 18 years. With regards to their husband's occupation, the majority of husbands of married girls were self-employed (57.1 %) and were engaged in various forms of craftsmanship (masonry, plumbing, barbering among others). Two were undergoing an apprenticeship in blacksmithing and carpentry, one was a nurse while five were unemployed.

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Table 4.1 *Demographic information of the married girls*

Variable	n=21	f (%)
Age at data collection	13	1(5)
	14	2(10)
	15	5(24)
	16	6(28)
	17	4(19)
	X (Unknown)	4(14)
Age at time of marriage	12	2(10)
	13	4(19)
	14	6(28)
	15	5(24)
	16	1(5)
	X (Unknown)	4(14)
Years spent in marriage	5	1(4.8)
	4	2(9.5)
	3	1(4.8)
	2	4(19)
	1	13(61.9)
Employment	Kayaaye (Head porter)	1(4.8)
	Seamstress	1(4.8)
	Petty trader	3(14.2)
	Unemployed	16(76.2)
Level of education	None	4(19.1)
	Primary	6(28.6)
	junior high	8(38.1)
	senior high	3(14.2)
Husband's age	18	1(4.8)
	19	1(4.8)
	20	2(9.5)
	21	1(4.8)
	23	2(9.5)
	25	3(14.2)
	X(Unknown)	11(52.4)
Husband's occupation	Self-employed	12(57.1)
	Apprentice	2(9.5)
	Nurse	1(4.8)
	Unemployed	5(23.8)
	X (Unknown)	1(4.8)

Note. X=could not remember age or did not have any knowledge about the variable

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For the fourth objective (see page 7, Research Objectives in Chapter one), seven community elders, 8 parents of married girls[1] and 9 staff of either NGOs or the District Social Welfare Department working with married girls were recruited for the data collection. Out of the 8 parents, four were married and four did not mention their marital status. Seven of the parents were females while one was male. This skewed sample occurred due to the times allocated for the interviews; most of the men were not at home when their homes were contacted for data collection. With regards to employment status, 7 parents were self-employed and were engaged in either a trade or in farming, one was unemployed. Three of the eight parents mentioned that their daughter had been married for more than three years while two mentioned that their daughter had been married for 2 years and the remaining 3 reporting that their daughter had been married for one year. All parent participants had never been to school and all were Muslims.

Table 4.2 *Demographic characteristics of the parents of the married girls*

Name	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Occupation
Mariama	Could not remember	Female	-	Potter/Rice refiner
Jamila	-	Female	-	Shea butter processor
Abu	Could not remember	Male	Married	Security guard
Nafisa	Unsure	Female	Married	Farmer
Rashida	50	Female	Married	Trader
Azara	35	Female	Married	Farmer
Amina	40	Female	-	Unemployed
Abiba	Could not remember	Female	-	Trader

Note. All names in the data are pseudonyms

Seven community elders were recruited for an in-depth interview on their views and perception about the cultural underpinnings of child marriage in the northern region of

[1] Two parents were related to two of the married girls interviewed.

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Ghana. A demographic analysis of the data indicates that three elders were females aged between fifty and eighty years with the four males aged between fifty-five and sixty-eight. Of the seven elders, two were chiefs, three were farmers, one a butcher, one a trader and one had retired from active work. An analysis of the marital status of the elders indicated that five elders were married, and one was widowed, and one did not mention her marital status. It is important to note that all participants were Muslims, two had received formal education with one being educated to the tertiary level and the other primary; the rest had never been to school. Table 4.3 presents the demographic characteristics of community elders.

Table 4.3 *Demographic characteristics of community elders*

Name	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Occupation
Alhaj	55	Male	Married	Farmer/Chief's elder
Abdul	80	Male	Married (3 wives)	Farmer/Arabic Teacher
Fati	80/Unsure	Female	Widowed	Retired from trading
Ayisha	60	Female	Married	Trader
Musa	66	Male	Married	Farmer/Chief
Alima	54/ Unsure	Female	-	Trader
Grandpa	68	Male	Married	Chief butcher

Note. All names in the data are pseudonyms

Staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations were also recruited for a focus group discussion in order to explore their experiences in working on issues related to child marriage and with married girls. Of the nine participants recruited for the focus group discussion, six were staffs of NGOs (Giving = 3, Nurture = 2, Concern =1), two were staffs of the district education and one was a staff of the District Social Welfare Department. Three of the participants were females while the other six were males. All participants have been working with their organisation for more than two years; one had worked with his organisation for ten years.

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4.6. Data collection method

The qualitative methodology employs diverse methods in the collection of the data. Some of the methods can include interviews, focused group discussion, observations, journaling, artefacts and documents. The methods used in this study were primarily individual interviewing and focused group discussion; I also kept a journal to record my reflections and note my observations. Qualitative methods are specifically designed to take account of the particular characteristics of human experiences and to facilitate the investigation of experience. According to Polkinghorne (2005), human experience is multi-layered and complex and consists of first-person or self-reports of participants' own experiences. A total of 36 participants were interviewed individually while one focused group discussion was conducted with nine participants who are staffs of the Social Welfare Department of the Mion district and staff of NGOs working with married girls. Table 4.4 presents a summary of the different data collection methods and the participants engaged.

Table 4.4 *Summary of Data Methods and Number of Participants*

	Data Collection Method	Number of participants
1	Semi-structured individual interview (36)	Married girls (21) Parent of married girls (8) Community Elders (7)
2	Focused group discussion (1)	Staff of the District Social Welfare Departement (3) Staff of non-governmental organisations (6)

4.6.1. Interview.

Potter (1996) defines interviewing as a data gathering process whereby the researcher asks human participants questions and gets them to react verbally to the questions. Described as a 'professional conversation' between the researcher and the participant (Kvale, 1996), interviews permit the researcher to gain a comprehensive description of the experiences, interpretations and perspective from the informant of the phenomenon under study.

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Interviewing requires the ability to form a relationship with the participant. This is done by active listening and focusing on the participants' experiential world which will, in turn, lead to the researcher accomplishing the goal of obtaining information from the participants. Most researchers in conducting interviews often use semi-structured or unstructured interview formats that allow them the opportunity to explore the participants' views and experiences; it basically allows the participant to tell her/his story about a particular phenomenon.

I used the interview method for data collection with the married girls, parents of married girls and the community elders. This method was used because it allowed me to engage the participants in a conversation through a number of questions that have been written out in order to gain detailed account of their experiences as married girls, parents of married girls and elders in the community where child marriage is being practised. Interviewing also gives the participants control over the content and form of the data. Moreover, in answering the interview questions, participants are able to consider other relevant issues pertaining to the topic under study and gives them the opportunity to move beyond answering the questions that have been asked by raising other important issues and concerns which the researcher may not have considered important (Liamputtong, 2010; Madriz, 1998).

4.6.2. Focus group discussion.

A focus group discussion has been defined as a data collection technique used by a researcher to collect data from a group through group interaction on a topic the researcher is studying (Morgan, 1996). The emphasis in focus group discussion is on the group interaction as it gives the researcher the opportunity to encourage participants to interact with each other thereby helping the participants and the researcher explore and clarify their views in ways that may not be available in a one-to-one interview (Morgan, 1996).

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Focused group discussions have been found to be very useful when the research aim is to explore people's perception, knowledge and experiences about a particular phenomenon (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008; Kitzenger, 1995). Focus groups are also useful for studying dominant cultural values (Kitzenger, 1995; Morgan 1996). Although focus group discussion is very helpful, it has been reported to sometimes silence individual voices of disagreement when the majority of the individuals in the group share the similar views about a particular topic (Gill et al., 2008; Kitzenger, 1994). Furthermore, with the presence of other participants, confidentiality may be compromised. Kitzenger (1995) notes, however, that the group discussions do not necessarily inhibit privacy as compared to the privacy in personal interviews. She further mentions that group discussions actively facilitate the discussion of very sensitive topics due to the willingness of some individuals in the group to discuss such topics and pave the way for shyer participants.

For this study, the focus group discussion was used to gather data from staffs of NGOs and staff of the Mion district Department Social of Welfare who worked with married girls. It was deemed appropriate because it provided the avenue to collect data from a larger number of people through discussions on child marriage in a socially-oriented atmosphere which is not a characteristic of the individual interview method (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Rabiee, 2004). This method gave participants the opportunity to discuss their experiences and to share their views on the phenomenon that was understudy. Furthermore, it gave me the opportunity to elicit critical responses from the participants through their own discussion of their experiences in the field with married girls as compared to individual interviews (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987). I found the participants were eager to talk about this phenomenon due to the fact that they had been working to prevent the practice of child marriage in their districts for years. During the discussion, all the participants were relaxed and comfortable which made it easy for participants to freely share their opinions and

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experiences in working with married girls and child marriage. This atmosphere was made possible by the already established relationship they had with each other which was a result of having worked in the same district as field officers for years. This already established relationship fostered a sense of commonality and mutual understanding among them when it came to discussing their experiences.

Considering the sensitive nature of the topic of child marriage in Ghana, the focus group method was adopted because I felt that it would give me the opportunity to stimulate a discussion among the selected group. In view of this, I went into the discussion with carefully crafted questions on the phenomenon under study, these questions guided the discussion and gave me the opportunity to steer the focus of the discussion. As the moderator, I was able to probe and ask for further clarifications when a point they had raised was not clear enough. In addition to this, I also made sure that the participants were very comfortable and relaxed by providing refreshments at the beginning of the discussion. I also secured a room with the help of my gatekeeper[2] in the newly built Mion district office complex. This provided an atmosphere which was free from distractions and was private enough to ensure their anonymity.

4.6.3. Data collection process.

Ethical clearance was sought from the Research Ethics Committee (Humanities) at Stellenbosch University and permission was also sought from the Department of Social Development in the Northern region of Ghana. The approval from the Department of Social Development was necessary because it is the government organisation that works with married girls in the region. I needed their permission in order to be able to contact the married girls in the communities that were recruited for the study. I also attained permission from

[2] Gatekeepers are individuals who facilitated my entry into the research setting.

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Norsaac, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that agreed to help me contact gatekeepers who facilitated my contact with participants in the selected districts.

Prior to seeking ethical clearance, the semi-structured interviews guides that I had prepared with the advice of my supervisors, were translated into Dagbani by a lecturer from the Department of Linguistics at the University of Ghana for the married girls, parents of married girls and community elders who were recruited for the study. Dagbani is the predominant language spoken by the residents in the district where the data was to be collected. The translated semi-structured interviews were given to a reference group of NGO service providers to examine the nature and context of the questions that have been prepared since they have been working with married girls. The interview schedule for the focus group was not translated because all participants had received education at least to the bachelor's degree level and were conversant and comfortable with English. The duration for the focus group discussion with this cohort was two hours and two minutes.

The duration of the individual interviews was between 20 and 80 minutes. The interview only commenced after participants had been briefed on the nature and purpose of the research and had given their verbal consent to participate in the study. As I do not speak Dagbani, I employed a research assistant who assisted in translating the interviews with the participants. The research assistant was a native of the research setting and a Dagbani speaker, and is a registered MPhil student from the Department of Psychology at the University of Ghana – she is referred to HB in later sections. HB was briefed and trained prior to data collection.

The interviews typically took place at the participants' home or in a location in the community that they felt comfortable. Some were also asked to come to a designated area in the community that the researcher and the participant felt was private enough to maintain anonymity. This was done in order to ascertain their interest in the study and obtain their

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verbal consent which was recorded at the beginning of the interview session. It is important to note that though some participants had received formal education at least to the basic level, most of them could not read or write English or Dagbani. All participants preferred giving verbal consent instead of a written one even though they were provided with the opportunity to give written consent. As mentioned earlier, the data were collected from four groups of participants and this was done in four phases.

4.6.3.1. Phase one

Twenty-one married girls were recruited from the population through purposeful and convenient sampling for individual in-depth interviews. The aim was to gather information on their experiences as married girls, their views about the reasons for their early marriage, any positive subjective experiences and challenges they may have encountered as married girls. The girls were sampled from the Tamale metropolis, Tolon and Mion districts in Northern region of Ghana and were aged between 12 to 17 years. See (Table 4.1) for demographic information pertaining to the married girl participants.

Participants were recruited with the help of gatekeepers who was assigned to us by the NGO that assisted us. These gatekeepers identified the married girls in the communities and introduced them to my research assistant and I. After the introduction, we talked with the selected married girls to determine their age and duration of their marriage and other relevant information based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. In Tolon district, due to the difficulty in finding participants, we used the snowballing technique to recruit further participants. Here the gatekeeper introduced us to one married girl who after being interviewed then recommended us to other married girls they knew in the community. If we found them suitable for the study, we sought their consent and then conducted the research. Though the consent form was translated into Dagbani, it is important to note that most of them could not read their local language even though the majority of participants had

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received basic education. The majority who could not read listened to the information being presented orally and providing their consent verbally.

4.6.3.2. Phase two

For this phase of the research, eight parents of married girls who agreed to take part in the study were purposefully and conveniently sampled. Only one parent (mostly mothers) from each household was recruited for the interview. The parents who were sampled had at least one daughter who was married for at least one year and should have lived in the research setting. They were engaged in individual interviews with the aim of garnering information on their perception of child marriage and their experiences as parents of married girls. The parents of married girls were recruited with the help of gatekeepers and married girls that were interviewed from the communities that the study was undertaken (see *4.9 Navigating ethical issues*). When potential participants were identified, my assistant and I were then introduced to them by the gatekeeper who had contacted them prior to our visit. After the introduction, they were briefed on the purpose of the study to ascertain if they were comfortable and willing to take part in the study. When they indicated their willingness to take part in the study, they were briefed on the research aims and objectives, confidentiality and anonymity as well as the potential benefits and implications in a language they were comfortable and could understand. Their verbal consent was then sought and recorded at the beginning of the interview. Participants were comfortable in providing the verbal instead of the written consent when they were presented with the options because they could not write. Table 4.2 presents the demographic characteristics of the parents who were interviewed. All interviews were conducted in the homes of participants. All parents were willing to discuss their experiences with the research assistant and me although the topic under study was perceived to be a sensitive one.

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4.6.3.3. Phase three

Seven elders who are 50 years and above and natives of the research setting were sampled for in-depth interviews on their cultural knowledge and understanding of the practice of child marriage in their community. Elders were included in the sample because they are culturally believed to be the custodian of the norms and traditions of a society. The participants who were recruited for this study were aged 50 years and above. This was based on the World Health Organisation's placement of the elderly for Africans at 50 years and above based on the cultural and traditional definitions of elderly (WHO, 2002). Individuals who did not meet this inclusion criterion were not included in the research. The elders were recruited with the help of gatekeepers that were identified in the communities that the study was undertaken. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were explained to the gatekeepers who then identified suitable recruits in the communities. They introduced me and my assistant to the elder(s) that have been identified. Upon meeting with the elders, I sought their permission and then conducted the interviews if they met the inclusion criteria. Where the elders did not speak any of the languages that I spoke, my assistant interpreted the questions for the interviews to be conducted in their local language. In all, 7 elders were recruited for the study. Table 4.3 summarises their demographic information.

4.6.3.4. Phase four

In the last phase of the study, nine staff members of non-governmental organisations were sampled for a focused group discussion on their experiences in working with married girls and to gain a view of the exo- and macrosystemic issues that pertain to child marriages. These staff members had worked with married girls for at least two years. The focused group discussion method was selected for this group of participants because it provides a platform for gathering information on the diverse perspectives, experiences and feelings about certain issues in a socially-oriented atmosphere (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Rabiee, 2004).

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Additionally, Kitzinger (1995) believes that the interactions during focus group discussion encourages individuals “to talk to one another” and provides an avenue useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences as well as understanding the basis of their ideas and perspective about a phenomenon which might not be present in individual levels. Furthermore, the use of the focused group discussion was deemed to be the right method for this group as it provides the avenue to instigate discussions on child marriage in a socially-oriented atmosphere.

I conducted focus group discussion with a total of nine participants, six staff of non-governmental organisations, two were staff of the district education department while one was a staff of the District Department of Social Development. Krueger (2000) recommends that the number of participants for a focus group discussion should ideally be between 6 and 12 participants. This number was recommended because it made it possible for researchers to include participants from diverse backgrounds into the study and is also ideal for participants to feel comfortable enough to share their opinions, views and beliefs (Morgan, 1996; Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). The number of participants initially selected for this group was 12 staff members of NGOs and staff of the District Department of Social Development, however, three participants were unavailable for the focus group session with reasons ranging from personal, to being assigned on official duty or their need to conduct fieldwork or their inability to get a means of transportation to the venue for the discussion. Participants for Phase 4 were recruited with the help of a staff of the district social welfare department who was my gatekeeper in the Mion district.

4.7. Trustworthiness

Qualitative research has been criticised for lacking rigour or trustworthiness due to its subjective nature compared to quantitative research which is perceived as more objective (Cope, 2014). In view of the above, qualitative research has been criticised for being

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researcher biased and lacking generalisability and therefore inferior. Despite this criticism, it is important to note that the aim of qualitative research is not objectivity but rather presenting quality findings through analysis of the experiences and perceptions about a particular phenomenon. By emphasising the exploration of individual in-depth experiences, several methods for ensuring the collection and presentation of quality research data are employed when conducting qualitative research. Trustworthiness refers to the degree of trust in the data, interpretations and methods used in particular research to ensure quality (Connelly, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria (credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability) for maintaining the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) added a fifth criterion, authenticity. Cope (2014) explains that for credibility to be ensured, the researcher must represent the participants' views on the phenomenon that was studied by validating the results with the participants after interpretations have been made from the data collected. In this research, I had recursive interactions with my research assistants and supervisors about my research processes, the obtained data, data analyses and the findings.

I also presented the findings of the research to the NGOs as a reference group working with married girls in order to ascertain from them if the findings presented in this study are a valid and credible representation of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Here, the NGOs act as peer debriefers and provide their assistance by reviewing the findings from the data that was presented by the researcher. Peer review or debriefing has been identified as a form of validation process whereby the researcher presents her data and research to someone or group who is familiar with the phenomenon under study for them to review the findings and interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The research assistant, a native of the research setting, also played a role as a peer reviewer by examining the interview schedules with me and pointing out the questions that were culturally appropriate and those that were

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not. Those questions that were not culturally appropriate, she would guide me on how to draft the questions so that they do not lose the meaning and purpose. We frequently discussed the interview schedule and findings during the data collection period, through those discussions, she was able to explain the cultural and religious context of the participants which further expanded my understanding of the research setting and participants' worldview.

To establish the dependability of data in qualitative research, Neuman (2011) suggests that the researcher should not eliminate the subjective views that are raised in the study but rather include those experiences and responses when reporting in order to get quality data. The use of different data sources in this research allows for different (and multiple) versions of the phenomenon of child marriage to be discovered and presented from different sources (Todd, Nerlich, & McKeown, 2004). The different participant groups who provided data for this study included married girls, parents of married girls, community elders and staff of NGOs working with married girls.

Silverman and Marvasti (2008) suggest that the researcher documents all procedures and methods used in the research in order to assist the reader in deciding the reliability and validity of the study's findings are transferable and can be applied to other social contexts. This is done by documenting the features of the research setting, selection criteria, participants demographics, methods used in data collection and data analysis (Noble & Smith, 2015). In this regard, I kept a journal of my observations of the research settings, participants' behaviour and reactions to the study in general. I also documented my reflections on the data collection and analysis in a journal. With their permission, I tape-recorded all my interviews and discussions in order to get an accurate account of participants' experiences which will enable me to give a true reflection of participants' views.

Creswell and Miller (2000) further suggest that the people who play an important role in the conduct of the study in the form of participation, reading and reviewing help establish

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validity and reliability of the study. In this instance, I had the benefit of having two experienced co-supervisors who being from different countries and fields in psychology also helped in the validation process in reviewing my data and analyses. One supervisor is female, from Ghana and was aux fait with the local conditions and cultural issues. The other is male, and has extensive experience as a community psychologist; he accompanied me for a week when I was collecting my data to familiarise himself with the context of the study. Having two sounding boards to review all my written work was very helpful in triangulating and checking the dependability of the findings presented in this study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Patten & Bruce, 2009).

In a later section (Subjective experiences and self-reflection), I also reflect on my experiences and inclinations before and during the conduct of this study. This process of ongoing self-reflection has helped me bring to light my position as a researcher with my own positionality and subjectivity in conducting this study.

4.8. Data Analyses

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher and the research assistant. This was done to capture the exact views of participants and to help with the analysis reporting of the research findings. The translations were validated by a reference group recruited from the NGO. After transcriptions, I read and reread the transcriptions to familiarise myself with the data and correct all errors in the transcriptions for analysis. After cleaning up and familiarising myself with the data, it was uploaded into the Atlas ti. qualitative analyses software (Muhr, 1991, 1997) following the guidelines proposed by Friese (2018).

The analysis of the data commenced after uploading it into the computerised qualitative data analysis software. It consisted of five main steps following Thomas' (2003,

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2006) suggestions for analysing data using the generic inductive qualitative method presented in Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5 *Coding process in inductive analysis*

Initial read through text data	Identify specific segments of information	Label the segments of information to create categories	Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories	Create a model incorporating most important categories
→	→		→	
Many pages of text	Many segments of text	30-40 categories	15-20 categories	3-8 categories

Note. Adapted from Thomas (2003, 2006)

Aside from following the steps proposed by Thomas (2003, 2006), I incorporated grounded theory analysis techniques such as constant comparison (Charmaz, 2008, 2014) into the analysis process since the generic inductive qualitative analysis allows for the adoption and combination of different analytical methods for the analysis of data (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). The constant comparison method helped in the identification of suitable labels for the codes that were being generated as well as in the categorisation of the data. Furthermore, the constant comparison method ensured that findings stayed close to the information given by participants and that the true presentation of participants' views and perception of the phenomenon under study are presented.

4.8.1. Steps in data analysis.

Phase one: Reading and familiarising with transcripts. This is the first stage of data analysis and it involves the reading and familiarisation with the raw data with the aim of familiarisation and the cleaning of the transcripts.

Phase two: Initial coding (line-by-line open and in-vivo coding): technique helps researcher stay close to data and also generate codes from data instead of imposing codes and

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ideas on the data. After analysing 3 transcripts I had generated 600 codes. This was done following Charmaz's (2006) suggestions on initial coding.

Phase three: Identifying and connecting categories and segments: focused coding was used to analyse data at this stage. Here frequent and significant codes were used to code and recode segments of the data that were similar. Those that were not similar but very important were also coded. This method helped in the grouping of codes that had similar quotes into categories and under more abstract names.

Phase four: Axial coding: here categories were grouped into themes and subthemes. The aim of this is to reduce overlaps and redundancies among themes. (Charmaz, 2006; Thomas, 2003). The limitation at this phase is not all categories and subthemes fall under particular themes and therefore forces the data into preconceived categories.

Phase five: reporting findings after continuous revision and refinement of the category: after the fourth phase of data analysis was conducted, I searched for subtopics and points of contradictions within the categories developed by reading the quotes within those themes and subthemes for new insights. This helped me select appropriate quotations that convey the core theme or essence of a category which helped me in the reporting of findings in this study. The findings from the data were then written into research articles that are reported in later chapters.

Important in this process is the constant comparison process where data were continuously being compared at each stage of analysis. Supervisors served as peer checks for the correct representation of data and findings in order to increase the trustworthiness of the data.

4.9. Navigating ethical issues

When the researcher is to interact with individuals at any level as part of the research process, which was the case in this study, ethical issues may arise and will need to be

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adequately planned for and executed during the research process (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). In the planning and designing of the study, the researcher is expected to carefully consider all potential ethical issues that may arise in conducting the research in order to build the research on good ethical foundations (Neuman, 2011).

In view of the above, I tried to make sure that potential ethical issues including risks and harm that may arise from engaging with participants have been considered with their solutions planned out. I, therefore, obtained formal ethical clearance from the research ethics committee at Stellenbosch University. This committee carefully scrutinised my research proposal and helped me plan for possible harm and risks that my study may pose to particularly vulnerable participants and even to myself since I was conducting a study on a topic that was considered very sensitive, illegal and with a vulnerable population.

Secondly, I sought permission from the Department of Social Welfare in the Northern region of Ghana since married girl participants fell under the auspices and protection of this department in the research setting. The need for this permission arose due to the fact that I needed their permission to conduct the study in the region in addition to the need for the assistance from some of their staff in locating the NGOs that work in the research setting and the married girls. I also needed their staff to take part in the research process.

Miller and Bell (2012) maintain that ethical considerations should form part of the research process and do not end when research has satisfactorily met the ethics criteria of the research and ethics committee of the institution the approval was sought from. In spite of these measures, I was faced with some challenges on how to best to design and execute the study, analyse and disseminate the findings of the research without causing harm to the participants recruited for the study. Some of the challenges centred on who to select as a gatekeeper, how to adequately protect participants, when and how to disseminate the findings of the study among others. To this end, I endeavoured to comply with the American

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Psychology Association's code of ethics (2002, 2010, 2016) as well as the ethical considerations and guidelines outlined in the Sixth Edition Publication Manual of the American Psychology Association (APA, 2010). Ethical considerations in this study included but were not limited to, the protection of all participants from possible risk and harm, their right to confidentiality, privacy and anonymity as well as informed consent.

Before commencing an interview session, I first sought consent from participants. My research assistant and I read and explained the translated version of the informed consent sheet to them. This sheet contained the details of the research, the purpose and aims of the study, potential risks and benefits for the participants should they agree to take part in the study. We also explained the voluntary nature of their participation in the research and their rights to withdraw at any time in the process of research without any consequence to them as participants.

To protect the married girls during the recruitment process, I discussed with them if there was any potential danger that their involvement in the research may expose them to should they be seen engaging with me. To this, all participants related no immediate or possible danger that their interaction with me was going to cause them. Some of them were even surprised that I had anticipated that their involvement with me was going to put them in danger or risk which made them curious in knowing the content of the interview. In addition, most participants were very comfortable giving me their verbal consent which was recorded after all the details of the study had been explained to them. Due to their marital status, married girls were considered to be adult as they have transitioned from childhood to adulthood and are expected to assume the role of a married woman (Mensch et al., 1999).

Due to the sensitive nature of this study, I anticipated that the study participants, especially married girls, may be at risk of emotional distress after recounting their experience as married girls. Having been trained as a clinical psychologist, I was equipped to identify

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signs of possible emotional distress and refer those girls to a trained clinical psychologist who had been contacted to provide therapeutic interventions. Notwithstanding these measures, a few of the participants needed psychological intervention for minor emotional distress (sadness and stress). I was able to counsel these participants that needed psychological help and therefore did not need the services of the clinical psychologist recruited for the study. The main problem for most participants especially the married girls was financial which I could not provide immediate help beyond the monetary payment I was giving them for their participation in the study.

Providing monetary payment for participation in a study has received a critical review. It has been seen to help increase the response rates of potential participants in taking part in a particular study (Head, 2009; Singer & Couper, 2008). In addition to this, paying participant has also been seen to help maintain the power imbalance between the researcher and the participant in a way that not only the researcher but the participant benefits from taking part in the research (Russell, Moralejo, & Burgess, 2000). It is also seen as helpful in compensating the time and other expenses the participant may have incurred by participating in the research (Groves, Singer, & Corning, 2000; Shettle & Mooney, 1999). Despite these advantages of the payment of participants, it has been seen to unduly influence participation in a study (Head, 2009; McKeganey, 2001). It has further been perceived to be coercive, and in some cases exploitative especially when working with vulnerable groups (Head, 2009). Wertheimer and Miller (2008), however, argue that monetary payment is not a form of coercion into participating in a study since participants have the sole right to choose whether to participate in a study.

In this study, I paid participants a standard monetary payment (₵20.00 equivalent to $4.81) to compensate for their travel expenses and time. I informed participants of the payment for their participation at the end of the interview, so as not to influence their

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decision to participate or to withdraw at any stage. When I presented the offer of compensation at the end of the interview, some participants especially the elders were offended that I was offering payment for participating in the research because they believed that they were giving me information which they believed was not for sale. Notwithstanding, it was welcoming for other participants who thanked me profusely for giving them the money even though I had explained to them that it was part of the process.

In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of participants, I conducted the interviews in a space that each participant felt would maintain their confidentiality and anonymity. Due to my inability to acquire offices in some of the communities I visited, I conducted the interviews in a location that the participant and I agreed on in the communities. These places included under trees and in front of a community school. I always tried to ascertain from the participant if s/he felt comfortable being interviewed in those setting and only conducted those interviews when they gave me the assurance that they were safe and I was also sure that their anonymity was not going to be compromised. At the same, I was able to acquire an office in a community girl's school and a room in an ActionAid (an NGO very common in the Northern region of Ghana) building to conduct the interview for married girls in two of the communities I visited. The anonymity of participants was protected by carefully removing participants' information that could reveal their identity such as names and location when collating the data and reporting the findings. I used pseudonyms and identifiers when reporting their accounts and experiences.

Gatekeeping formed a very crucial part of this research in the sense that I was not a member of the communities where I was conducting the research. Gatekeepers were identified and contacted with the help of the NGO I collaborated with when conducting this study. Gatekeepers are individuals, groups and organisations that act as intermediaries between the researcher and the participants within the research process (de Laine, 2000).

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Their role in the research process gives them the power to grant or withhold access to participants, organisation or community (Clark, 2011; de Laine, 2000). This role gives them a position of power in the research that may affect the ethical foundation of the research (Miller & Bell, 2012). The onus of the researcher, therefore, is to manage this relationship so that it does not interfere with the research process. In this research, the main role of the gatekeepers was to identify potential participants in those communities that I visited after I had given them my participant selection criteria. I then met up with those potential participants at a designated point in the community and then recruited them if they fell within the inclusion and exclusion criteria and more importantly voluntarily consented to take part in the research. By doing this, I attempted to mitigate the power that the gatekeeper had over participants' choice to take part in the study.

Another ethical challenge I was faced in conducting this study was in relation to selecting parents of girl participants since it could have undermined the married girls' anonymity should their parents have found they had interacted with me. When it came to recruiting parents of married girls, I was challenged in the sense that I had to make a decision between gathering data from the parents of married girls who participated in the study, which was going to further expand on the understanding of the practice of child marriage, and protecting participants' anonymity. Nonetheless, I overcome this challenge by discussing with girl participants the possible effects they felt the recruitment of their parents will have on them. Girls, who related the recruitment of their parents may affect them were not asked to recruit their parents. Furthermore, I asked my gatekeepers in some of the communities to recruit the parents of those married girls who felt we could interview their parents. I also made sure not to reveal any information that I had gathered from married girls whose parents were interviewed. In the end, two parents of married participant girls were interviewed for this study in addition to five other parents whose children were not interviewed.

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Participants were given the opportunity to ask any question they felt was relevant to them. Due to the sensitive nature of the phenomenon under study, I debriefed the girl-participants after the individual interviews.

4.10. Gaining access to the research setting

As a researcher coming from a completely different society who is not familiar with the research setting, I was able to gain access through the help of my contact NGO. However, the community is likely to be suspicious about my motives in conducting research on the practice of child marriage due to the government ban on its practice. I exercised due diligence by developing a good rapport with the communities - this was done by employing gatekeepers in each community that we visited. These gatekeepers were usually suggested by the contact NGOs and this was done to protect the identity and safety of all participants recruited. The gatekeepers who lived and/or worked in the community and were mostly natives of the communities visited were very familiar with the culture of the research setting and were able to guide me in seeking permission from the right sources, introduced me to key individuals in the society and usually facilitated my entry into the society before I started collecting data. These gatekeepers also helped in the recruitment of key informants in the community for the interviews and focus group discussion conducted as part of the data collection process. Out of the nine gatekeepers recruited, seven were females (some of whom were married girls) while two were males. The males were very instrumental in helping my research assistant and I gain access to community chiefs and elders while the female gatekeepers helped in the recruitment (see Data collection proce**ss** for participant recruitment procedure) of married girls and their parents. Elders, chiefs and key individuals of the society were briefed on the purpose of my research, potential risks and benefits and I assure them of anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and of the community.

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In the ensuing chapter, I will discuss my subjective experiences and reflections during the process as I situated myself as researcher in this study.

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Chapter 5

Subjective experiences and self-reflection

"*A worldview is probably an expression of self*"

(*Michael Leunig*)

5.1. Introduction

Creswell (2014) acknowledges that qualitative research is interpretative in nature with the researcher being involved in an intensive data collection experience while interacting with her participants. Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2013) aver that this researcher-participant interaction during the data collection process introduces ethical and personal issues into the research and needs to be addressed by the researcher. Reflexivity is the process that the qualitative researcher employs to help her discuss issues that she experienced during her interaction with the participants as well as previous experiences that may affect those researcher-participant interactions (Ryan, 2015). McHugh (2014) notes that it is the process where the researcher navigates through the phenomenon under study by critical self-scrutiny of her emotions, subjectivities, lived experiences and world views. Within social constructionist perspective, the reseacher is reported to play a very specific role in co-creating/co-constructing the knowledge in the interview and is therefore not perceived as a neutral individual in the research process (Burr, 2015). In line with the assertions outlined, some authors have encouraged the use of reflexivity in research, due to its nature of helping reduce researcher bias and increasing the quality of research (Carolan, 2003; Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009; Smith 2006).

In view of the above, I, as a researcher, therefore, needed to identify and engage with my personal views, values, biases, and background that were likely to shape my interactions

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with the participants during data collection as well as shape the interpretations I make from the data while analysing and presenting the data I have collected (Creswell, 2014).

5.2. Personal interests and background

My interest in understanding the practice of child marriage in Ghana is based on reflections on my own marriage process, and in engaging with media reports and personal investigations on the incidence of child marriage in Ghana which brought to light the literature gap on the topic of child marriage. With the information I gathered on child marriage, I believe I was likely to view the concept of child marriage as detrimental to the married girl and society as a whole.

I am a young woman who hails from the Ashanti region of Ghana which is an ethnic group that is matrilineal by inheritance. I have lived and schooled in the Greater Accra region of Ghana with very little knowledge of the cultures of the northern regions of Ghana as I only had an opportunity to visit these regions during a research work I was undertaking. However, my interest in the study of the practice of child marriage came about when my romantic partner proposed marriage (in June 2015) and I started reflecting on the journey that I was to undertake with him and anticipating how the process and experiences that were to unfold in the process. As I was reflecting on my marriage I started remembering instances during my adolescence and early adulthood when I interacted with married women who were unhappy in their marriages and recounted effects of staying in a bad marriage. I often received advice from such women on choosing the right man for a husband. These experiences had a profound impact on my life in the sense that I became scared of marriage as an institution considering the bad experiences that I had been told about marriage. Even though some of these married women had not married early, a number of them had gotten married as teenagers which made me wonder if there was a correlation between age and marital

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satisfaction. This led me to start engaging with literature on age, marital satisfaction and marriage trends in Ghana.

My research into this phenomenon brought to light another dimension of marriage which was child marriage. I read more on it and realised that there was very little literature on the experience and practice of child marriage among married girls in Ghana. I pondered on the literature that I was reading and realised that majority of it was on the prevalence of child marriage and even the information in the news focused on prevention and the negative impact of child marriage on the society. Upon interacting with this literature, I raised questions on the practice of child marriage. Some of these questions included: What are the experiences of being married as a girl? Do they think child marriage is detrimental as projected in the print and electronic media? Does early marriage have any impact on the psychological wellbeing of the individual's involved? What role did their parents and the society as a whole play in the commencement and sustenance of their marriage? These were just a few of the questions I reflected on.

In August 2016, the Graduate School of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Stellenbosch University advertised for sponsorship of doctoral fellowships and I saw this as an opportunity to enable me answer some of the questions that I raised while interacting with the literature on the practice of child marriage by conducting a study on the phenomenon.

Having been given the chance to conduct this study via the doctoral scholarship, I went into the research setting being aware of all of these experiences prior to the commencement of the research. In order to engage with my own subjectivity as well as to gain an informed understanding of the cultural context of the child marriage phenomenon, I lived in the research setting specifically Tamale for about the three months during the period I was collecting the data. The aim was for me to acquaint myself with the culture and practices of the people in the community. In view of this, I recorded some of my own internal

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and external observations of the experience in a journal. In order to get an accurate description of the experiences of my participants, I recorded the views of my participants on a tape recorder with their permission.

5.3. Navigating positionalities: Insider and outsider positions

A researcher's position during the research is very crucial to the quality and integrity of the study being conducted. Kerstetter (2012) and Keikelame (2018) both aver that the researcher's identities are ever-changing depending on where the research is being conducted and the personalities and individuals involved and the topic under study. Being an insider, that is, sharing the same characteristics and experiences understudy with the participants, or an outsider to these experiences and characteristics are very crucial and ever-present when conducting research (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Understanding the researcher's position in relation to gender, class, ethnicity, etc. plays a very significant role in the interpretation of the study that is being undertaken (Angrosino, 2005). My position as an outsider was reflected in being identified as a Ghanaian from the southern part of the country, a young married woman with high socioeconomic status and education as well as coming from a different religion. These positions presented challenges that I had to navigate while conducting this research.

In the planning of this research, I was of the view that being a Ghanaian was the same across cultures and ethnic groups since growing up, I came into contact with so many individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds that shared similar views with me on many issues. With this knowledge, I felt that going into the research setting and navigating the complexities that came with it was likely to be relatively easy especially since I had planned to stay in the research setting for about three months to study and understand the research setting. I soon realised that my identity as Ghanaian was the only commonality between myself and my participants as I became aware of the differences that existed between myself, my participants and the research setting as a whole.

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Coming from the southern part of Ghana, I was immediately placed as an outsider when I started interacting with people due to the differing social, religious and economic characteristics that I earlier on had acknowledged were present but subtle. I was thought of as an individual with a higher socioeconomic background and was mostly perceived as a rich woman when they learnt that I live in the southern part of Ghana and had travelled outside the country to pursue my post-graduate education. I was always accorded respect and at times referred to 'Madam Abena' which was very new to me due to the perceived socioeconomic differences and status I had. Considering that most of my participants were from very poor backgrounds I was considered as someone from an affluent background and could not understand the hardships and difficulties they faced. In some instances, some of my participants saw me as an individual who was going to help them out of their economic difficulties.

The above circumstances placed me in the position of power when it came to interviewing the married girls who were recruited for the research. Armstrong (2012) maintains that in conducting interviews it was important for the researcher to pay attention to the power balances between the researcher and the researched. Furthermore, the relationship between researcher and researched individuals is usually perceived as unequal which makes it important for the researcher to negotiate power (Merriam et al., 2001).

For this research, the power dynamics between my research assistant and I was always shifting depending on the participants that were being interviewed. For the married girls, I had to make the conscious effort to make the participants feel empowered in the research process. I remember one instance where in seeking consent from one married girl, I asked if she would allow me to record the interview. Her response was '*you are the one doing your work so what you want to do is what we do*.' I felt the need to ensure that she understood her rights as a participant in the study and her ability to withdraw at any point in the study. In

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view of this, my assistant and I made sure to explain to participants their rights before their consent was sought and even during the interview session. This was not the case with the parents, elders and staff of NGOs and Social Welfare Department. For these groups, especially the elders, we were seen as either children or grandchildren that were being schooled on the cultural foundations of marriage and the practice of child marriage.

I observed that the cultural position of women in the research setting also placed them in such a position that appeared to me that most of them were subdued which I believe affected the power dynamics between me and the female participants in the study. I observed in the field that most female participants except the elderly women were not willing to share their opinions about a particular question or issues that I had raised. They were also sometimes reluctant to share their personal experiences even on topics that I considered were not sensitive. This was very different from the experiences I had had with girls and women from the southern part of Ghana, they were more able to express their views and opinions about any issue. I discussed this feeling with my hostess and others who explained that most of the women in their communities were culturally raised not to express their opinions and emotions especially when their husbands were not present. A male gatekeeper confirmed this and added that it was a way to keep women from giving out information that was not 'supposed to be out.'

With this, I made an effort to establish a rapport with participants at the beginning of the interview. I usually introduced myself and research assistant to them, explained my purpose to them and also invited them to ask me any question that they had which I always answered as candidly as I could. I realised that by generating this atmosphere, participants felt more relaxed and ready to share their experiences with me. I also redrafted my questions in such a way that they were simple and easy to understand. For older women, my assistant and I always referred to them as '*Mma*' meaning mother or '*Mpaga*' grandmother in order to

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make them feel respected and empowered. We also sometimes asked them to talk to us as if they were talking to their daughters which sometimes made them more open to sharing these circumstances.

Additionally, due to my higher education, my participants perceived me as someone who did not understand their plight as women/girls with lower or minimal education. My educational background put me in a higher socioeconomic background which meant that I was not going through the same experiences as them. One participant in discussing how she suffers as a woman mentioned: “yeah women suffer but those of you in school (with high education) do not suffer.” When I encountered situations such as this, I instantly felt like an outsider and at times tried to explain to participants that I had also had a difficult background growing up and can understand their experiences. The explanations that I usually gave were not taken seriously since to them I had managed to climb the social ladder and placed myself at a higher status. In trying to understand them better, I tried to engage in the narratives of their lives from a position of not knowing.

On the other hand, being perceived as a woman of high status placed me in the position of a role model to some of my participants due to my educational background. An elder I interviewed was pleased to have interacted with me and mentioned that he hopes his daughter becomes like me in this future. I also realised that it was difficult for some individuals to understand that I was still pursuing a higher degree since they felt the highest educational level to achieve is a bachelor’s degree, while for some, it is was senior high school. Some participants especially the men found this somewhat intimidating and a hindrance to my marriage. Those who did not know that I was married perceived that it would be difficult for me to get a man to marry.

I was not particularly shocked by this perspective of a highly educated woman not being able to get a suitable husband. This had always been the trend when I grew up and

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started dating. I was, however, saddened that this was the case not just in the research setting but in most parts of Ghana. This was reflected in how I conducted the interviews and engaged in the data I collected. When listening to my participants, I was always sad when participants related that they were expected to leave their education and pursue marriage instead. This feeling was refuelled when I was reading my transcripts and conducting my analysis.

Due to the fact that I am a Christian in a predominantly Muslim community and cannot speak the predominant language spoken in the research setting (in trying to navigate my position as an outsider), I encouraged my hostess and my research assistant to teach me how to greet in the local language and the greeting gestures in order to fit in. Greetings in Ghana are recognised as socially important and is very important in helping individuals navigate their social roles (Egblewogbe, 1990). Furthermore, being able to greet in the appropriate manner is considered a mark of good breeding and also respect for the individual being greeted (Egblewogbe, 1990). Having learnt the appropriate greetings helped me avoid offending any participant I encountered. Some of them were even amused that being a southerner, I was able to greet in their local dialect. I was always being guided by my gatekeepers and research assistant on how to behave appropriately in order to be accepted although an outsider. Also, I felt like an insider at times when I met participants who could speak my local language and was able to interact with them. I always felt as a Ghanaian when I am able to interact with people in the research setting in my local language rather than in English.

As a young married woman, I was frequently asked by participants both males and females where my husband was and why I had left him to travel very far away from home to work. My husband was always pitied by individuals I encountered during the data collection process because they believed that as a woman, my place was to be by my husband and taking care of him. These perceptions also reflected on my duties as a wife as it was

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perceived that in my culture, men were allowed to help their wives which was not common in the culture of my participants. This they believed was what gave me the opportunity to pursue my education. A participant on reflecting on the duties of a wife compared the cultural differences in what is expected of a wife and the support of a husband.

> Mamuna: when a man marries, the wife will have to do all the house chores… You are expected to do everything, and so … so this is what happens in this community, but I think this does not happen where you come from… as for you, you can sleep and your husband will wash your clothes… or he will go and cook food for you… laughs, the place I went to live in Accra, where my sister lives, they are Asantes, when I went to live there, I saw everything! (16 years, married 3 years).

These perceptions made me aware of my ideologies with regards to feminism and gender inequality that I had developed over the years as a growing child. I always felt that both men and women should have equal opportunities and rights in all spheres of life despite location. Listening to the stories of my participants, however, made me feel a considerable impact of culture in the shaping of our identities and roles in the society.

When confronted with these instances, I did acknowledge that we may have been experiencing life differently and may not understand their life and perspectives even though I am a Ghanaian. This always made me feel like an outsider, however, it made trying to understand their issues and predicaments through the careful examination of narrations of their lives and experiences easier to pursue.

5.4. Emotional challenges

My experiences in the fieldwork also had a profound impact on my emotions. In managing my changing positions as a researcher, I became aware of my own feelings not only during the fieldwork but during the transcription and analysis phase of the research process. This study was not my very first qualitative experience but was my first experience conducting research on a sensitive topic such as child marriage and also interacting with the

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key stakeholders involved in the practice of child marriage. During the proposal phase for this study, I read a lot of the literature on child marriage which I sometimes made me angry or sad. These feelings gave me an insight into the emotions that I may be facing as a researcher in the field. Upon entering the research setting, I was faced with different situations that affected my emotions on different levels.

At the beginning of data collection, I was very fascinated when I entered into the research setting. As stated earlier, the culture of my participants was very different from mine and I found this new experience quite interesting. I was happy that I was experiencing a new culture which was going to broaden my perception of life. At the initial stages of the study, I was worried that I might not find participants due to the criminalisation of child marriage in Ghana. However, my contacts in the NGO linked me up with some girls (some of who were married girls themselves) in some of the communities the study was being conducted. These girls managed to invite some of their friends and married girls in the community they knew. This process eased my entry into the communities and my contact with the married girls. Those contacts further helped me recruit other participants for the research.

After the hurdle of getting access to participants (especially married girls) had been overcome, I was faced with some emotional challenges during the data collection process. I realised that due to the cultural differences between myself and participants, I initially found it difficult developing rapport with the participants. Developing rapport is very important for qualitative study as it helps to build the research relationship with the participants (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007; Goodwin, Pope, Mort, & Smith, 2003). Building rapport was going to facilitate disclosure from participants but I found myself struggling with this part of the interview process due to the fact that I could not speak the language. I also found that the culture of participants did not allow them to open up to interact with strangers as their husbands do not want them to give out information. Most of

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the girls and mothers my assistant and I interviewed would not even maintain eye contact with me or my assistant and were very comfortable with silence. Even though silence is necessary at different points in the interview, some participants in this study were comfortable in not speaking or expressing their views. They would remain silent for long periods of time. I found it very frustrating and confusing, it also made me feel uneasy.

Another aspect of the interview process I found confusing was disclosing personal information. I was always not sure whether I was expected to disclose my personal information to the participants and to what extent. I had also not really thought about sharing my experiences and views with participants. Nevertheless, I shared my personal information especially those concerning how my marriage came about and some of my own expectations in marriage. Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) mentioned that self-disclosure helps maintain a non-hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the research participant and helps facilitate rapport. I found that by sharing some of my experiences and views with those participants in some instances helped them open up and share their own experiences with me and my assistant.

According to Liamputtong (2010), qualitative research affords the researcher an opportunity to hear the voices of the silenced and marginalised. I must admit that hearing the voices (and the silences) of the marginalised can be very emotionally challenging. I found myself getting shocked, angry, sad, and feeling helpless when I listened to some of the stories of my participants. These emotions were re-lived when I was transcribing and analysing the data. I concur with Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) who stated that participant researchers in their study felt a responsibility to do something to help their participants after listening to their stories. I also felt the need to help participants during the data collection period. I also feel a responsibility to go back into those communities and provide some interventions after hearing the stories and seeing their livelihood. It is my hope that those interventions would be geared

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towards empowering those adolescent girls and training them on how to exercise their agency and express their opinions in a patriarchal community such as the ones I found my self in. I do acknowledge that this may be difficult considering the entrenched patriarchal norms that most adolescent married girls have been socialised with. I, however, hope that through education and psychological interventions I will be able to achieve this.

Coupled with the feeling of responsibility is the feeling of guilt. When I started collecting the data for the research, I was happy that I was able to recruit participants who were sharing their stories which was going to provide me with very rich data. Feeling contented made me feel guilty since I felt that I was using participants as a means to an end. I began to worry that I was getting desensitised and losing touch with humanity since their shared experiences were becoming a common trend for me.

I was able to overcome some of these emotions by discussing them with my research assistant, my hostess, colleagues and other individuals. I was also able to take short breaks during the data collection period which helped me realign my emotions.

5.5. Language, transcription and translation

Language is a very important phenomenon when it comes to research. Language allows participants to communicate their views, define and explain their ethnicity, gender, and their identities and generally allows them to represent themselves in their social reality (Squires, 2008; Temple, 2002). Language played a very important role in the conduct of this study because as a researcher, I did not understand the language of most of my participants and therefore had to look for avenues for addressing these barriers. van Nes, Abma, Jonsson and Deeg (2010) indicated that language differences between the researcher and participant may have an impact on how concepts, ideas and perceptions are interpreted since those perceptions and ideas in one language may have a different meaning in another language.

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With the above in mind, I employed a research assistant who is a master's level psychology student and speaks Dagbani and is a native of the research setting to assist in conducting the interviews especially in cases where the participant could not speak a language I understood. The assistant was also employed to conduct the transcription of the interviews conducted in order to get an accurate representation of the views of the participants. Squires (2008) recommends that in employing a translator for a cross-language study, the researcher must employ a translator who has professional understanding of the terms in the field that the study is being conducted since a lay translator may not be familiar with the terminologies in the field of study which may affect how they translate the researcher's questions and the participants' responses.

Though the research assistant assisted in conducting the interviews and some of the transcriptions, I, nevertheless, felt limited when it came to conducting interviews with participants who did not understand my language. I would frequently ask my assistant to ask some questions to probe for further understanding of the issue being discussed. This I always felt was a hindrance because it kept the interview very long since she had to listen to me and translate into Dagbani for the participant. Also, the fact that I could not directly interview the participant was a discomfort to me, I had to resign to the conclusion that I could not do anything about the situation and 'allow' my assistant to help conduct the interviews.

In view of the above, I was always happy when we found participants who could speak my local language '*Twi*' or English as it gave me the opportunity to conduct these interviews with them directly. While conducting those interviews, I realised that sometimes, some participants found it difficult translating their views and expressions in my native language or in English. When this happened, I would encourage them to speak in their own language and describe or explain their ideas or views. Sometimes, they found it very difficult to do that, not because they cannot express themselves but they just could not find the right

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word or phrase to express those views. I usually encouraged them in such instances to express themselves in their local language after which I would seek clarifications from my research assistant who I believe may understand their expressions better than me.

5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed my reflections on the various experience that influenced my decision to conduct research on child marriage and how I navigated my position as a researcher in the research setting. I also discussed the emotional experiences I encountered as well as how I navigated the cultural and language barriers I experienced in the field. These experiences may have in one way or the other affected my interpretations of the findings that are presented in the various manuscripts in the ensuing chapters.

The findings of my study relative to the objectives articulated in Chapter 1 will be presented in the next six chapters in the form of journal manuscripts.

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Chapter 6

Manuscript 1

Title: Understanding Child marriage in Ghana: The constructions of gender and sexuality and implications for married girls

Authors: Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo, Joana Salifu Yendork and Anthony Vernon Naidoo

Abstract: Child marriage is the practice of marrying an individual below 18 years. The drivers of this practice include poverty, gender inequality, cultural and religious norms among others. While Ghana is one of many countries worldwide in which child marriage is practised, the literature on cultural underpinnings and implications of the practice in Ghana is sparse. This paper aims to discuss how constructions of adolescence, gender and sexuality in Ghana affect the practice of child marriage. It further examines the implications of child marriage for married girls and argues for research into the causes and mental health implications of the practice.

Keywords: Ghana, child marriage, gender inequality, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, adolescent health

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6.1. Introduction

Marriage is a sacred institution in the African community that is usually accompanied by cultural and religious practices and merrymaking (Amoo, 2017). The joy of marriage, however, eludes some individuals as they are compelled to marry at a very early age due to an intersection of cultural, religious, and financial reasons. Research (Glinski, Sexton, & Meyers, 2015; UNICEF, 2001, 2018) indicates that child marriage is practised worldwide and cuts across cultures, religions and ethnicities. UNICEF (2018) reported the prevalence of child marriage to be 9% in South America and the Caribbean, 5% in the Middle East and North Africa, 44% in South Asia and 18% in sub-Saharan Africa. Global measures to reduce the practice of child marriage have yielded some results with significant reductions being recorded in the last 10 years (UNICEF, 2018). The persistence of the practice of child marriage may be a result of cultural and religious factors that underlie its practice. In Ghana, several factors (social norms, protection from teenage and sexually transmitted infections, and poverty, among others) have been listed as drivers of child marriage (de Groot, Kuunyem, & Palermo, 2018). One of the major underlying factors for the practice is gender inequality which stems from the cultural constructions of gender and sexuality.

Early or child marriage has been defined as any marriage (formal and informal unions) where one or both spouses is/are less than 18 years (Mourtada, Schlecht, & DeJong, 2017). Global statistics indicate that, though boys are likely forced into child marriages, the majority of child marriages tends to involve young girls (Alhassan, 2013). Child marriage is considered to be a violation of the rights of its victims since most victims are either coerced through, physical or sexual threats and/or abuse, and psychological pressure (Women Living Under Muslim Laws [WLUML], 2013). Furthermore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 2015) upholds the individual's right to grant free and full consent to marriage as a universal right. Consent, therefore, may not be considered "free and full" when at least one

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partner is very young and was forced (UNICEF, 2001). Moreover, Ghanaian legislation (The Marriages Act in Ghana) prohibits marriages before the legal age of 18 years for both males and females (de Groot et al., 2018).

Global estimates of child marriage show that currently 650 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday (UNICEF, 2018) while about 250 million were married before turning 15 years, which is more than one in three girls (Prameswari & Agustin, 2018). Of the most recently married girls worldwide, about one in three are in sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, 2018). Global trends indicate a 15% decrease in the practice of child marriage worldwide during the past decade. This trend is similar in sub-Saharan Africa where reports suggest a decrease in the practice of child marriage though at a slow and modest rate (UNICEF, 2018).

In Ghana, child marriage is unlawful and seen as a menace that successive governments have been trying to curb. The right of a child to refuse and be free from marriage has been documented in several international and regional conventions of which Ghana has assented to. In line with the decrease in global trends indicated above, the prevalence of child marriage in Ghana has shown a slight increase by 7.9% between 2014 (27%) and 2018 (19.3%) (Ghana Demographic and Health Survey [DHS], 2014, 2018). The Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey [MICS] (GSS, 2018) reported that 5% of women in Ghana were married before age 15 and 19.3% of women are married by age 18. More girls in the three northern regions of Ghana are affected where the prevalence is 1 out of 3 girls (34%) who are below 18 years. A 2014 UNICEF report also recorded about 21% of child marriages occurred before age 18 and about 5% occurred before age 15. In Ghana, the prevalence of child marriage among boys exists, though it is not commonly practised. Compared to females, only 2.3% of males are married by their 18th birthday (Alhassan, 2013; de Groot et al., 2018), reflecting the gender disparity.

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6.2. Methods for collecting and analysing literature

This paper which forms part of the doctoral study of the first author is based solely on the review and analysis of studies, literature and institutional reports on the various themes that are germane to the focus of this article. Several methods were used to conduct the literature review. Firstly, a literature search was conducted by the first author using Google search engines, Web of Science and Social Sciences databases. Terms such as "child AND early marriage in Ghana," "construction of adolescence in Ghana," "construction of gender in Ghana" and similar phrases were used to as parameters for the search. For child and early marriage in Ghana, findings revealed two research articles and five government and institutional reports. For other themes such as "construction of adolescence in Ghana," "construction of gender in Ghana" and "construction of sexuality in Ghana" thirty-five research articles and literature were retrieved. These sources were examined by the first author of which twelve articles for the terms "construction of gender in Ghana," five articles for "construction of adolescence in Ghana" and seven articles for "construction of sexuality" were retrieved as they were deemed relevant for this paper (see Table 1). Other research articles and literature (eleven) also retrieved from Google Scholar, Web of Science and the Sciences databases were considered relevant for this paper were also included in the literature for this paper (see Table 1).

In addition, another search was conducted for literature on the "implications of child marriage in Ghana" which yielded no results. Given the sparse results, the search term "implications of child marriage for married girls in Ghana" was changed to "the implications of child marriage worldwide". This search yielded several literature on the implications of the practice of child marriage on married girls, however, six research articles were identified for the psychological implications of child marriage. This prompted a search for the psychological implications of child marriage for married girls which yielded little or no

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results. The search terms were modified to include other terms such as “mental health effect” “impact on mental health” of child marriage on married girls. This yielded two research article from web of science and six research articles and institutional reports. However, four were selected for this paper due to the relevance of the information they had and the credibility of the journals they were published in. The information gathered from these papers is discussed in the ensuing sections of this paper.

Table 1

Summary of themes and literature

Terms	Research articles	Institutional reports	Books and Book chapter
Child AND early marriage	3	3	0
Child and early marriage in Ghana	2	5	0
Constructions of adolescence in Ghana	5	0	0
Constructions of sexuality in Ghana	7	0	0
Constructions of gender in Ghana	12	0	1
Implications of child marriage	2	7	1
Psychological implications of child marriage	4	0	0
Other supporting literature	6	0	5

6.3. Causes of child marriage in Ghana

The reasons for the practice of child marriage in Ghana are diverse and sometimes interrelated. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection’s national strategic framework on ending child marriage (MoGCSP, 2016) identifies the main drivers of child marriage to be gender inequality, poverty, teenage pregnancy, traditional and customary practices, social norms, peer pressure, poor parenting; ignorance, impunity and poor enforcement of the law.

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Poverty is seen as one of the major reasons for child marriage in Ghana (Alhassan, 2013). The MICS 2011 reports that girls (41.2%) from poor socioeconomic backgrounds are four times more likely to get married compared to girls (11.5%) from more affluent socioeconomic backgrounds (GSS, 2011). Furthermore, the report suggests that child marriage is very common among the poorest, uneducated and population living in rural areas in Ghana (Amoo, 2017; de Groot et al., 2018). Moreover, the report revealed 36.2% of girls in rural areas compared to 19.4% of girls in urban areas are in child marriages. Tsekpo, Afram, Boateng, and Sefa-Nyarko (2016) found that in some rural fishing communities, young girls were lured to marry older men with the promise of being well catered for compared to the poor livelihood in their families. In contrast to these prevalence indicators, education has been identified to be a protective factor for girls against early marriage (Amoo, 2017). Across Ghana, girls with little or no education are twice more likely to be married in their childhood than girls with higher education (GSS, 2011; MoGCSP, 2016).

As alluded to above, gender inequality, grounded in the cultural constructions of gender and sexuality, is one of the main underlying factors for child marriage in Ghana (Tsekpo et al., 2016). This is evident in the number of boys as compared to girls who are married before their eighteenth birthday (de Groot et al., 2018). Furthermore, the regional distribution of the practice of child marriage shows a significant widening of the gap between the northern patriarchal communities and central/southern matrilineal communities (GSS, 2011, 2014).

6.4. Construction of gender in the Ghanaian society

Gender has been defined by Bolin and Whelehan (2009, p. 33) as ‘the psychological, social and cultural aspects of being a male or female’, signifying that gender is more than merely biological difference and impacts on an individual’s sense of social identity, experience and interactions. Individuals are socialised into their gender roles and in the

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process internalise societal constructions of gender. This, in turn, shapes how they behave in society and, furthermore, how they interact with others in their community. Findings on gender construction in Ghana report socially instituted role separations for men and women deeply rooted in cultural practices (Adinkra, 2012; Ampofo, Beoku-Betts, Njambi, & Osirim, 2004; Opare, 2005). The cultural construction of masculinity and femininity in Ghana, according to Adinkrah (2012), is quite complex and dynamic and can be found in cultural expressions, values and norms (Ampofo, 2001).

Though Ghana practices both matriarchal and patriarchal family systems, the cultural constructions of gender and sexuality is mainly patriarchal in both family systems (Ampofo, 2001) with an emphasis on male supremacy and female subordination in all spheres of the Ghanaian life (Adinkrah, 2012; Fiaveh, Izugbara, Okyerefo, Reysoo, & Fayorsey, 2015). This unequal status leads to the relegation of women in economic, legal, social, political and educational spheres of life. Literature on gender roles in Ghana indicates that most households are traditionally headed by males who are also the sole decision-makers of their families (Brown, 1995). The women, in most instances, are not expected to contribute to decisions and when their opinions are sought, the men may decide not to take their inputs (Brown, 1995). This robs women of their agentic and decision-making abilities and makes them solely dependent on males (Kambarami, 2006).

One of the ways in which culture is used to ensure that individuals in the society recognise and respect their appropriate gender positions in society is the use of language and linguistic nuances such as proverbs, idioms and figures of speech in the daily discourse of the society (Asimeng-Boahene, 2013; Dako-Gyeke & Owusu, 2013). For instance, the Akan of Ghana use specific phrases and words to describe and enforce gender roles and male supremacy. A woman who tries to behave like a man and veers from her feminine attributes is likely to be called *obaabarima*, the Akan appellation for ‘male-woman’ (Ampofo &

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Boateng, 2011). Furthermore, in trying to ascertain the sex of a newborn among the Akans, the father of the child is likely to be asked '*did your wife give birth to a human or a girl?*' This statement clearly depicts the importance and joy accorded to the birth to a boy instead of a girl with the girl status being depicted as less than human. This trend is also very common among other tribes in Ghana where patriarchy is practised and male supremacy is upheld. Additionally, Ampofo (2001) reports that the hierarchical power structures in Ghanaian society, place women and children, especially females, at the bottom, subordinate to males. Other social structures such as the family, marriage, initiation rites among other are avenues for the construction of gender and sexuality (Nukunya, 1992).

The importance of a male in the Ghanaian society translates into how both males and females are treated. Research (Alhassan, 2010; Amoo, 2017) suggests that parents are less likely to educate their girl child because they are perceived to be less intelligent than boys and are likely to get pregnant while in school. Furthermore, marrying off girls is a source of income generation for the parents since they receive bridewealth from the girl's potential husband (Alhassan, 2010). Therefore, families may pull a girl from school and marry her off when faced with financial crises to reduce the financial burden on the family (MoGCSP, 2016). Reports indicated that in some Ghanaian cultures, girls are given out in marriage as gifts to wealthy men, either as compensation or settlement of family/communal issues including debt, inherited liabilities and religious obligations (MoGCSP, 2016).

The family in Africa is recognised as the bedrock of every society and a basic unit that plays a significant role in society (Boateng, 1995). It is seen as the epicentre of all social institutions and organisations and a means to regulate social issues on sexuality and reproduction, socialisation of the young, enforcement of social norms and transmission of the culture of the society (Mann & Takyi, 2009). Family responsibilities are particularly gender stratified (Ampofo et al., 2004) with young girls socialised to look up to men and boys as

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stronger, wiser, and more responsible, while boys are socialised to lead the family and control women (Boateng, Adomako-Ampofo, Flanagan, Gallay, & Yakah, 2006). Boys are raised to be the breadwinners of the family while girls are raised to be dependent on males, be supportive wives and nurture the home and family by engaging in activities such as childcare, food preparation and managing household chores (Adinkra, 2012). This socialisation has several implications on the development of identities of both males and females which then translates to the development of self-worth and an awareness of social positioning. According to Tsekpo et al. (2016), girls who are socialised to believe that they are inferior to males will likely internalise these beliefs and roles enforced by culture. Such girls may limit their dreams and aspirations and often feel the need to seek the support of males in order to achieve their life goals. They may, therefore, want to find a man who will marry them when they reach puberty who will satisfy all their needs and help them achieve their goals (Tsekpo et al., 2016), thereby promoting child marriage. Furthermore, when parents themselves believe that their girl child belongs in the kitchen, they are less likely to fund her education or help her to achieve her goals but are more likely to marry their girls off to the most eligible bachelor or man when they are perceived to be sexually matured. Moreover, being an older educated woman also attracts negative perceptions. Alhassan (2010) reports that educated women are perceived to be empowered and difficult to control. In view of this, men are reticent to marry educated women and will rather marry younger and less matured women or girls as they are perceived to be more submissive and easier to control than educated women. The perception that women belong to their husbands also discourages many parents from sending their girls to school or even to invest in them (Alhassan, 2010).

6.5. Construction of sexuality in the Ghanaian society

Sexuality is believed to be beyond biological sex assigned at birth and includes how individuals are socialised into their gender roles, their physical and psychological

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development with respect to their body image, the social relationships they develop, and future social aspirations (Fiaveh et al., 2015; Murphy & Elias, 2006). Society plays a significant role in the socialisation of sexuality defining what is appropriate for males and females regarding their sex-roles, behaviours and functions (Anarfi & Owusu, 2011). In Ghana, the mediums through which individuals are socialised about sexuality is usually informal with structures such as family, state and religious organisations among others being relied on for sexual socialisation (Anarfi & Owusu, 2011). Typically, the discussion of sexuality is done secretly (van der Geest, 2001) and, until recently, the open discussion of sex was viewed as immoral and deviant (van der Geest, 2001). There is a strong emphasis on girls maintaining their virginity and sexual purity before marriage and there is strong disapproval for premarital sex by the Ghanaian society and religious bodies (Amoo, 2017; Osafo, Asampong, Langmagne, & Ahiedeke, 2014). To reduce premarital sex and possible out of wedlock pregnancies after a girl has reached menarche, parents may feel pressured to marry them off early since sexual initiation is socially expected to coincide with marriage (Osafo et al., 2014). Reaching puberty and menarche, rather than age, is a prime consideration of whether an individual is perceived to be ready for marriage (Osafo et al., 2014). Education on sex is typically done during the puberty rites and traditional preparation for marriage. Topics cover responsible parenthood, prenatal/ post-natal care, menstruation, menstrual care and hygiene and tend to emphasise what the bride should or should not do to please her husband (Anarfi & Owusu, 2011).

When it comes to decisions on sexuality (specifically sexual and reproductive issues), in most patriarchal societies in Ghana, men exercise the sole decision-making rights despite the fact that women are the ones who carry reproduction responsibilities (Dodoo & Tempenis, 2002; Takyi & Dodoo, 2005). A study conducted in the Northern region of Ghana on the use of contraceptives revealed that systems in the patriarchal societies prevented

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women from taking decisions regarding their sexual reproductive health (Bawah, Akweongo, Simmons, & Phillips, 1999). The inability of the female to exercise control over her life makes it difficult for her to make decisions about when and whom to marry since that decision rests largely with her father and family whose wishes she is expected to obey. This may lead some of the girls into child marriage before reaching the legal age of marriage. Furthermore, since women are perceived to be the homemaker, a girl who reaches puberty and perceived to be sexually matured is also perceived to be matured enough to cater for the home and can thus be married.

6.6. Construction of adolescent development and sexuality

Koops and Zuckerman (2003, p. 346) define adolescence as "the period in life that bridges the gap between childhood and adulthood." By this definition, adolescence is seen as the transitional period and is marked by the onset of puberty. The concept of adolescence as a separate transitional period in the life of an individual is considered a modern perspective (Macleod, 2006) while the construction of adolescence is different across cultures and historical contexts (Saltman, 2005). Adolescence is marked with rapid biological, cognitive, social and psychological development (Shefer, 2004). According to western perspectives, adolescence is a stressful and emotionally turbulent period (Macleod 2006; Shefer, 2004). Hall (1904) describes adolescence as a period of "storm and stress," associated with psychological distress for the child who is in the process of becoming an adult. These psychological implications result from the individual being preoccupied with rapid physical changes while handling the need to conform to social pressures and the psychosocial meaning of growing into an adult (Shefer, 2004). Accompanying these developmental changes is the experience of sexual feelings and desires and the lure to experiment with these sexual drives. The emergence of sexual desires in adolescence, while a natural phenomenon, is regarded as

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problematic since engaging in sexual activities is considered an adult activity and the adolescent is still considered a child by the society and community (Macleod, 2006).

In some parts of Ghana, the cultural construction of adolescence may be a misnomer. Historically, adolescence starts for girls with menarche or initiation and ends with marriage or child-bearing (Awusabo-Asare, Biddlecom, Kumi-Kyereme, & Patterson, 2006). The period culturally considered to be adolescence is usually a short period because as soon as a girl has her first menstruation, she is sent off to be initiated into womanhood. Ampofo (2001) notes the initiation is done to celebrate the girl's fertility for her or her husband's lineage and her maturity for marriage thus as part of the initiation rites, girls are adorned in rich clothes and beads and paraded through their communities to announce their readiness to marry. Before they are introduced to the community, the initiates are secluded and given rudimentary instructions on the secrets of sexuality, how to be a good wife and mother (Ampofo, 2001). For males, the growth of pubic hair, breaking of voice and having his first wet dreams mark puberty and are important milestones leading to apprenticeship (Awusabo-Asare et al., 2006). While there are no initiation rites for boys Awusabo-Asare, Abane, and Kumi-Kyereme (2004) indicate that after reaching puberty boys are trained in vocations such as hunting, farming, fishing and craftsmanship which conform to societal expectations of them becoming the head and provider of the family. These initiation rites are developed to help young people transition into adulthood. They are also instituted to prepare the individual for the cultural prescriptions of his/her gendered adult roles but also to prevent adolescents from engaging in premarital sexual activities and to ensure that sexual activities take place in marriage since any form of sexual activity outside is considered deviant (Osafo et al., 2014). In the girls' initiation rites, a test of virginity forms a core part of some of these rites (Asampong, Osafo, Bingenheimer, & Ahiadeke, 2013; Osafo et al., 2014). Culturally, premarital sex is considered a taboo bringing dishonour to the family of the adolescent,

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especially the girl, who is perceived to have engaged in any form of sexual promiscuity (Awusabo-Asare et al., 2004; UNICEF, 2001).

Although maintaining virginity before marriage is upheld by society, it is not practised by many young people. Adolescents in Ghana are perceived to be increasingly sexually active which has been attributed to rapid social, cultural and economic changes occurring both locally and internationally (Asampong et al., 2013). Several studies have reported early sexual debut with some adolescents engaging in sex in their mid-teen years (Glover et al., 2003; Zaba, Pisani, Slaymaker, & Boerma, 2004). Early sexual debut has been associated with high risks for STIs and HIV/AIDS (Addai, 2000; Awusabo-Asare et al., 2006), and with teenage pregnancy which has health, social and economic implications for the mother and child (Agyei, Biritwum, Ashitey, & Hill, 2000). Early childbirth for young girls can lead to infant and maternal mortality due to birth complications, or in some cases, the mother can develop chronic health issues as a result of the pregnancy (Zabin & Kiragu, 1998). Nour (2009) reported that adolescent pregnancy or childbirth poses dangerous health risks to the mother and to her child because her adolescent body is not physiologically developed to give birth.

Most ethnic groups in Ghana historically encouraged early marriage and childbearing (Awusabo-Asare et al., 2004; Nukunya 1992). Although the current Ghanaian society has undergone social change due to modernity and westernisation, early marriage still persists especially in rural areas and poor urban areas (Awusabo-Asare et al., 2004) due to entrenched cultural and religious traditions still being practised and financial considerations.

6.7. Gender, sexuality and child marriage

The discussions above depict women in the Ghanaian society in a disadvantaged position and the Ghanaian culture as a hegemonically patriarchal one that preserves the

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practice of child marriage. Research has indicated that countries with high gender inequality have a high prevalence of child marriage (Glinski et al., 2015; Nasrullah et al., 2014). Patriarchally, early marriage is posited to help control the personalities and sexuality of the girls as it is believed that older girls or women are more difficult to regulate especially when they have been educated and become independent (Chowdhury, 2004; WLUML, 2013). Marrying girls off seems to be the ideal way for parents as responsibility for their upkeep now shifts to the husband. Usually, most parents believe that when girls are married off early, the honour of the family is protected as marrying them early will prevent them from engaging in premarital sexual activities and advances from men (Sabbe et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2001). In view of this, a number of practices (puberty rites and early marriage) have been designed by some communities to protect the girls from "sexual immorality" and sexually transmitted diseases which can bring dishonour to her and her family at large (Nasrullah et al., 2014). Furthermore, for most cultures in which child marriage is practised, the concept of adolescence is foreign (UNICEF, 2001). A girl child who reaches puberty is considered an adult and can bear a child (Anarfi & Owusu, 2011). She is expected to be ready to take on responsibilities of motherhood, home keeper and a respectful wife, which are socially desirable roles. It is common for parents in these communities to withdraw their children especially girls from school fearing that exposure to male classmates or teachers can put them at "risk" of sexual activity or transgression (WLUML, 2013).

6.8. Implications of child marriage

Child marriage, aside from being a violation of the human rights of the woman, affects its victims in diverse ways. It has detrimental effects on the development of such children since it is an abrupt shift from childhood activities and pastimes to adulthood without adequate preparations (Bruce & Bongaarts, 2009; Gupta et al., 2014). Additionally, it hinders (often curtails) the educational attainment of its victims, which comes with associated

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rippling effects. For example, lower educational attainment results in difficulty in finding employment. This, in turn, makes girls more susceptible to violence, psychological distress and economic hardship (Jensen & Thornton, 2003) locking them into dependency. Low educational levels among married girls also affect their children due to the inability of the young mothers to provide proper nutrition, immunisation against childhood diseases which in turn result in high mortality rates among such children (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008; Nguyen & Wodon, 2014).

Child marriage also poses severe reproductive health risks. Girls who marry early usually experience physical pain associated with sexual intercourse due to their underdeveloped reproductive organs (Mathur, Greene, & Malhotra, 2003). Childbirth may lead to obstetric fistula (the tearing of vagina, bladder and/or rectum during childbirth) because of prolonged child delivery (Glinksi et al., 2015). Exposure to sexual abuse and sexually transmitted infections is often high among this population (Presler-Marshall & Jones, 2012). It has been revealed that married girls in Ghana are less likely to use contraception to space their childbearing with only 13.6% of girls using contraceptives (WiLDAF Ghana, 2014).

Furthermore, child marriage has negative economic implications. Girls who are married are usually unable to have access to education which will give them the needed skills, knowledge and employment prospects to support their families (WiLDAF Ghana, 2014). This advertently leads to an increasing number of girls who cannot contribute to the national economy, thus putting pressure on the country's economy and national development prospects.

The psychological consequences of child marriage also persist and cannot be overlooked. Although research in this field is limited (Glinksi et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2001),

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studies have found that girls who marry at an early age show poor mental health and report higher rates of social isolation and depression (Le Strat, Dubertret, & Le Foll, 2011). A recent study also revealed that young girls once married or having received any form of marriage requests were significantly more likely to have had suicidal thoughts than girls who are not engaged in any marriage process (Gage, 2013). Le Strat et al. (2011) also found that most women who married as children in the United State reported higher rates of depression and nicotine dependence in their lifetime when compared with women who married as adults. These psychological consequences may be due to, but not limited to, the loss of adolescence, forced sexual relations, emotional and physical violence, and denial of freedom and personal development (UNICEF, 2001).

Additionally, married girls are often socially and physically isolated from friends, family, and other social networks, which in turn render them reliant on their husband and in-laws for their basic needs. This situation often persists throughout the girl's lifetime and translates into a lack of control over financial resources, and restricted access to information and social support system or networks (Malhotra, 2010). Additionally, studies have revealed that girls in child marriages are at a higher risk of sexual, physical, and emotional violence (World Health Organisation, 2002). Although the psychological implications of child marriage are very important to the design and implementation of policies and interventions, literature suggests little research on this field of enquiry (Glinski et al., 2015).

6.9. Arguing for research on child marriage in Ghana

In Ghana, studies have been conducted to examine the antecedents and impact of the practice of child marriage. For example, Alhassan (2013) found that poverty was the major reason for the practice of child marriage in the Northern region of Ghana. Undergirding the practice of child marriage was the perceived high cost of educating the girl child and the

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parents' inability to meet the financial needs of the family due to low household income and meagre resources. This led parents to marry off their daughters early in order to get them out of poverty. Although Alhassan's (2013) focus on poverty as a causal factor for the practice of child marriage is helpful, it leaves a gap in understanding other causal drivers of child marriage.

A similar study conducted by de Groot et al. (2018) also examined the prevalence of child marriage among the population in the Northern and Upper East region of Ghana in a sample of 1349 ever-married women aged 20–29 years. The findings revealed that child marriage is a common practice in northern Ghana and is associated with poor health, adolescent pregnancy, increased child mortality, and low agency among women. A limitation of this study is that the above-mentioned topics were not examined in detail since the use of structured questionnaires didn't allow participants to share their experiences. A research study is needed that affords participants the opportunity to give discursive accounts of their subjective experiences with child marriage and the impact on their lives.

A study conducted by Tsekpo et al. (2016) that focused on the practice of child marriage in communities along the Volta Lake in Ghana reported that children are not always forced into child marriage but may be lured into the practice due to early sexual escapades, incentives for sex, and sexual promiscuity, arising from interplay of other contextual factors, including poverty, single parenting and parental neglect and teenage pregnancy. Although this information is very useful, it, however, presents a gap on affected adolescent girls' views on whether or not they accept the practice, the implications of resisting such practices and their awareness of alternative avenues available to them instead of early marriage.

These limited number of studies, according to de Groot et al. (2018), present a lacuna in the literature on the practice of child marriage in Ghana and necessitates a broader

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qualitative study into child marriage that seeks to examine a holistic view of the practice by exploring the social and cultural causal dynamics and dimensions undergirding child marriage in Ghana.

Relatively little is known about the psychological impact of child marriage on the lives of married girls. Literature on the psychological impact of child marriage on its victim in Ghana is scant though studies have revealed that the practice has dire psychological consequences on its victims (Gage, 2013; Nuor, 2009) as well as other consequences on their children (Jensen & Thornton, 2003; Lloyd & Mensch, 2008) and the society (Glinksi et al., 2015). Against this background, it is imperative to conduct research that seeks to explore the contextual drivers and understand the psychological experiences of children in child marriage. Such a study would be relevant in Ghana given the country's high prevalence of child marriage with 21% of girls in Ghana being estimated to be married before they are 18 (UNICEF, 2016), but rates can be as high as 39% in the northern part of the country (GSS, 2014). Findings from such a study will contribute to the understanding of the cultural, social and psychological impact of child marriage on the quality of life of Ghanaian girls. With the launch of the Ghanaian government's national campaign in 2016 to end child marriage, explorative research will further help inform state departments, agencies and organisations develop interventions and policies addressing the aetiology, practice and impact of child marriage based on the perceptions and experiences shared by participants affected. Research should focus not only on the married girls but also on their parents and elders in the community to understand the social and cultural antecedents of the practice. Information can also be garnered from organisations providing support services to this vulnerable population. Findings from these sources will help psychologists, social workers and other professionals plan and implement interventions that are better tailored to the mental health needs of married girls and affected individuals. The experiences and recommendations of NGOs rendering

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support to vulnerable groups such as child brides may provide valuable data to inform policy and intervention development.

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Chapter 7

Manuscript 2

Title: Examining the intersection between marriage, perceived maturity and child marriage: Perspectives of community elders in northern Ghana

Authors: Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo, Joana Salifu Yendork and Anthony Vernon Naidoo

Abstract: Child marriage is a rampant global phenomenon which occurs in many developing countries including Ghana. The practise of child marriage appears to emanate from how marriage, adolescence and readiness for marriage are construed in practising communities. This study presents the views of community elders and examines their constructions of marriage and maturity and its influence on child marriage. Data were purposively collected from seven elders from selected communities in the Northern region of Ghana. Individual in-depth interviews were used to gather participants' perceptions on the constructions of marriage and markers for determining maturity of girls for marriage. A generic inductive qualitative method was used to analyse transcribed data. Views from the elders indicated that the practice of early marriage is influenced by a community's constructions of marriage and social indicators of readiness for marriage. The main indicators of maturity for marriage for males were economic independence and having an awareness of sexual urges while the overt markers of physiological development and mastery of domestic tasks were indicators for girls. Knowledge about the cultural constructions of marriage and readiness for marriage is helpful for impacting policy-making and interventions on early marriage.

Keywords: child marriage, marriage, northern Ghana, readiness for marriage, community elders

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7.1. Introduction

Varying definitions of marriage mainly connote different constructions of marriage among different cultures and ethnic groups (Yin & Black, 2014). Marriage is universally defined as the union of at least two individuals with a set of legal or cultural rules and obligations binding them (Yin & Black, 2014). In Ghana, marriage is a union of two families instead of individuals (Addai, Opoku-Agyeman, & Amanfu, 2015).

Child or early marriage is construed as the marriage of an individual who is less than eighteen years (Neetu, Edmeades, Murithi, & Barre, 2019). The incidence rate of child marriage in Ghana is 19.3% and is more prominent in the northern parts (Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey [MICS], 2018). The MICS indicates that 19.3% of adolescent girls marry before their 18th birthday and 5% marry before turning 15 years. In comparison, only 2.3% of adolescent boys are married before turning 18 years (de Groot et al., 2018).

In Ghana and across the globe, child marriage continues to persist despite several measures put in place to eradicate the practice. In 2016 the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) launched a strategic framework for ending child marriage in Ghana. This paved the way for the implementation of interventions by government and non-governmental organisations that were directly or indirectly geared towards the prevention of child marriage. One such intervention was the implementation of the Girl Child Initiative School programme which allows reintegration of pregnant adolescent girls into school after childbirth is reported to have helped prevent child marriage in most parts of Ghana (University of Ghana Centre for Social Policy Studies and World Vision Ghana [UG-CSPS and WVG], 2017). Other interventions being implemented include but not limited to social and economic assistance for families, advocacy and the creation of awareness of the harmful effects of early marriage. Despite these interventions, the practice still persists. One of the reasons for this persistence may be the differing constructions of marriage, maturity or

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readiness for marriage and adulthood across countries and cultures. The notion of 18 years being the universally accepted minimum age for marriage has been described as a western concept (Stark, 2018) and may not fully encompass the different constructions of maturity and marriage. The concept of maturity or readiness for marriage appears to be influenced by cultural beliefs and historical perspectives of childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Byrd, 2009).

In Ghana, for instance, the cultural construction of adolescence may be a misnomer and may not necessarily reflect western notions of adolescence and maturity. In view of this, the study aims to examine the cultural constructions of marriage and readiness for marriage and how these constructions shape and influence the practice of child marriage in practising communities in the Northern region of Ghana. Elders are the older generations in the community and are perceived to be the custodians of cultural values and beliefs held by a particular group of people (Warburton & Chambers, 2007). The views of elders on the cultural constructions of marriage and readiness for marriage provide rich information which is steeped in the cultural traditions of the communities where child marriage is practised. An understanding of these concepts from the perspectives of elders not only adds to the growing literature on early marriage but presents a unique Ghanaian perspective which may be relevant for the West African sub-region. This information may help inform policymakers and interventionists on the specific underlying cultural ideologies that maintain the practice of child marriage in Ghana. It is important to note that this study forms part of a larger study conducted for the doctoral study of the first author which aimed to investigate and identify the factors that contribute to the practice of early marriage and their related implications on the psychological wellbeing of adolescent married girls in the Northern region of Ghana. While this study reports the perceptions of community elders, the larger study examined the

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perceptions of married adolescent girls, their parents, and professionals working with married girls on the aims of the larger study.

7.1.1. Constructions of marriage and maturity.

Studies (Aniciete & Soloski, 2011; Byrd, 2009) have indicated that the construction of marriage varies across cultures and societies. Marriage is perceived to be a product of social reality and the cultural beliefs held by a group of people (Aniciete & Soloski, 2011). Knowledge about marriage is socially constructed through countless interactions with the environment and social reality (Aniciete & Soloski, 2011). Constructions of marriage have evolved over the centuries with respect to the kind of individual or entity that is married, roles played by the partners involved, and the reasons for, and duration of the marriage. Generally, marriage in individualistic and collectivist societies is perceived differently with respect to the roles played by the couple and their families (Byrd, 2009). In individualistic cultures, the couple's individual interests, love and romantic pleasures are upheld with very little family interference (Aniciete & Soloski, 2011). In collectivist societies like Ghana, the needs of the extended family supersede those of individual interests and preferences (Takyi, Miller, Kitson, & Oheneba-Sakyi, 2003).

The importance of marriage in the African context can be attributed to the centrality of family in the life of the traditional community (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2006). Marriage is considered the bedrock of the family institution since it plays a formative role in the regulation of sexual behaviours, lineage continuation, socialisation and perpetuation of cultural practices (Nukunya, 2003). It is also perceived to be the legitimate institution for procreation and expansion of the family. Married individuals, therefore, are perceived to have the legitimate right to engage in sexual activities usually with the aim of procreating (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2006).

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In traditional Ghanaian society, marriage is expected of everyone and was usually contracted after the performance of puberty rites which signifies the maturity of the child into adulthood and readiness for marriage (Okyere-Manu, 2015). Due to the importance given to marriage, the betrothal (*asiwa* among the Akans, *ngugu* among the Dagomba of Ghana) of an individual may be contracted before puberty is reached. Betrothal is not considered child marriage since the partners are expected to consummate the marriage only when they are considered to be matured and ready to be married.

Considered a dignified social institution, marriage in Ghana bestows on the individual and her/his family social prestige, honour and respect (Addai et al., 2015). In juxtaposition, remaining unmarried, when an individual is considered mature for marriage incurs stigma with the individual perceived as being immoral (Nukunya, 2003). Every individual irrespective of social status, economic background or health is expected to marry at some point in her/his life (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2006). However, the timing of the marriage for an individual is dependent on whether the individual is considered mature enough for marriage.

On the concept of maturity and readiness for marriage, literature indicates that what constitutes maturity is viewed differently across cultures and societies (Bledsoe & Cohen, 1993; Stark, 2018). The construction of maturity or adulthood is perceived to be influenced by biological, psychological, economic and cultural tenets. One marker for determining maturity, or the readiness for marriage, in traditional Ghanaian societies is the onset of puberty (Ampofo, 2001; Stark, 2018). The emergence of secondary physical and sexual characteristics, which for boys is the growth of pubic hair, breaking of voice and experiencing ejaculations, while for girls the onset of menarche, development of breasts among others, were some of the markers for determining puberty (Ampofo, 2001). Individuals who show signs of the onset of puberty are initiated into adulthood through the performance of puberty rites after which they are considered adults and ready for marriage

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(Ampofo, 2001). Other indicators for maturity are the ability of the individual to master specific social markers and cultural tasks at certain stages in his/her life (Nsamenang, 2015) and being regarded by the family and society as mature. Against this background, maturity in this study is conceptualised as the perceived readiness of an individual for marriage.

Bearing in mind that most Ghanaian children reach puberty between 12 and 15, with an average age of 15 years (Awusabo-Asare, Biddlecom, Kumi-Kyereme, & Patterson, 2006), traditional constructions of maturity place the individual in the category of an adult. With the onset of puberty, marriage is usually the perceived next step for adolescents in traditional Ghanaian communities where such constructions of adolescence and adulthood are upheld. Awusabo-Asare et al. (2006) purport that if adolescence exists in the Ghanaian context, it is a very short period which may be between the onset of puberty and when the individual has been initiated into adulthood.

These constructions of maturity have been considered one of the underlying factors driving the practice of child marriage in practising communities (UNICEF, 2001) although other reasons (e.g., poverty, protection of young girls, peer group and family pressure, controlling female behaviour and sexuality among others) have also been outlined (Alhassan, 2013; UNICEF, 2001).

Within this context, this study purposefully sets out to examine the constructions of marriage and maturity and how these constructions shape and influence the practice of child marriage in practising communities in northern Ghana. Understanding the perceived cultural practices, beliefs and indicators for maturity and marriage from the perspective of community elders will add to the growing literature on the concept of marriage, maturity and adulthood and help inform policymakers and interventionists on the specific underlying cultural ideologies that maintain the practice of child marriage in Ghana.

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7.2. Methodology

7.2.1. Research design.

Using the constructionist paradigm (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Burr, 2015), an exploratory qualitative research design was adopted to gather data on the social constructions of marriage and maturity from community elders. The generic qualitative approach was specifically adopted for this study because it allows the researcher to discover and examine the perceptions, worldviews and experiences of individuals involved with a particular phenomenon (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). Furthermore, it is flexible and allows for the incorporation of other qualitative methods in studying the phenomenon under study (Cooper & Endacott, 2007). This method was deemed suitable to examine how elders, as custodians of the cultural mores of their communities, construct and perceive child marriage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

7.2.2. Research setting and participants.

Seven elders were recruited from three districts (Tamale, Sanarigu and Mion) in the Northern region of Ghana for individual face-to-face in-depth interviews. Although we had set out to interview 12 participants, data collection was stopped after the seventh interview due to data saturation (see Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The Northern region of Ghana was selected because it is reported to have the highest rates of child marriage in the country (GSS, 2018). All participants were Muslim and from the Dagomba ethnic group which is the largest ethnic and religious groups in the region (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2010).

Participants were selected using purposeful and convenient sampling techniques. In line with the World Health Organisation's (WHO, 2002) definition, elders are 50 years and older and are considered well versed in the culture of their respective communities. Elders are seen as the custodian of traditional knowledge, values and customs of a group of people and

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are the individuals in the society to be contacted when a person wants to understand the traditions and values of a group of people (Warburton & Chambers, 2007).

Of the seven elders, three were female aged between fifty and eighty years while the four males were aged between fifty-five and sixty-eight years. Two elders were chiefs, two farmers, two traders and one a retired trader. Five of the elders were married while one was widowed, and one did not mention her marital status. Two had been educated with one being educated to the tertiary level and the other at the primary level; the rest had never had formal education.

7.2.3. Data collection.

A research assistant (HB) who shared common ethnic and linguistic characteristics with the participants was employed to aid the first author (EAS) with translations and transcription of data. HB was a graduate student of psychology and received training in interviewing skills before the commencement of data collection. Gatekeepers identified in each of the communities assisted with recruiting participants. The criteria for the selection of participants were explained to gatekeepers who then helped identify potential participants in their communities. Identified participants were introduced to EAS and HB who, after ensuring they met the inclusion criteria, explained the study objectives to them and sought their consent before conducting the interviews.

Questions discussed with participants focused on their views on how marriage is culturally defined, the importance of marriage, the markers for determining readiness for marriage and views on bachelorhood and spinsterhood. Of the seven interviews, five were conducted by HB and two were conducted by EAS at various settings that included a chief's palace, homes of elders, and at designated points in the community. Interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of participants and lasted an average of 45 minutes.

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7.2.4. Ethical considerations.

Ethical approval (reference number: SU-HSD-004745) for the study (which formed part of a broader study – see Sarfo (2020) was obtained before commencing with data collection. Permission was also obtained from the Department of Social Welfare in the Northern region of Ghana because this agency is constitutionally mandated to handle the affairs of vulnerable children (married adolescents) in the research setting.

Consent was also sought from participants before the commencement of data collection. Before commencing the interview, participants were assured that their names and personal information would be replaced with pseudonyms to ensure confidentially and anonymity. Also, they were informed that they could withdraw their participation at any stage of the research. All participants received an amount of ₵20.00 (equivalent to $4.81 at the time of the study) as compensation for their time. Paying respondents has received critical review however the paying respondents is reported to help eliminate power imbalances in addition to it compensating for time and expenses (Wertheimer & Miller, 2008). Participants were only made aware of the payment at the end of the interview in order to unduly influence their decision to participate in the study.

7.2.5. Data analysis.

In the first step, EAS read through all transcripts several times to familiarise herself with the data and gain an overview of participants' views and emerging issues raised in the transcripts. In the next step, the data were coded using the line-by-line and in-vivo coding techniques. This method enables the researcher to stay close to the data and helps capture the exact views being shared by participants. The third step which entails the grouping of codes into categories was then implemented by connecting, grouping and labelling similar codes. Codes that did not fall under any category but were important were also labelled. Using Charmaz's (2006) focused technique, large amounts of data were sorted and synthesised into

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categories. The fourth step involved rereading, recoding and re-categorisation of all overlapping codes to reduce redundancy among the categories. To assist in reducing repetition and overlap among the codes, axial coding techniques proposed by Charmaz (2006) were applied to aid in sorting and linking categories into subthemes and themes. Co-researchers helped to 'validate' the meaningful presentation of findings by reviewing all themes, categories and interpretations. After the careful reading of all codes and categories, several themes were generated from the data and will be presented in the ensuing section.

7.3. Findings and discussion.

Findings have been categorised under two broad themes, namely, perceptions of marriage and indicators of maturity and their respective subthemes (see Table 7.1) which are discussed in the sections below.

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Table 7.1

Indicators of maturity and perceptions of marriage

Theme	Subtheme	
Perceptions of marriage	Perceived reasons for marriage	
		Religion
		Procreation
		Controlling sexual behaviour
		Housekeeping
	Perceptions of bachelor/spinsterhood	
	Males:	Irresponsibility
		Impotence
	Females:	Sexual infertility
		Insubordination
		Spiritual possession
Perceived indicators of maturity	Males:	Economic independence
		Sexual awareness
	Females:	Physiological development
		Mastery of tasks

7.3.1. Perceptions of marriage.

Findings on the constructions of marriage among participants were categorised into two subthemes (perceived reasons for marriage and perceptions on bachelor and spinsterhood).

7.3.1.1. Perceived reason for marriage.

Religion. Several interviewees alluded to marriage, although part of the traditional social structure, being ordained by God.

> "Marriage is just something that God has ordained. Because God said that when you grow up and you are ready for marriage, you are supposed to get married." (Alima, female, ±54 years).

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According to Alima, individuals who are perceived to be mature and ready for marriage were expected to marry as a way of obeying God's command. In Ghana, marriage is a religious rite that is part of the social structure (Marks, 2005). Religion is an important part of marriage for several reasons - the support and sanctioning of the marriage by the clergy and the faith community, the religious rituals that unite the couple and their families, the reinforcement of marital fidelity, beliefs and faith in God as marital support (Marks, 2005). Marriage is also supported by the various religious scripture, traditions and practices. Participants' views of marriage being ordained by God appear to be in line with their professed faith in a religion that upholds marriage as a prized social institution.

Procreation. Aside from being considered the legitimate social and religious institution for the experience of sex, marriage was also perceived to be important for procreation. Most participants felt that children were an important part of the social system and marriage provided the avenue for individuals to procreate. Children were perceived to be a sign of God's blessing on the couple and important assets since they are expected to cater for their parents in their old age.

> "Both of you will give birth to children and they will take care of you tomorrow because you are people who will one day grow old." (Alima, female, ±54 years).

Children were also important for continuity of lineage and a way to increase the family size.

> "…we want the family to become large…you are my daughter and this is my daughter. I marry you to a man and I marry this one to a man, she had about three children, you had about three children and we were only three, now how many numbers are we? We have increased to … a large family. …so if you delay marrying your child to a man or your boy didn't marry, how will the increment come?" (Baba, male, 68 years)

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The importance of children in African marriages has been noted by Tabong and Adongo (2013). Children are desired by the family because they are considered to provide economic service, labour and perpetuate the family's lineage, customs and practices (Yin & Black, 2014). Children also assist in the duties of the household, and in caring for the aged. When they gain economic independence, children are expected to take care of their parents and other older family members (Takyi et al., 2003). Hence, most African societies expect individuals to marry and procreate; choosing to stay single is considered to be contrary to cultural expectations.

Controlling sexual behaviours. Marriage was seen as a means to regulate the sexual behaviour of adolescent girls and prevent immorality in the society. Participants stated that girls who were mature enough for marriage and are not married early are likely to get impregnated or engage in amorous behaviours. Early marriage was thus a way to manage girls who are perceived to be sexually active, control their sexual behaviour and prevent premarital pregnancy. The need to control behaviours of adolescent girls was based on the perception that when girls start puberty, they become sexually active and start 'hunting men' for sex and love. The prospect of pubescent girls being the target of men's attention did not appear to be a more plausible possibility for many of the participants. The pursuit of sex and love was, instead, perceived to be an inborn need that cannot be controlled by the girls. Marriage, therefore, was positioned as the appropriate social structure that should be used to manage girls and regulate adolescent girls' sexual impulses.

> "There you can start hunting men. A man wouldn't come to you as I love you, but you the girl will go to the man for the love because you need the sex. You have now come for the sex, so the earlier they throw you (marry you) out and not for you to do the bad thing that they don't want you to do. That's why now we have got the small, small children being pregnant and all those things" (Baba, male, 68 years)

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Baba's views portray a bias towards female sexual behaviours, social perceptions about marriage and how it is used to regulate sexual behaviours, especially among adolescent girls. The literature on child marriage reveals that the need to control sexual behaviours, prevent illicit sexual activities, pregnancy and the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases present some of the reasons for the practice of child marriage (African Union, 2015; WiLDAF Ghana, 2014).

The focus on adolescent girls' sexual behaviours presents gender inequalities in societal issues relating to sex. Furthermore, the need to control female sexual behaviours is grounded in gender inequalities existing in societies where child/early marriage is condoned as illicit sexual tendencies are likely to bring dishonour and shame to the girl and her family if not controlled (African Union, 2015). Furthermore, although the responsibility of catering for the child as a result of the sexual behaviour sometimes falls on the man responsible for the marriage, parents and the adolescent girl may be left to cater for the child in circumstances where the man responsible for the pregnancy does not accept the pregnancy or neglects his duties as the father of the child. This may have economic implications for the impregnated girl and her family since they may not have the financial resource to cater for the added responsibility (Alhassan, 2013).

Another reason for the need to control the sexual behaviours of girls is presented by Musa. He indicates that allowing or having an adolescent daughter engage in premarital sex has implications for the father. Since premarital sex is considered a sin and immoral behaviour, it is believed that when an unmarried girl starts having sex, her father incurs her sin. Musa posits:

> "Our people believe that if you leave your girl child and she misbehaves, the sin comes to you the father so it is right for you to give her to marriage at a very tender age ..." (Musa, male, 68years).

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Musa's and Baba's accounts on the reason for marriage confirm findings of other studies (Alhassan, 2013; UNCEF, 2001) that countries where more conservative religious practices and patriarchal norms are observed, child marriage is also reinforced.

Housekeeping. Marriage was also perceived to provide the man with a partner who will cater to his domestic and reproductive needs. Due to cultural constructions of gender roles in marriage, participants mentioned that marriage gives the man the opportunity to find a woman who would take care of his home, perform other domestic chores and give birth to his children.

> "… when he marries you, you will be there to cook and they will eat. You will also keep the compound tidy. When you put the compound in order for some time, you will get pregnant and give birth." (Fati, female, ±80 years).

This perception seemed to be a common ground for contracting marriage and for the marriage of girls. The prospective husband and his parents usually looked for a woman who is evaluated to be well trained in domestic chores given the perceived role of women in marriage.

> "…before you take her in, you will be probing to see her role in the house, what the home itself is. And in probing you want to know whether she can cook, whether the mother has trained her very well." (Musa, male, 68years).

Getting good training means having the skills and ability to perform domestic chores which are perceived as a sign of maturity and womanhood for young girls. These statements confirm the perceived role of the woman in marriage. Social conventions on marriage in Ghana place the woman in the kitchen and responsible for food preparation, managing household chores and nurturing the children (Adinkrah, 2012; Nukunya, 2003). Therefore, mothers are expected to train their daughters for similar roles in their future marriage and

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family. Participants' accounts seem to reflect these norms on the gender roles and expectations in marriage and seem to be grounds on which marriage is contracted.

7.3.1.2. Perceptions of bachelor/spinsterhood.

Findings revealed differing views about singlehood based on gender. Males who had chosen the life of bachelorhood were perceived to be either irresponsible and or impotent. Females, however, were perceived to be either sexually immature, insubordinate to male authority or being spiritually possessed. There was unanimous disapproval of the choice to stay unmarried due to the relative importance of marriage to the individual, family and society. Hence, every individual was expected to marry regardless of his/her socioeconomic background, physical and mental health. Alhaj's view seemed to support this notion.

> "…it doesn't really happen and a woman will grow up and wouldn't want to marry...even if she is mentally ill, definitely some man will impregnate her... A woman doesn't just grow up and won't marry. Can't you see that people still have children with madwomen?" (Alhaj, male, 55 years)

The sexual abuse of a mentally ill woman appears to be of lesser importance to the ability to procreate and contribute to the man's lineage. This assertion makes marriage an important social status that every individual is expected to achieve at a socially defined point in his or her life. This view is also supported by literature on the importance of marriage in the Ghanaian society. Addai et al. (2015) maintain that marriage is seen as a prestigious milestone that every Ghanaian is expected to achieve since it is viewed to be the bedrock of society.

While being married confers respect and honour on the individual, being unmarried conversely confers stigma with unmarried individuals being perceived as social misfits and/or sinners (Addai et al., 2015). Participants' accounts seem to support the view of Addai and his colleagues (2015) on the social stigma attached to choosing the life of singlehood.

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Findings from this study have indicated that individuals who refuse to marry when they are considered mature, experience some form of social stigma and rebuke. Social perceptions from the accounts of elders about individuals who are single are discussed next.

Irresponsibility. Men considered mature for marriage and who had not initiated the process of marriage were perceived as being irresponsible. Irresponsibility was reported to be an unwillingness to marry and cater for a woman and children.

> "…but in reality, irresponsible men do not want to marry. They are looking at the cost associated with marriage and if … he doesn't have that capability he thinks that he must hold his peace." (Musa, male, 68years)

Musa's view and that of other elders interviewed in this study are grounded on social norms on the role and responsibilities of a mature individual in society. Reports have shown that in African society, the aim of the individual is to contribute to the growth of the family and society (Nsamenang, 2015). Playing one's part as a mature individual is revealed in one's role as a man in the family which involves getting married, procreating and catering for the family. The inability to take up the responsibility of marriage and family life, therefore, was perceived to reveal a lack of psychological maturity as such a decision was deemed unwise. Baba's (male, 68 years) view seemed to summarise this social perception "everybody wants to marry unless [they are] the stupid people!"

Impotence. Another stigma associated with the choice to stay single as a man is a perception that such men are impotent or sexually ill. Most participants perceived men who had not married as impotent. Since marriage was the socially accepted space to procreate, men who chose not to marry were considered to be either impotent or having had some sort of illness or deformity that prevented them from procreating.

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> "There are some instances like that, and someone would refuse to get married to a man or a man would refuse to get married to a woman. You are impotent!" (Alhaj, male, 55 years)

As explained earlier, children are valued in the African traditional family due to their economic, social and cultural relevance and their ability to maintain a clan's lineage (Tabong & Adongo, 2013). Every individual, therefore, is socially expected to procreate and marriage provides the legitimate avenue to do that.

Views on the reasons for a woman's choice to stay single reflected social norms on the role of the woman in the society and family. The traditional role of the woman is to be a supportive wife, bring forth and nurture the children, manage the home and family by engaging in activities such as childcare, food preparation and household chores (Adinkrah, 2012). Based on these socially defined gender roles, women or girls who stayed unmarried when they were perceived to be mature, experienced stigma. Participants mentioned that women who remained unmarried were perceived to be either insubordinate, sexually infertile or had been possessed by a demon.

Insubordination. In relation to insubordination, singlehood among mature women was interpreted to mean refusal to take up the role of a wife and a mother, perform domestic chores and be a submissive wife. Ayisha explains her view about spinsterhood when she says:

> "...I think she doesn't want to be responsible or she doesn't want to settle in one place. Like being in a man's house and the man is overseeing your affairs, I think that is what she doesn't want." (Ayisha, female, 60 years).

From Ayisha's account, remaining unmarried as a woman was interpreted to mean one had chosen not to 'settle at one place' or be under the control of one man. This could be interpreted to mean choosing to engage in sexual relations with several men instead of

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finding a single partner and getting married to him. Getting married was equated with being responsible while remaining single was associated with promiscuous living. The social and cultural rules on engaging in premarital sexual relations reflect that such practices are abhorred by the traditional Ghanaian society while chastity is upheld especially for the unmarried woman (Anarfi & Owusu, 2011).

Sexual infertility. Other views on reasons for choosing the life of spinsterhood or remaining unmarried were related to sexual immaturity and infertility. Females who were perceived to be physically mature but had not married were believed to have issues with menstruation or were infertile.

> "… you don't get your menstruation, how will you go to marry without giving birth? So you are thinking over this, you are now looking to get your treatment, get your menstruation before you go and marry." (Baba, male, 68 years)

Similar to men, women are expected to get married and procreate in order to perpetuate the clan's lineage. Women who had not married were therefore perceived to have infertility issues which they are expected to resolve for them to get married and bear children.

Spiritual possession. Several participants mentioned spiritual possession as one of the reasons that may prevent individuals from marrying. Accounts of 'jinn' and demon possession were shared in relation to individuals who had refused to marry at the socially accepted time for marriage. Recommendations for exorcism and spiritual deliverance were suggested to liberate such individuals from their possession which they believed would allow them to marry.

> "If a woman decides not to get married, it is demons that are after her. In that case, we have to deliver her! If the demons are exorcised, then she will be fine. Even there are some women when a man calls her, she gets tensed and anxious and it means she is being possessed by the demons." (Alhaj, male, 55 years)

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Another view was expressed in relation to spirituality where participants indicated that the spiritual essence of an unmarried individual may be the cause of his/her inability to marry. Fati believes that when a woman's spirits repel men, she is unlikely to maintain a relationship which may lead to marriage.

> "…Someone is there, she has grown into a woman, but her spirit doesn't like a man. Because her spirit doesn't want a man, a lot of men will try to date her but to no avail." (Fati, female, 80 years)

The perceptions presented by Alhaj and Fati on spirit possession and its effect on the marriage of the individual is grounded in traditional African beliefs of spirit spouse and spirit possession as well as Islamic beliefs on jinn possession and its effect on the marriage of the possessed individual (Jimoh, 2015; Rey, 2013). Jinn or spirit possession has been reported to be responsible for the marital instability among married individuals and the inability to secure a partner for unmarried individuals due to the spirit repelling those individuals who show interest in them (Jimoh, 2015; Rey, 2013). The reference to spiritual possession in relation to females may reflect perceptions of female weakness as such spirits are believed to possess weak individuals.

7.3.2. Perceived indicators of maturity.

Analysing the perceived indicators of maturity presented gender differences. For males, indicators such as having economic independence and sexual awareness which includes the experience of sexual urges were identified. For girls, physiological changes such as the onset of menstruation and the development of secondary sexual features and the ability to perform chores were used to determine girls' maturity relative to their peers.

*Economic independence***.** An adolescent boy was perceived mature enough for marriage when he is seen to have acquired a job or is able to engage in an income-generating activity. Due to the cultural expectations of the male being the sole provider of the family,

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having a job or engaging in an "income-generating activity" is perceived to provide the man with some stature of economic stability and independence which enables him to cater for his wife and children.

> "…a man who thinks he is prepared to marry…should, one, be somebody who has at least engaged in some income-generating activity. Two, … have the ability to take care of the woman and himself, that's what the family will be looking out for." (Musa, male, 66 years)

Literature on gender roles in Ghana indicates that most households are traditionally headed by males who are also the sole decision-maker and breadwinner of their families (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2006). In view of this, the general perception of a man matured for marriage is an individual who is independent, assertive and is economically stable (Ampofo, 2001).

Sexual awareness. The experience of sexual urges was also perceived to be a masculine indicator of maturity. Participants in discussing maturity for marriage usually mentioned that a boy's experience of wet dreams or penal erections indicated readiness for marriage. This was because, for males, manhood was associated with the ability to experience sexual arousal.

> "When your penis erects, then you will know that you are ready to have a wife. If it doesn't erect, then there is nothing…that is when we say you are not a man. When you see a woman and there is nothing then you are not a man." (Abdul, male, 80 years)

Physiological development and mastery of tasks. For girls, participants' views on markers for determining maturity were to master certain social tasks and attain some physiological developmental milestones. Markers such as the onset of menstruation and the development of secondary sexual characteristics such as breasts, widening of hips among

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others are indicators for female maturity for marriage. These markers portrayed the girl to be mature enough for sexual relations and ultimately procreate.

> "You know if a girl child grows up without breast, without you know the necessary things that the man would see in a girl and get attracted, if they are not there, it will be very difficult for someone to … approach her and say look I want to marry you." (Musa, male, 68 years)
>
> "… Immediately she sees her hydah [menses], then she is ready for marriage." (Abdul, male, 80 years)

Determining maturity is based on the emergence of physical and secondary sexual characteristics (Ampofo, 2001; Awusabo-Asare et al., 2006). Views on the indicators of maturity from the account of participants appear to confirm these existing beliefs on maturity and readiness for marriage.

Comparing a girl to her peers seemed to help parents to ascertain whether their daughters had reached their developmental milestones and were ripe for marriage. Culturally, parents perceive their daughters as mature when their daughter's peers are getting married, even when their daughters have not yet developed their secondary sexual characteristics.

> "some of them [girls] have got big, big breasts and some are having small breasts and if you and my daughter are the same age, she is still looking young and you are grown, you are matured when men came for you for marriage and they agreed to marry you, then it shows that she's also matured to marry." (Baba, male, 68 years)

Another aspect of determining maturity is the girl's ability to perform domestic chores. The manner in which the girl performs those chores was perceived to be a sign of womanhood and an indicator of her maturity. Views expressed indicated that culturally, girls are expected to become mothers and homemakers and were expected to be trained for such roles for marriage. Girls who are able to perform chores that are performed by adults are considered mature enough to be married and are given out for marriage.

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> "… when you train her up and she is ready for marriage, it is in the work she can do in the house that you will use to know. Her work at home changes and she doesn't behave like a child anymore. She performs the work of a married woman…the work of an adult." (Abdul, male, 80 years)

From the statements above, these indicators of maturity for marriage were culturally defined and reflect gender role expectations in marriage for the adolescent growing into adulthood. According to Nsamenang (2015), maturity is construed as the ability of the child to master specific social markers and cultural tasks at certain stages in his/her life. Being considered a social individual, the child in achieving these biological milestones and mastering social tasks is compared to her peers to determine the level of mastery and maturity (Nsamenang, 2015). The findings of this study support the evidence from several other studies (Alhassan, 2013; Lai, Sheriff, Mohd, & Bandy, 2018; UNICEF, 2001) that the practice of child marriage is influenced by cultural practices and beliefs surrounding the construction of adolescence and marriage. UNICEF (2001) has reported that in societies where there are strong cultural beliefs on the importance of marriage and childbirth, there is a higher likelihood of child marriage being practised.

7.4. Conclusion

The findings of this study illustrate salient aspects of how child or early marriage is constructed as well as the perceived indicators of readiness for marriage from the perspective of seven community elders from selected towns and villages in the Northern region of Ghana. Although their views and construction of marriage do not represent the views of the entire elderly population of the Northern region, their perspectives throw light on how readiness for marriage and marriage are construed in some Ghanaian contexts.

Findings indicate that an individual is considered an adult based on certain physiological and social indicators. These indicators appear to be socially defined sets of

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achievements and milestones that individuals are expected to have attained or experienced to be considered adults and ready for marriage by the community. These indicators are gender-specific. For males, the indicators for maturity and readiness for marriage include being able to independently support a family economically. Physiologically, the marker is becoming sexually aware and aroused to the point of being able to ejaculate. For females, the dominant physical marker is the onset of secondary sexual characteristics (such as breast development and menstruation). The social marker is the young female's ability to demonstrate mastery of domestic chores expected of a wife.

Participants' accounts appear to indicate that an individual's status as a child begins to change significantly when s/he attains or exhibits some of these socially defined indicators of maturity and is then perceived as becoming an adult. This sudden transition of being considered and treated as an adult may have significant implications for the physical and psychological development of the individual. One such implication on the child is being deemed to be ready for marriage. In satisfying these indicators and markers as the benchmark for determining maturity, children who are considered as adults are likely to be married as they are culturally perceived to be adults.

Constructions of marriage from the elders' perspectives reveal that marriage is considered an important social institution in communities where the study was conducted. Religion appears to play an important role in marriage. Beliefs such as marriage being ordained by God, the importance of chastity, and the stigma of pregnancy are likely to compel parents to pressure their daughters into early marriage. Furthermore, the emphasis that sexuality and procreation are perceived as being for the institution of marriage is likely to cause parents, the extended family and the society to compel adolescents to marry early.

The impact of social stigma attached to bachelorhood and spinsterhood is also perceived to be a driving force for the practice of child marriage. The findings confirm the

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perception that marriage is an important social rite that every individual is expected to undertake in most Ghanaian communities. Choosing a life of singlehood constitutes an evasion of adult responsibility and comes with severe social stigma. When society strongly upholds marriage and stigmatises choosing to stay unmarried, individuals are likely to be compelled or may even decide to marry early.

From the social constructionist perspective, findings on the constructions of marriage and maturity/readiness for marriage indicate a system of gender constructions based on expected gender roles of individuals in the society since most of the findings appear to be gender stratified. Although both matriarchal and patriarchal family system exists in Ghana, the cultural construction of gender is generally patriarchal (Ampofo, 2001). Gender roles are such that men are expected to be family heads and breadwinners while females are expected to be homemakers, nurture children and submit to their husbands and men in general (Adinkrah, 2012). Elders' constructions of readiness for marriage and marriage appear to provide an explanation for the perpetuation of some of these gender-biased roles which fuel the practice of child marriage. For instance, perceptions of marriage providing an opportunity for the man to find a woman to cater for his domestic and reproductive needs as well as be controlled by the man (see *Housekeeping* and *Insubordination*) seem to support the culturally defined gender roles for women with girls being groomed to become homemakers, mothers and wives. The notion of single women refusing to submit to a man reveals the power relations expected within the family which allows for male dominance and female subjugation purported to be one of the reasons why adult males tend to marry young girls (see Alhassan, 2013).

Perceptions on sexuality in the Ghanaian context from the perspectives of participants appear to be gender stratified with a lot of the responsibility being placed on the woman although both females and males engage in sexual behaviours. For instance, participants'

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view on sexual behaviour seems to blame the female adolescent girl's inability to control her sexual desires for the need to control her sexual behaviour (see *controlling sexual behaviours*). Literature has revealed that men are the sole decision-makers on sexuality in most patriarchal Ghanaian societies (Dodoo & Tempenis, 2002; Takyi & Dodoo, 2005). In considering the role of men in sexual decision, the elders in this study appear to emphasise female sexual behaviours to the neglect of male sexual behaviours.

Although the findings in this study are based on seven elders in selected communities in the Northern region of Ghana, the views and perceptions of elders form the backbone of a particular society and are usually carried down to the younger generations (Newman & Hutton-Yeo, 2008). The development of interventions that may help to reorient elders and the entire community's perception of women by implementing gender-transformative approaches will be relevant in helping to reorient communities' perceptions of the role and worth of women thereby helping to prevent gender-based practices such as child marriage. Emphasis should also be placed on changing gender roles that have been constructed by the society with equal emphasis being placed on the roles of both males and females. A reconstruction of the role of individuals in the construction of sexuality will also help remove the emphasis on needing to control female sexual behaviours which seem to influence the early marriage of females in the Ghanaian society.

Additionally, studies that seek to understand adolescents girls' reason for marrying early and their experiences in marriage will provide a unique standpoint on the practice of child marriage in Ghana.

Constructions of marriage and perceptions on maturity in relation to readiness for marriage seem to provide an understanding of the persistence of the practice of child marriage in Ghana. It would be relevant for policymakers and interventionists to engage with these social constructions of marriage and readiness for marriage by educating the

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communities on the implications of such beliefs for the practice of child marriage. Education may help reorient communities' beliefs and constructions that are undergirding the practice which will ultimately help eradicate child marriage.

While yielding important insights on the perspectives of elders on child marriages, this study's findings cannot be generalised to all Dagomba and Muslim elders in Northern Ghana, given the purposive sampling and qualitative design utilised. Future studies should adopt participant recruitment methods that will ensure a more diverse ethnic and religious representation of participants. Such diverse groups of individuals will present a broader picture of the cultural constructions of marriage and readiness for marriage and their implications on the practice of child marriage nationwide.

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Chapter 8

Manuscript 3

Title: "*I married because* …": Motivations to marry early among female spouses in child marriages in northern Ghana

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Abstract: Child marriage is practised in Ghana with a prevalence rate of 27.2%. This high prevalence is due to how marriage is conceptualised and constructed in practising communities. Though reasons for the practice of child marriage are well documented, empirical studies of the married adolescent girls' reasons for marrying in the Ghanaian context are scant. Twenty-one married girls aged between 13 and 17 years were recruited from selected communities in the Northern region of Ghana using purposeful, convenient and snow-ball sampling techniques for individual face-to-face in-depth interviews with a semi-structured interview guide. A generic inductive qualitative analysis method was used to analyze the accounts of their experiences. Three core themes emerged as reasons influencing participants' decision to marry. Personal motivations focused on personal need for children, idleness, peer group comparison and love. Economically motivated reasons include poverty, the quest for a better life and enticement by men. Sociocultural reasons include teenage pregnancy, family pressure and societal views on marriage among others. Information on the motivations for marriage among adolescent girls may be relevant to policymakers and interventionists in developing measures and interventions that are tailored to the needs of individuals affected by the practice of child marriage.

Keywords: child marriage, reasons for marriage, Ghana, adolescence

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8.1. Introduction

Marriage in Ghana is considered a means by which two individuals come together to form a union usually for a lifetime (Danquah, 2008). Wimalasena (2016) defines marriage as a union between two individuals who have agreed to stay together usually with legal and or cultural backing for posterity, honour, social and economic gains. Marriage in Ghana, however, is more than just a union of the couple but also of the families of the couple (Danquah, 2008). Families gain respect, stature and honour from the society when their children get married. The honour and respect gained become more paramount when the couple who married are considered morally upright (virgins) and have gone through the necessary initiation rites required by the society (Danquah, 2008; Osafo, Asampong, Langmagne, & Ahiedeke, 2014).

The choices of whom, when, and whether or not to marry, are decisions that almost every individual makes at a point in her/his life. For some individuals, especially girls, these decisions related to marriage may be made for them at a young age. Child or early marriage is defined as a marriage or union where one or both spouses is/are below the age of 18 years (Mourtada, Schlecht, & DeJong, 2017). The practice of child or early marriage is common in Ghana especially in the northern regions of the country. In 2011, the Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MISC) reported a prevalence rate of 27%, which increased marginally by 0.2% in 2014 (Ghana Demographic Health Survey [GDHS], 2014). Although boys (2.3%) are affected by the practice, the prevalence rate among girls (27.2%) is more than ten times higher compared to boys (de Groot et al., 2018). The antecedents underlying child marriage are multifaceted and may be socio-cultural, economic and/or religious (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection [MoGCSP], 2016; Tenkorang, 2019).

Culturally, being married is the desired status in the Ghanaian society irrespective of the individual's socioeconomic status, education and/or employment (Addai, Opoku-

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Agyeman, & Amanfu, 2015). The society encourages marriage as soon as individuals are considered matured enough to do so. Maturity in some communities is measured by the onset of puberty and for girls, menarche (Awusabo-Asare, Abane, & Kumi-Kyereme, 2004). The intersection of construction of maturity and the protection of the family's honour may account for powerful motives for child marriage since early marriage is believed to protect the girls from unwanted pregnancy and sexual immorality as well as guard the honour of the family and the community (Tsepko, Afram, Boateng, & Sefa-Nyarko, 2016). Cultural norms on importance of the extended family, childbirth and spouse selection by authority figures in the family and society are similarly reported to contribute to the perpetuation of the practice of child marriage (UNICEF, 2001).

Literature has also reported gender inequalities to be one of the causal considerations for child marriage in Ghana (MoGCSP, 2016). Families are more likely to educate boys while marrying off girls to ease the financial burden on families and/or pay off family debt due to the perception that girls are less important and will become wives and mothers in other families (Alhassan, 2010).

Reports further indicate that parental neglect and irresponsibility is a factor that influences the practice of child marriage in Ghana (MoGCSP, 2016; Tsekpo et al., 2016). Some parents neglect their responsibilities which translate into the loss of family protection and truncates the education of the girl child resulting in their pursuing menial ways of providing for their own financial needs (University of Ghana Centre for Social Policy studies & World Vision Ghana [UG-CSPS & WVG], 2017). Engaging in sexual activities for money is an option that adolescent girls may explore which can then lead to teenage pregnancy and subsequent marriage.

Religious belief and emphasis on marriage, sexual purity and virginity have been reported to influence the practice of child marriage as conforming to these beliefs is

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purported to safeguard and protect the sexual chastity of the girl (Sabbe et al., 2015). Although child marriage is not peculiar to Islam, reports have indicated higher prevalence rates among Muslim communities (Lai, Sheriff, Mohd, & Bandy, 2018). Alhassan (2013) observed that children from Christian homes were less likely to be married as compared to their counterparts from Islamic and African Traditional religious families due to adherence to strict religious beliefs.

Economic insecurities and poverty have fuelled the practice of child marriage in some communities in Ghana. Adolescent girls from families with low household income were more likely to be married and less likely to be educated compared to girls from high-income households (Alhassan, 2013; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003). The aforementioned reason may be linked to the perceived high cost of education (Alhassan, 2013). Moreover, there is the sense that the education of a girl is a waste of financial resources for the parents which benefits their daughter's future husband and his family (Lai et al., 2018). Additionally, the practice is reported to occur more in rural settings than in urban areas (de Groot et al., 2018).

Education is seen by some scholars as being both a cause and an outcome of child marriage. Research suggests that girls with high educational levels are less likely to marry early while getting married early disrupts the education of the married girl (Glinski, Sexton, & Meyers, 2015; Steinhaus, Gregowski, Fenn, & Petroni, 2016).

Other contributing influences to child marriage include unplanned teenage pregnancy, early sexual escapades and adolescent-choices for a better life and peer pressure (Kenny, Koshin, Sulaiman, & Cislaghi, 2019; MoGCSP, 2016). Some adolescents end up getting married due to their search for a better life and the quest to escape financial and social difficulties at home (UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017). Tsekpo et al. (2016) found that some adolescent girls got married due to early sexual escapades or being lured into sex by men in exchange for money and better livelihood.

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MoGCSP (2016) reports that girls also experience being pressured by their friends to seek out men for financial support. Others are influenced by observing their friends who had gotten married early and have had their needs provided by their husbands (UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017). In their pursuit of a better life, some girls may deliberately get pregnant and be forced to marry the men or boys who impregnated them (Tsekpo et al., 2016). Romance or love is also believed to influence early marriage as some adolescent girls decided to marry their suitors due to love and romantic attraction (Kenny et al., 2019; UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017).

The implications of the practice of early marriage have been noted by researchers and include the discontinuation of education of married girls (Jensen & Thornton, 2003), the loss of adolescence since most married girls immediately take on adult roles and responsibilities which may be quite stressful; they may not be adequately prepared to take up such roles (Bruce & Bongaarts, 2010; Gupta et al., 2014). Other implications include severe reproductive and health risks (Nuor, 2009), abuse of victims' human right (Raj, 2010), high risk of contracting STIs (Presler-Marshall & Jones, 2012) and lower economic autonomy of the victim (WiLDAF Ghana, 2014). de Groot et al. (2018) also report an association between child marriage and poor health, teenage pregnancy, high child mortality and low agency among Ghanaian participants.

There is scant literature on the practice of child marriage in Ghana although the practice has long been in existence. Studies conducted on child marriage and its victims in Ghana have focused on prevalence (de Groot et al., 2018) and causes and effect of the practice (Alhassan, 2013; Tsekpo et al., 2016; UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017). Most of these studies were institutional reports and were policy-based. The focus on the experiential accounts of married girls is at best minimal and leaves a conspicuous gap in the empirical research of child marriage in Ghana. This lacuna can be addressed by focusing on the

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subjective experiences of married girls and the impact on their wellbeing. Serving as a standpoint, this article, therefore, focuses explicitly on the personal accounts of the reasons and motivations that influence adolescent girls' decision to marry early. Information on what motivates adolescent girls to marry early can help inform the development of interventions at national, institutional and societal levels that are tailored to the social and personal needs of individuals impacted by the practice of child marriage. This article forms part of a larger study (Sarfo, 2020) conducted to understand the practice of child marriage in Ghana and its implications for the mental wellbeing of married girls. Possible implications of these decisions and recommendations are discussed.

8.2. Method

8.2.1. Research design.

Using the social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Burr, 2015) and feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 1997; Hartsock 1997; Smith 1974) as a basis for understanding married girls' experience of marriage, an exploratory qualitative research design was deemed suitable for this study. As explained by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), a qualitative research design allows the researcher the possibility of understanding how the individuals construct their reality through their subjective experiences of the world by employing a process which affords the researcher the possibility to engage in in-depth conversations with experienced individuals on the phenomenon. As the aim of this study was to understand the subjective experiences of married adolescent girl participants influenced by their construction of their social realities, the need for a dialogical, atheoretical (explorative) process became paramount for achieving this. The qualitative research approach enabled the primary researcher (EAS) the opportunity to gather data on the lived experiences of married girls through in-depth individual interviews to examine the reasons for their marriage based on their standpoint as married adolescent girls. While in-depth individual interviews and

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focused group discussion were employed for data collection for the larger study, for this study, individual in-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide for data collection. Interviews were audio-recorded for transcription.

8.2.2. Research setting and participants.

Participants were selected from the Northern region of Ghana where rates of child marriage, according to the GDHS (2014), are the highest. Specifically, participants were selected from three districts of Tamale, Mion and Tolon. These districts were specifically selected because they are recorded to have the highest rates of child marriage in the Northern region (Naatogmah, 2016). The dominant ethnic group located in these districts is the Dogomba who speak Dagbani while the dominant religion practised is Islam (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2010).

For this study, twenty-one married adolescent girls aged between 13 and 17 years with a mean age of 15.56 (SD=1.15) were recruited from the research setting. The ages at the time of marriage were between 12 and 16 years with a mean age of 14.89 (SD=1.63). All participants had been married for at least one year or more, were Muslims and Dagomba. Of the 21 participants, sixteen were unemployed while 3 were engaged in small scale trading, one was an apprentice seamstress and one a head porter (*kayaaye*). Analysis revealed that four (19%) had not received any formal education, six (28%) had primary education (equivalent to elementary school in the USA), eight (38%) have either completed or received some form of junior high school education (equivalent to Secondary Education [UK] and Middle School [USA]) while three (14%) had been educated at the senior high school level (equivalent to Further Education [UK] and High School [USA]). Four participants did not know their ages because their parents could not recall their date of birth.

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8.2.3. Procedure.

After obtaining ethical clearance, participants were recruited for individual in-depth interviews through purposeful, convenient and snow-ball sampling techniques. The recruitment of participants was done through gatekeepers identified in participating communities. These gatekeepers were identified by non-profit organisations providing services in these communities. After identifying potential participants in their communities, the gatekeepers introduced those participants to the first author and the research assistant who explained the purpose and nature of the study to the potential participants. Participants were selected based on whether they lived in participating communities, were below 18 years and have been married for at least a year.

Prior to the start of data collection, a female research assistant (HB) was employed to assist the first author (EAS) with the data collection and transcription due to the inability of the EAS to speak the local dialect of most participants recruited. HB was a master's student in Psychology and is a native of the research setting; she was briefed and trained before data collection began.

Most interviews (seventeen) were mainly conducted by HB because of the language preference of the participants; the EAS conducted four interviews with participants who could either speak English or the local dialect familiar to EAS. She also was an observer for all the other interviews that were conducted by HB.

Consent was sought at the beginning of the interview session from participants before data collection commenced. The interviews were conducted in their homes or at a designated participant point (under trees: 2, office: 10, home of participants: 3, and home of gatekeeper: 6 participants) in the community where participants felt their anonymity and safety was

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protected. The translated version of the interview guide was used as a guide for the interview session. On average, interviews lasted about 40 minutes.

8.2.4. Trustworthiness of the data.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed five criteria (credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity) for ensuring trustworthiness in a qualitative study. Credibility is linked to the ability to accurately present the views of participants which can be achieved by validating findings with participants and/or peer group (Cope, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was pursued by discussing contextual aspects of the data with the research assistant and presenting the findings to the staff of NGOs who served as a reference group working with married girls. The second and third authors also examined and reviewed the interview schedules used, the transcripts of the interviews, and the interpretations made by the first author from the data helping to enhance the credibility of the findings. Dependability was pursued by staying close to the expressed views and experiences of the participants. Neuman (2011) suggests the inclusion of subjective experiences and views of participants to enhance dependability.

To guarantee confirmability, data were collected from multiple sources using different types of data collection methods (Todd, Nerlich, & McKeown, 2004). Findings from the different groups and participants were compared for similarities and differences while allowing for the different perspectives of the phenomenon to emerge. For the larger study, data were collected from married adolescent girls, their parents, community elders and staff of the district social welfare department and NGOs working with married girls. Individual in-depth interviews, as well as focus group discussions, were employed as data collection methods.

In the current study, the first author also kept a journal of her observations of the research setting, participants and procedure to provide collateral data about the research

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process and to maintain transferability. She also documented reflections on some of the processes during the data collection and analysis process including daily debriefing sessions with the research assistant where they reflected on the interviews and ways of improving the interview guide for the collection of quality data. By documenting the research processes, the transferability of the research process is facilitated as it provides guidelines for other researchers to replicate or conduct similar studies. Furthermore, the in-depth individual interviews were tape-recorded (with participant permission) which helped garner the first-hand accounts of participants for transcription, thereby ensuring the authenticity of the data collected. Furthermore, data collected in the local language were translated into English by the research assistant and back translated into English to check for consistency and accuracy of the data by an independent linguist.

8.2.5. Ethical considerations.

Given that participants may be regarded as a vulnerable population, due care was exercised with ethical considerations in the study (Tronto, 2010). Ethical clearance was first obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at Stellenbosch University, South Africa (SU-HSD-004745). We further obtained permission from the Department of Social Welfare in the Northern region of Ghana because of their responsibility for the protection of vulnerable children such as married adolescents.

The interview guide, information sheet and consent forms that were used for the study were translated into Dagbani (by a professional linguist), the dominant local dialect spoken by most of the participants to facilitate ease of understanding for the participants (Esposito, 2001).

Particular attention was paid to the protection of all participants from possible risk and harm, their right to confidentiality, and ensuring privacy and anonymity. Participants' confidentiality and privacy were ensured by conducting interviews in spaces identified by

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participants where they felt safe (see Procedure). Interviews were conducted only when participants were assured that their identity and safety was not going to be compromised. Participants were assured that all data would be anonymised with care taken to remove any identifying personal data – use was made of pseudonyms to facilitate data organisation. Additionally, a licensed clinical psychologist was available to provide psychological assistance in the event any participant would need support due to the sensitive nature of the topic under study; no participant, however, needed the services of the psychologist. All participants were debriefed at the end of the interview (Tronto, 2010).

The purpose and nature of the study were explained to each participant at the beginning of the session and the interview only commenced when the participant had given full consent to take part in the study. Informed consent was obtained verbally from participants which was recorded at the beginning of the interview session. As suggested by Mensch et al. (1999), adolescent girls were considered adults since they were married with some of them being parents. Participants were assured of the option to terminate the interview if they felt uncomfortable.

All participants were given a token of ₵20.00 (equivalent to $4.81) to compensate for their travel expenses and time. While the payment of participants has attracted criticism (Wertheimer & Miller, 2008), payment, however, presents as a form of the power balance between the researcher and the participant and compensates for time and other expenses incurred by participating in the study (Groves, Singer, & Corning, 2000). Participants were informed of the monetary compensation only at the end of the interview.

8.2.6. Data analysis.

We utilised Thomas' (2003; 2006) five step recommendations for generic inductive qualitative analysis. We also incorporated grounded theory analysis techniques such as constant comparison into the analysis process since the generic inductive qualitative analysis

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allows for the adoption of different analytical methods for data analysis (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). This was done to ensure that findings stayed close to the data and reflected the true presentation of participants' views and perception of the phenomenon.

Prior to analysis, the audiotaped interviews were transcribed by the first author (EAS) and her research assistant (HB) after which they were then cleaned, formatted and uploaded in ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software (v.8) (Friese, 2018; Muhr, 1991, 1997). All transcripts were transcribed verbatim and were translated into Dagbani and back translated into English by an independent linguist for accuracy and consistency.

Following Thomas' (2003, 2006) process, the first step in analysis was the reading of the transcript by EAS in familiarisation with data. The second stage involved the initial coding (line-by-line, open, and in-vivo coding) of transcripts. The third process was to identify and connect codes into categories and segments. Focused coding techniques, proposed by Charmaz (2006), were adopted to analyse data. Here frequent and significant codes were used to code and recode segments of the data that were similar. Those that were not similar but very important were also coded. This method helped in the grouping of codes that had similar quotes into categories and put under more abstract names.

The fourth step in the analysis of the data was recoding and grouping categories into themes to reduce overlaps and redundancies among categories. Axial coding techniques (Charmaz, 2006) was also adopted to help create themes and subthemes. Finally, core themes were identified to cluster the dominant motivations of the participants for their early marriage. The fifth stage is the presentation of findings which is discussed in the ensuing sections.

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8.3. Findings and discussion

After data analysis, three core themes (personal reasons, economically motivated reasons and reasons motivated by sociocultural factors) emerged as reasons that informed participants' motivations to marry. Personal reasons tended to cluster around their own sentiments and motivations in relation to their circumstances and experiences in their environments. The themes in this cluster included sentiment related to the participants' own or personal need for children, idleness, peer group comparison and love. Economically motivated reasons include issues related to poverty, the quest for a better life and enticement by men. The sociocultural factors that influenced the decision to marry included marrying due to teenage pregnancy, pressure from family, guardian or parental irresponsibility and societal views on marriage. Findings are discussed below.

8.3.1. Personal reasons.

Personal reasons are informed by the individuals' circumstances, their perspective of life and their personal struggles and difficulties that influenced or motivated their decisions to marry. Several reasons were given under this category and are discussed below.

Marrying for love. One reason that emerged to explain early marriage among participants was love for the partner. Some participants indicated that they felt motivated to marry due to their romantic feeling for their partners. Findings indicated that some were in long term relationships with their current spouses and felt the need to marry them when they realised they were in love with them (UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017) as shared by Fatima (15 years, apprentice seamstress): "To be frank, I loved him and he also loved me. That is why I married him."

Adolescence is a transitional period described as stressful due to experiences of rapid and simultaneous biological, cognitive, social and psychological development (Shefer, 2004).

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These developmental changes, according to Furman and Wehner (1994), are accompanied by increasing emotions and affectivity including love, sexuality and the need for attachment which may be translated into the need for a relationship. Fatima clearly asserts that she decided to marry because of the love she felt for her husband. Studies in Ethiopia (Basazinewu, 2018) and Ghana (UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017) have reported that love and being deeply fond of the romantic partner was one of the major causes of child marriage in these research settings.

Peer group comparison. Some participants provided explanations of their motivations for marrying being due to their own evaluation of their lives against their friends and realising that most of them were married and sometimes better off.

> "But if you and someone [a friend] move together and the person gives birth to a child… you will have thoughts about that. Yes, they will all marry and leave you. So when they just told me that I didn't resist, then I told him and he came to pay my bride price, and I moved into his family house." (Nisa, age unknown, unemployed)

Neugarten (1979) introduced the social clock theory to propose that there are biologically and socially determined age related life expectations or timetables of every individual with implicit age related norms on when to marry, have children, retire among others. Being able to accomplish major life events at the right age or not has psychological implications on the individual (Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz, & Carver, 2003). Conforming to or deviating from these major life events is dependent on the individual's personality as well as the social pressure that the individual faces. Marriage for women in the participating communities of this study comes as soon as the girl reaches puberty or is considered matured enough to marry. This has an influence on a girl whose friends are all getting married while she is not. Participants explained that they felt their social clock ticking when they realised that most of their friends were married and therefore felt the need to marry

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in order not to be isolated and ridiculed by society. Living in a society where the practice of child marriage is very common, more girls are likely to find themselves getting married early because of the peer pressure in seeing their friends getting married early.

Pursuit of children. Other participants chose to marry due to their own wish to have children. Marriage for some of the participants was a way for them to experience motherhood and childbirth.

> "yes, we marry because of children, we wouldn't marry if not for children, I can go and live with my parents but it is because of children that I married" (Mamuna, 16 years, married 3 years)

Addai et al. (2015) assert that marriage and childbirth are important to the Ghanaian woman since it is a role status that is expected of her by society. Tabong and Adongo (2013) further reported in a study conducted in northern Ghana that couples who were not able to bear children were stigmatised and excluded from social roles. This was due to cultural norms surrounding the importance of children and childbirth in the Ghanaian society. The fact that Mamuna who is 16 years feels the need to bear children at her age signifies the importance of children and childbirth in her community.

Idleness. Idleness was mentioned as one of the motivating factors that led to marriage among participants. Idleness may be influenced by the low financial status of the family, poor parenting and social pressure although some girls may make their own decision to marry due to their inability to continue their education, learn employable skills or find a job. Some participants in this study mentioned that their inability to continue their education or learn a trade after completing an educational level forced their decision to marry since they felt that staying at home was a waste of time.

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> "…Just this year that I finished [school] and I also came and was sitting at home. When I looked at the way I was sitting it wasn't meaningful so I said he should come and marry me." (Nadia, 17 years, unemployed)

A study in Kenya and Zambia reported that girls who were not in school and idle at home either married due to parental pressure or a personal decision to marry (Steinhaus et al., 2016). The lack of funding to support a child's education or future ambitions was usually seen as a threat to the family since idle girls were likely to get pregnant or get involved in immoral activities which could lead to the dishonour of the family (Alhassan, 2013; Tsepko et al., 2016). Conversely, education has been reported to be a protective factor against child marriage (Malé & Wodon, 2016; Steinhaus et al., 2016). This was found to be the case among participants in this study. Jamila argues for the need for girls to be more than just idle around the house. She makes a case for wanting to be in school, learn a trade or working so as to be independent and be able to help support her future husband. She also suggests that this will help prevent most girls from needing to marry early:

> "Some people, if she has a trade to do which will bring money so that she can afford the things she wants, it will let her keep herself which will enable her not to get married early until she acquires what she will need to support her marriage life which will in turn support she and her children." (Jamila, 16 years, unemployed)

According to the Demographic Health Survey report for Ghana (2014), 47% of women aged 20-24 years with no education and 42% with primary education were married or cohabiting at age 18, compared to only 15% of women with secondary education or higher in Ghana. Little or no schooling strongly correlates with being married at a young age. Conversely, attending school and having higher levels of education tends to protect girls from the possibility of early marriage.

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8.3.2. Economically motivated reason.

Satisfaction of needs. Financial motives were identified as a significant factor driving some adolescent girls into early marriage. Due to their parents' inability to cater for their basic and financial needs, they decided to marry since they perceived that finding a husband was a way out of their financial difficulties. Some participants who made the decision to marry saw a positive change in their life in the sense that their husbands and in some cases other relatives gave them money and the assistance they needed to alleviate their financial needs, others were not so lucky. The quote below is one of a girl who saw marriage as a means for a positive change in her life and experienced it:

> "…So my thoughts were that if I marry, my situation will change for the better. And indeed it has been better. Yes. That is why (I married)" (Abiba, 16 years, unemployed)

The pursuit of a better life has been reported to be one of the driving factors for the practice of child marriage in Ghana (MoGCSP, 2016). The UG-CSPS and WVG in 2017 reported that some girls ended up married in wanting to pursue a better life. This resulted from girls perceiving their parents' inability to provide their financial and educational needs as a sign to fend for themselves. Due to their parents' inability to provide for their needs, the girls find other avenues to fulfil their dreams and, for most of them, marrying a man becomes the only viable option. Tsepko et al. (2016) aver that some girls are likely to seek out marriage when they see that marrying a man is the only means to achieving their dreams and aspirations and a way out of difficult family situations.

Poverty. As reported worldwide, poverty is one of the main drivers of the practice of child marriage, Ghana not being exempted (Alhassan, 2013; Domfe & Oduro, 2018; Malé & Wodon, 2016). Poverty features prominently in the participants' accounts of the factors that

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led them into early marriage. Most girls tend to marry due to the inability of their parents to cater for their basic needs and upkeep.

> "The reason why they marry is that for some people, her family do not have enough to be giving her the things she needs so if a man comes out and says he wants to marry her and they see that he is well to do, they will give her out to him so that they too can be benefiting small small and their daughter too will be getting some." (Jamila, 16 years, unemployed)

Linked with teenage pregnancy and pursuit of a better life among other factors, poverty is regarded as one of the main factors fuelling the practice of child marriage in Ghana (Alhassan, 2013). Studies suggest that some parents marry off girls in order to reduce the economic burden of caring for the girl (Alhassan, 2013; Amoo, 2017; MoGCSP, 2016). However, several studies (Alhassan, 2013; de Groot et al., 2018; Steinhaus et al., 2016) indicate that, though protection from poverty may be some parents' aim for marrying their daughters, their daughters may be placed into vulnerable situations since they usually have not acquired employable skills to work for income. This may trap the girls and their children in poverty (Alhassan, 2013).

Enticement by men. Another reason closely linked to poverty is enticement by men with money. Here, men approach adolescent girls who are perceived to be mature for sex and lure them into sexual relationships which inadvertently leads to marriage when the adolescent girls got pregnant. These girls usually from poor homes are easily drawn into the promises of a better life made by the men seen in the account below.

> "…for we the schoolgirls, for me you don't have what you will eat at school or you don't have the necessary things you need for school, when something is not there you don't have anything you will do to get it but the man says he will give you, then gives you small, small till you also fall in love with him. By the time you realise he has impregnated you." (Jamila, 16 years, unemployed)

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This example seemed to be the case for most of the girls since due to poverty and parental neglect, the girls turn to men for their basic upkeep (Tsekpo et al., 2016). According to Ibrahim (2018), giving a girl gifts is seen as part of the courtship. A man is expected to give his intended partner gifts; the acceptance of the gift indicates the acceptance to be in a relationship which inadvertently may lead to marriage (Ibrahim, 2018). These men, therefore, take advantage of the marriage customs and the situation; the girls find themselves entice to have sexual intercourse with them (leading frequently to pregnancy). These impregnated girls are then forced by their parents to marry the men responsible usually to protect the girls and their families from disgrace and stigmatisation (MoGCSP, 2016).

8.3.3. Sociocultural factors.

Teenage pregnancy. Teenage pregnancy was one of the leading causes of child marriage in most of the participating communities in this study. The quote places this in perspective.

> "The reason I got married was that I was pregnant, besides if I wasn't pregnant I wouldn't have gone into marriage." (Latifa, 14 years, unemployed)

Becoming pregnant is one of the leading antecedents of child marriage in Ghana (MoGCSP, 2016). Amoo (2017) notes that because of the higher value placed on virginity by religious and cultural beliefs, parents have no choice than to marry their daughters when they are found to be pregnant. Furthermore, the need to protect the honour of the family is paramount in societies where religion and culture play an important role in the lives of individuals and society (UNICEF, 2001). Those men are made to pay compensation for impregnating the girl out of wedlock in addition to her bridewealth to the girl's family.

Family pressure. Other participants recounted that some parents who find their daughters at home after either completing their education or dropping out of school or an apprenticeship are inclined to marry their daughters off as quickly as possible to prevent

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teenage pregnancy and other premarital sexual escapades which may bring dishonour to the family. Although a girl may decide to marry due to idleness, it may also cause parents to force their daughters to marry early when the girl is not ready to do so. Some girls reported being given an ultimatum by their parents/guardian to either bring a man to be married to or a man will be provided for them by their family. This ultimatum was usually given to the girls when parents/guardians realised or decided that they could not provide the financial means to assist their children in their education or the learning of a trade. Janat recounts her experience:

> "They were saying that if I don't bring a man to marry me, they will give me out to a man of their choice. So I thought that, well if that is the case then I don't want that because I don't know the person's character or I don't know the kind of person he is and I will just be sitting and they will tell me that this is your husband. So I said no, I will bring a man of my choice." (Janat, 15 years, unemployed).

Family pressure thus plays a role in perpetuating the practice of child marriage worldwide. In most of the communities where child marriage is practised, the need for parents to protect the honour of the family and their daughter becomes paramount especially when girls reach puberty (Alhassan, 2013; Tsepko et al., 2016). This leads parents into forcing their children into marriage sometimes without regard for their age (Tsepko et al., 2016).

Parental/Guardian abdication. Parental or guardian dereliction of their responsibility has been referred to be one of the factors that motivate some girls to marry. Nisa, on reflecting on the reasons for her marriage, mentioned the unwillingness of her parents and guardians to invest in her education. She describes her experience:

> "…I could do some menial jobs, like harvesting groundnuts and helping others in their farms and, if my mom had a little too, she added it for me to support my schooling...

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> For a pen, no one ever bought me one, and if my mother didn't have, my father wouldn't help. And if he refused, no one could force him to do it." (Nisa, no age, unemployed)

Poverty, poor parenting and parental abdication have been reported to be driving factors for child marriage (MoGCSP; 2016; Tsekpo et al., 2016; UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017). Parents and, in some cases, guardians are reported to be derelict in the provision of the basic needs of their children. In a study by UG-CSPS and WVG (2017), married girls reported that they got married due to their parents' refusal to provide their basic needs and education. Parental neglect may be due to gender preferencing where parents and guardians see no reason to invest in the education of girls in the family or due to their perception that girls are less intelligent, are likely to get pregnant or will end up getting married and move to their husband's home (Alhassan, 2010; Amoo, 2017). This motivation highlights the gender inequalities that undergird the pressure for adolescent girls to marry early.

Religion. Religious beliefs seem to have played a significant role in the decisions to marry. Some girls mentioned that marriage was a command from God and therefore every individual is supposed to marry in order to honour God.

> "I was happy because it is a way of following God's instructions to get married. Because as a woman, you cannot be there and won't get married." (Sadia, 15 years, unemployed)

Others saw early marriage as God's predestined plan for some individuals. Refusing to marry early after receiving several proposals from men was believed to lead to a life of spinsterhood which is not socially desired.

> "I don't see it like that. Everyone and where their destiny lies. For all you know, God has given you your destiny early, and then you say that you have married early so you leave your husband's house, you will sit.. aahh, you won't get a man to marry anymore. So you don't have to see it as that you have married early." (Sadia, 15 years, unemployed)

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Justifying early marriage is believed to be common in practising communities. Alhassan (2010, 2013) reports that early marriage is backed by religion in practising communities in Ghana as it is believed to protect the morality of the girl and the honour of the family.

Societal views on marriage. Additionally, the views of the society on marriage also influenced the decisions of girls in this study to marry early. Jamila reveals the perceptions of the people in the community of girls who refuse to marry early:

> "In this community, if a girl reaches that (age) and is still not married, they see her as a bad girl. That she doesn't want to get married even when she is mature enough and she is still sitting. That is engaging in immoral behaviour." (Jamila, 16 years, unemployed)

The influence of societal views on marriage cannot be overlooked as the prevalence of child marriage in a community depends on the pervading social and cultural ideologies of that particular community (UNICEF, 2001). Furthermore, the prevalence of child marriage in a community is also affected by the society's views, traditions, customs and practices as well as social norms on marriage (MoGCSP, 2016). The influence of culture and societal norms on marriage can clearly be gleaned from accounts given by participants in this study. In some communities due to the importance placed on virginity, purity and morality, girls who do not marry early are considered immoral (Amoo, 2017; Osafo et al., 2014).

8.4. Conclusion

Findings presented above contribute to the growing literature on understanding the motivations and antecedents for the practice of child marriage in Ghana. The findings clearly suggest that child marriage in Ghana emanates from a myriad of interconnected social, economic and individual factors. Although individual reasons presented above are based on the personal accounts of the married girls, the individual motives are not isolated but are also

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affected by intersecting socioeconomic and cultural conditions that perpetuate the practice of child marriage.

The relatively high rate of child marriage in Ghana has seen a marginal decline over the decade although the decline is slow (Tenkorang, 2019). Reasons for this slow decline may be due to the causes of the practice being embedded in the economic instability and sociocultural practices of practising communities (Amoo, 2017). Strategies to end child marriage in Ghana have been laid out by the government for years. In 2014, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection set up an Ending to Child Marriage Unit entrusted with the mandate to coordinate and promote efforts and campaigns to end child marriage (de Groot et al., 2018). Additionally, in 2016 the same ministry launched a strategic framework for ending child marriage in Ghana. More interventions, however, are needed to be implemented to help eliminate the practice. One such intervention should be geared toward keeping girls in school or helping them learn employable skills and related skills acquisition which may serve as significant protective factors against their early marriage (Glinski et al., 2015). Moreover, government departments can set up resources and safe spaces in communities and schools such as girls clubs that are aimed at providing support, interventions and information on reproductive health that are geared towards empowering and helping girls make healthy life decisions instead of being coerced into early marriage (Duflo, Dupas, & Kremer, 2015). Such support programmes may help equip girls with alternative and adaptive resources, and means of coping other than considering marriage and relying on men for solutions to their problems.

Programmes that work with both men and boys should also be implemented to help promote gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls. A review of research by the World Health Organisation (2007) indicated compelling evidence that such

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programmes can change attitudes and behaviours of men and boys towards females and ultimately help end child marriage.

At the community levels, government and state institutions should provide interventions that are geared towards the provision of economic support such as the provision of soft loans, economic and employable skills training programmes and incentives for girls and their families. Such programmes will help reduce the economic burden on families living in poverty (Alhassan, 2013; Handa et al., 2013) and help address families' economic difficulties which can become justifications for marrying their daughters early (Gupta et al., 2014).

The implementation of programmes that provide alternatives to marriage, increase the value of girls to their families, and instil parents' responsibilities for the care of their children could also help reduce the practice of child marriage. The aforementioned can be realised through the education and mobilisation of parents, community leaders and members to reframe and change social and religious norms and beliefs that influence early marriage- these may help delay early marriage for adolescent girls (Gupta et al., 2014).

The education and enforcement of laws on child marriage should be implemented to stop child marriage. Alhassan (2013) reports that due to the lack of awareness by girls in practising communities of the laws surrounding the practice of child marriage, they are unable to refuse when their parents force them into marriage. An awareness of these laws should be made in the communities for girls to feel empowered and parents to know the consequences of forcing their daughters into early marriage.

The individual and social reasons that were gathered from participants indicate that though the government is working to reduce the practice, a lot more needs to be done. Social

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interventions that have been put in place to help prevent the practice need to be intensified at the national level but also proximally at community and individual levels.

8.4.1. Limitations and future directions.

While this paper has examined and presented diverse reasons motivating the decision to marry early among married adolescent girls in the Northern region of Ghana, some limitations in the study need to be considered. One such limitation is the composition of the sample engaged in the study. Although the study endeavoured to recruit participants from diverse backgrounds, the sample did not have a broad diversity with participants being mainly Muslim, and Dagombas. This was an artefact of the research setting selected for the study. Given this, the non-random sampling used and the qualitative design of the study, the findings of the study cannot be generalised albeit providing valuable rich insights of young participants' lived experiences from the northern region of Ghana. Further research is needed to expand the research setting in order to be able to include participants with varying backgrounds. Collecting data from diverse participants from different regions will present a better national picture of the causes of the practice of child marriage in Ghana.

The primary researcher's inability to speak the local dialect of participants placed constraints on pursuing a deeper level of engagement with the participants during the interview process. Although this was mitigated by employing a research assistant who was a master's student at the Psychology Department of the University of Ghana who was a native of the research setting and could understand the language spoken by participants as recommended by Squires (2008), for a cross-language study, the language barrier restricted the primary researcher from engaging more spontaneously with the participants. Overall, the findings from the perspectives of married girls in this study have revealed that an interplay of child-driven factors, socio-cultural and economic factors combine to affect the practice of child marriage among communities selected for the study.

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Chapter 9

Manuscript 4

Title: The lived experiences of the female spouses in child marriages in northern Ghana: Implications for psychological well-being

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Abstract: The experience of marriage is ordinarily complex and challenging exerting an invariable effect whether positive or negative on the psychological well-being of the individual. When the spouse is a child, the effects may be much more complicated and devastating. Literature on the experiences of child spouses and the implications of early marriage for their psychological health is scarce, especially in Ghana. This study seeks to investigate the subjective experiences of marriage and its psychological implications for married adolescent girls in the Northern region of Ghana. Using purposeful, convenient and snowball sampling techniques, 21 married adolescent girls (between 13 and 17 years) were recruited and individually interviewed. Using a generic inductive qualitative analysis method, two main themes on the subjective experience of marriage (positive subjective experiences and challenges experienced in marriage) and two themes on the implications of those experiences on the psychological well-being of married girls emerged. Positive subjective experiences in marriage were related to the availability of financial support and resources, social recognition and the presence of spousal support whereas challenges experienced in marriage pertained to themes of financial difficulties, restrictiveness, relational conflict and abuse and stressful chores. The positive experiences of marriage appear to have implications for the female spouses' satisfaction with life and increased quality of life while the negative experiences of marriage were associated with regrets and disappointment, worrying, unhappiness and anhedonia. Based on these findings, we suggest the implementation of

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various interventions that are tailored to the alleviation of those negative psychological implications of early marriage for married girls. Efforts, however, need to be redoubled to engage upstream preventative endeavours to challenge cultural and religious traditions that reinforce the practice of child marriage.

Keywords: child marriage, adolescents, subjective experiences, psychological well-being, Ghana

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9.1. Introduction

While marriage is reported to be associated with happiness and satisfaction in life (Botha & Booysen, 2013), this may not be the case for individuals who marry as children. Child marriage, defined as a marriage where one or both individuals is/are below the age of 18 years, occurs at a stage before an individual is likely to be physically, physiologically and psychologically ready for the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing (Jain, Bisen, Singh, & Jain, 2011). It is considered a rampant global problem that is most prevalent in developing countries (African Union, 2015; UNICEF, 2001, 2015). Globally, it is estimated that every year, 650 million girls are married before their 18th birthday and most of the girls are forced into such arrangements by their social, economic and cultural circumstances (Loaiza & Wong, 2012; UNICEF, 2001). In developing countries, such as Ghana, it is estimated that one in three girls is married by age 18 and one in nine by age 15, with the highest rates of child marriage being recorded in Africa. Of the 41 countries worldwide with prevalence rates of 30 per cent or more, 30 are in Africa (African Union, 2015; UNICEF, 2018). The Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS, 2018) reports the current prevalence of child marriage to be 5% for women married under age 15 and 19.3% for women who married before age 18. This trend compared to the 2014 Ghana Demographic Health Survey (DHS) shows a 7.9% decrease in the practice of child marriage in Ghana between 2014 and 2018 (DHS, 2014, MICS, 2018). Although there appears to be a decline in the prevalence of child marriage in Ghana, the practice still persists which may be due to a complexity of multifaceted etiological factors that are sometimes intertwined. Causes of child marriage may be traced to traditional and religious practices, gender inequalities and poverty (Ferdous & Zeba, 2019; WiLDAF Ghana, 2014).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as any individual below 18 years unless the law of a particular country states that majority is attained at an earlier age. In

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Ghana, a child is by law considered an individual who is below 18 years although the communities and ethnicities may consider an individual mature at an earlier age (The Children's Act, 1998). The concept of the child and childhood has been a prevailing debate in academic discourse suggesting that the definition and conceptualisation of a child is socially constructed (Boakye-Boaten, 2010). Among ethnicities, cultures and communities in Ghana, the traditional definition of childhood is limited to when an individual commences the onset of puberty. An individual is no longer considered a child when she or he is perceived to have reached puberty. When they begin to exhibit the physical signs of puberty (the development of secondary sexual characteristics such as menarche and breast formation in girls), children in some communities are either encouraged, coerced or forced into marriage by their relatives and friends.

The experience of marriage has been positively linked to subjective well-being (Botha & Booysen, 2013) with literature further indicating that married individuals are more likely to be happier and more satisfied compared to their single counterparts (Addai, Opoku-Agyeman, & Amanfu, 2015; Shapiro & Keyes, 2008). Marriage affords the couple the opportunity to share with each other emotional, instrumental and recreational resources thereby promoting positive subjective well-being (Diener, Gohm, Suh, & Oishi, 2000). Marriage also presents couples with a myriad of supportive networks which help improve their subjective well-being compared to unmarried counterparts (Stutzer & Frey, 2006). Despite the positive impact of marriage, Addai et al. (2015) reported a negative association between being married and subjective well-being among Ghanaians. Their findings indicated that married individuals (especially females) are more likely to report being unhappy and less satisfied with life compared to unmarried individuals.

The impact of marriage is invariably psychological for the individuals involved. Addai et al. (2015) maintain that marital stress and an unsupportive marital social

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environment may undermine the well-being of the individual. Research by Kiecolt-Glaser and Newman (2001) has reported that an unsupportive social environment such as poor marital quality may cause depression and emotional instability which, in turn, negatively affect the couple's well-being (Addai et al., 2015).

9.1.1. Implications of child marriage.

Aside from being a violation of the human rights of the child, child marriage poses serious implications for the physical and mental health of its victim. It hinders the educational attainment of girls who are married which may also be accompanied by other ramifications. Reports indicate that female victims of child marriages are less likely to go back to school after they have married (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008). Girls engaged in child marriage, therefore, tend to have lower educational levels compared to their unmarried counterparts (Psaki, 2014). Lower educational attainment leads to economic hardship due to the loss of skills and opportunities affected girls might have been able to acquire in school (Tenkorang, 2019). Furthermore, the young female spouse may become solely dependent on her husband and/or in-laws who may use this as an opportunity to restrict her (Nguyen & Wodon, 2014).

Additionally, child marriage poses serious reproductive health risks for girls such as the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, pain during sexual intercourse, early pregnancy and pregnancy complications such as obstetric fistula (Glinksi, Sexton, & Meyers, 2015; Nour, 2009). Teenage pregnancy which may be both a cause and consequence of child marriage has been linked to increases in maternal and child mortality rates due to complications of pregnancy and childbirth (Nuor, 2009).

Literature on mental health and well-being among victims of child marriage has indicated that the child marriage has severe implications for the mental well-being of married girls (Gage, 2013; John, Edmeades, & Murithi, 2019; Le Strat, Dubertret, & Le Foll, 2011). Research on the psychological implications indicates that the majority of married adolescents

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suffer from social isolation, depression and drug dependence (Khanna, Verma, & Weiss, 2013; Le Strat et al., 2011) and suicidal ideations (Gage, 2013). These implications may be due to the victims' loss of their adolescence as they are plunged into adulthood without the development of physical, psychological and cognitive skills for the adult role of being a wife and mother (UNICEF, 2001). Furthermore, they are forced into sexual activities by their husbands, which may be accompanied by emotional, sexual and physical abuse (UNICEF, 2001). The likelihood of married girls suffering violence and abuse in their marriage is higher compared to married women (Gupta et al., 2014). Child marriage and early childbearing are also reported to erode or even erase the budding potential in adolescent girls due to the detrimental effects on the health, education and financial independence of young mothers and their children (Gupta et al., 2014).

Research on the mental health implications of child marriage has been reported to be scant especially in the Ghanaian context (Glinski et al., 2015; John et al., 2019; Tenkorang, 2019). Tenkorang's (2019) study reported that women who married early were more likely to suffer intimate partner violence, endorse cultural norms on gender and patriarchy and have limited autonomy. In exploring the subjective experiences of well-being, the challenges of married adolescent girls and the coping resources available to them, Baba (2018) found that, although some married girls recounted having positive experiences of marriage related to being young wives and mothers, overall, the results indicated that married girls experienced high levels of depression, anxiety and stress and low levels of resilience. This concurs with finding from the study conducted by the University of Ghana Centre for Social Policy Studies and World Vision Ghana [UGCSPS & WVG] in 2017 that reported that child marriage has psychological implications such as depression, social isolation and abuse for married Ghanaian girls.

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9.1.2. Experiences of married girls.

Literature on the experiences of married girls has reported many negative experiences of marriage from the perspectives and accounts of married girls. Accounts of experiences of early marriage have reported regret, depression and isolation due to the experience of limited autonomy and possibilities associated with being married, social and financial restrictions, disruption of education, the performance of stressful domestic chores among others (Callaghan, Gambo, & Fellin, 2015; Maharjan, Rishal, & Svanemyr, 2019). A Nigerian study found that most of the married girl participants reported experiencing difficult relationships with co-wives and mothers-in-law (Erulkar & Bello, 2007). Furthermore, the experience of motherhood, pregnancy and childbirth were described as fearful, confusing and traumatic especially during first pregnancy (Erulkar & Bello, 2007).

Studies on the subjective experience of marriage by girls in Ghana are very limited. Most studies focused on the incidence, causes and impact of child marriage through retrospective experiential accounts of women married as girls (Tsekpo et al., 2016; UGCSPS & WVG, 2017). Additionally, although child marriage has dire psychological effects on its victims, little is known about the Ghanaian setting. Hence this paper sought to understand the subjective experiences of marriage of adolescent girls and ascertain the implications for those experiences for their psychological health. This study forms part of the doctoral dissertation of the first author which sought to identify the socio-cultural constructions that contribute to the practice of early marriage, investigate the experiences of married adolescent girls in marriage and its related implications on the psychological wellbeing of adolescent married girls in the Northern region of Ghana. Data were collected from married adolescent girls, parents of married girls, community elders and professionals working with married girls in order to understand those constructions, experiences and implications of child marriage in

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practising communities. Only the data obtained from the married adolescent girls are reported in this paper.

9.2. Method

9.2.1. Research design.

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative research design to gather data on the lived experiences of married girls. Specifically, a generic inductive qualitative approach (GQIA) was selected for examining the experiences of married adolescent girls. This approach was selected because it is flexible and descriptive and allows the researcher to understand a phenomenon from various perspectives and worldviews of the individuals experiencing the phenomenon (Cooper & Endacott, 2007). Furthermore, the focus of the GQIA is on the description of the content of participants' perspectives, opinions and reflections of past and present world experiences and not on the inner organisation and structure of their experiencing processes (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015).

9.2.2. Research setting and participants.

Twenty-one married girls from three districts (Tamale n=7, Tolon n=5 and Mion n=9) in the Northern region of Ghana were recruited through purposeful, convenient and snow-balling sampling techniques. The Northern region is reported to be one of the regions with the highest rates of child marriage in Ghana (MICS, 2018). The 2010 national census identifies the Dagomba who speak Dagbani as the major ethnic group in the research setting while the dominant religion is Islam (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). All participants were Muslim, were adolescents from poor economic backgrounds and had been married for at least one year (see Table 1 for demographic information of the participants). The mean age of participants at the time of data collection was 15.56 (SD=1.15) while their mean age at the time of

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marriage was 14.89 (SD=1.63). Seventeen of the twenty–one participants recruited had at least basic education while four had no education.

Table 1

Demographic information of the married girls

Variable	n=21	f (%)
Age at data collection	13	1(5)
	14	2(10)
	15	5(24)
	16	6(28)
	17	4(19)
	X (Unknown)	4(14)
Age at time of marriage	12	2(10)
	13	4(19)
	14	6(28)
	15	5(24)
	16	1(5)
	X (Unknown)	4(14)
Years spent in marriage	5	1(4.8)
	4	2(9.5)
	3	1(4.8)
	2	4(19)
	1	13(61.9)
Level of education	None	4(19)
	Primary	6(28)
	Junior high	8(38)
	Senior high	3(14)

9.2.3. Ethical considerations and procedure.

All data were collected through individual in-depth interviews that were conducted by the first author (EAS) and her research assistant (HB) after ethical approval and permissions and had been obtained. Given the particular vulnerability of the participants in the study, ethical approval was sought from both the Research Ethics Committee at Stellenbosch University (Reference number: SU-HSD-004745) and from the Department of Social Welfare

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in the Northern region of Ghana which is the statutory agency responsible for the protection of vulnerable children (including married adolescents) in the research setting.

Due to the cultural and linguistic differences between the first author (EAS) and the majority of the participants, a research assistant (HB) au fait with the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the participants was employed to assist with the collection and transcription of the data. The consent forms and semi-structured interview guide were translated into Dagbani for the convenience of the participants.

As the recruitment of participants at the beginning of the study was initially quite difficult, gatekeepers were employed in participating communities to assisted EAS and HB in gaining access into communities. These gatekeepers (who lived in participating communities and were either married adolescent girls themselves or allies with married adolescent girls) identified potential participants in their communities whom they introduced to HB and EAS for possible recruitment. The aims, objectives and nature of the study were explained to these potential participants who were then invited to participate if they consented and met the inclusion criteria (being a child [under 18 years] and married, being a native of the Northern region of Ghana, and had been married for at least one year). Use was made of snowball sampling with participants and the gatekeepers helping to recruit further participants for the study.

Before commencement of the interview, time was taken to explain the consent process to the participants and that their identities and data would be anonymised by assigning a pseudonym and removing all participants' personal information when reporting the findings of the study. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw their participation at any point in the study process. All participants were uncomfortable with signing the consent form finding it too formal, we offered participants the option of providing verbal consent which was audio-recorded before the interview session was initiated. In the

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debate in using written or verbal consent, Gordon (2000) posits that low literacy levels may influence participants' willingness to sign consent forms with most preferring to provide oral instead of written consent. Studies (Gordon, 2003; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2010) have also intimated that the use of written consent can interfere with the development of the researcher-respondent relationship and create power imbalances as it transforms the relationship from researcher to informant to researcher and research subject.

Given the particular vulnerability of this group, a licensed clinical psychologist was employed to provide psychological help to girls in the event they needed psychological intervention after the interview. The services of the clinical psychologist, however, were not used by participants. Adolescent girls recruited for this study were treated as adults since they were married with some being parents (Mensch, Bagah, Clark, & Binka, 1999).

Using the translated versions of the interview guide, HB conducted seventeen individual interviews with the married girls in Dagbani. EAS conducted three interviews with participants who could speak English and one interview in Asante Twi that she could understand and speak. Some of the questions discussed with participants included: what are some of the challenges you experience as a married girl? How do you feel as a married girl? What are some of the joyful moments in your marriage? A token of ₵20.00 (equivalent to $4.81 at the time of the study) was given to each participant at the end of the interview to compensate for their travel expenses and time. Wertheimer and Miller (2008) aver that the payment of money not only compensates for time and expenses but helps maintain the power imbalances between the researcher and the participant. All interviews were audio-taped and lasted an average of 40 minutes.

9.2.4. Analytic issues.

Data were analysed using the Generic Inductive Qualitative approach described by Thomas (2006). First, the audiotaped interviews were transcribed by EAS and HB after

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which transcriptions were translated into Dagbani and back translated into English by an independent linguist to check for accurate and consistent presentation of participants' views and experiences. The transcriptions were then formatted and uploaded in ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software (v. 8) (Friese, 2018; Muhr, 1991, 1997) for coding by the first author.

Using Thomas' (2006) five-step approach for analysing the data, the author (EAS) first read through the transcripts to familiarise herself with the text and gain an understanding of the developing themes. In the second step, in-vivo and line-by-line coding was conducted to develop codes that stayed close to the data. The third step is the labelling of segments of information to create subthemes and themes. Here those segments of data that were similar were connected, coded and named using Charmaz's (2006) strategy to aid coding- themes that were not similar but were very important were also coded. The fourth phase of the coding process involved rereading and recoding all subthemes and themes that were developed in the third step of analysis in order to reduce redundancy among the different themes and subthemes of coded data. Axial coding techniques were adopted to aid in the creation of themes (Charmaz, 2006). Finally, after careful reading of the generated themes and their quotations, four major themes (positive subjective experiences and challenges of marriage and their psychological implications) were created. The subthemes and themes created by the first author were examined and reviewed by the co-authors to help with the accurate presentation and interpretation of data thereby validating the findings. The themes, subthemes and psychological implications of those experiences are discussed below.

9.3. Findings and discussion

Following data analysis, the subjective accounts of child marriage by the participants were grouped into four broad themes; positive subjective experiences in marriage and challenges experienced in marriage and the positive and negative psychological implications

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of those experiences in marriage. Positive subjective experiences were differentiated into receiving support from their spouses with house chores and other activities, social recognition resulting from marriage and motherhood and the availability of financial support and resources. The psychological implications of those positive experiences were associated with satisfaction with life. Challenges experienced were linked to the experience of financial difficulties, restrictiveness, relational conflicts and abuse and stressful chores. The impacts of these experiences on their psychological health are regret and disappointment, worry, end of personal development, unhappiness and anhedonia and development of resilience and hope. Participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

9.3.1. Positive subjective experiences in marriage.

Whereas the literature (Bruce & Bongaarts, 2009; Gupta et al., 2014; Glinski et al., 2015) dominantly reflects a negative impact of child marriage on the well-being of victims of child marriage, this study uncovered several positive experiences associated with being a married adolescent. Some participants reported experiencing a positive change in their lives after getting married which had an eudemonic impact on their psychological well-being.

Availability of financial support and resources. One of the positive experiences reported of child marriage by married girls is the access to and provision for their financial and basic needs which they may not have had prior to their marriage since most of the participants were from poor and economically unstable backgrounds. Accounts from some participants indicate that marriage has given them some form of independence and financial stability and access to their basic needs since their husbands are providing for these needs. For some, their previous worries about their livelihood when they were living with their parents and/or guardians have been dispelled.

> "I am happy, any time he is going to work, he gives me chop money (money usually given to the wife by the husband for daily upkeep of the home), and when on his

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> way home he finds a dress he thinks will look nice on me, he buys it for me, sometimes he would buy me yoghurt (sachet of yoghurt) or kalyppo (a box of drink) for me which makes me happy." (MM, 16 years, married 3 years, Tamale)

MM is not only happy for the provision of her daily needs but also for the unsolicited gifts provided by her husband. As the Ghanaian culture prescribes the man to be responsible for the daily provision and maintenance of his wife/wives as well as children (Addai et al., 2015), most girls enter marriage expecting their personal needs to be catered for by their husband (UGCSPS &WVG, 2017). Clearly, in MM's case, the fulfilment of her financial and basic needs translates into satisfaction with life and happiness. Her statement further intimates a deeper unmet basic need of most participants since she was impressed by a 'common' sachet of yoghurt (about $0.19) or *kalyppo* (about $0.29) that was given to her by her husband.

Social recognition. For some participants, marriage afforded them respect and status among their peers, families and in their community. There was a sense of pride for achieving a significant milestone in their lives. They wore their veils, which signified being married in their communities, with pride. RH's quote below illustrates this:

> "Now when I am walking, I wear a veil that makes people respect me. If you are walking you have respect than one who is not married." (RH, 17 years, married one year; Mion)

Marriage in the Ghanaian society is seen as a prestigious milestone that every Ghanaian is expected to achieve (Danquah, 2008). Being married confers on the individual respect and honour while on the other hand an unmarried individual is perceived as a social misfit and/or sinner, in some Ghanaian religions and cultures (Addai et al., 2015). Due to the importance of marriage in the Ghanaian society, it is not surprising that RH and other married girls will report social recognition and honour as one of the positive experiences of their early

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marriage. This finding concurs with the UGCSPS and WVG (2017) report that there are perceived prestige benefits for child marriage in some communities in the northern parts of Ghana.

Besides marriage, childbirth and motherhood were also reported as a badge of respect and pride for participants. The ability to boast about one's children in the community is explained by LF

> "Nhmn…for a child, you can go and sit somewhere and also boast of having a child" (LF, 17years, married four years; Tamale)

Once married, the ability to bear children was indicative of the fertility and womanhood of a female in the Ghanaian society (Tabong & Adongo, 2013). Given the value attributed to children in the community, they are a source of pride for parents and other relatives and achievement for the young spouse if she is able to propagate. LF's statement illustrates the prestige and honour in having a child leading to her boasting about her ability to have a child.

Participants who had not been able to bear a child reported experiencing verbal abuse, and stigmatisation since they may be considered barren or as refusing to bear children for their spouses as seen in HD's assertion below.

> "..if you just have a problem with someone in the house and they are just insulting you, like the sister, she just insulting you, you get married and you refuse to give birth for her brother." (HD, 16 years, married one year; Tamale)

In most part of Africa, childlessness is considered a taboo with most childless couple facing social stigma, ostracism and economic deprivation (Dyer, Abraham, Hoffman, & Van der Spy, 2002; Tabong & Adongo, 2013). Tabong and Adongo (2013) report that in northern Ghana, it is customary for a couple's family to expect the birth of a baby within the first year of marriage. Any delay was considered the woman's fault and was therefore unacceptable.

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This social stigma and ostracism may likely induce depression and feelings of low self-worth for girls struggling to fall pregnant since she may not be considered a woman by her community. With these heavy consequences, it not surprising that most girls reported motherhood as a source of pride.

Presence of spousal support. In recounting some of the positive experiences some participants mentioned spousal support as an essential part of their experience. Spousal support could be in the form of tangible assistance with house chores or just being available when comfort and affection were needed. The willingness of their husbands to help them with their chores came as a relief from the stress of being a young wife and a mother. This had the positive impact of increasing their satisfaction with their lives besides eliciting positive emotions such as happiness and heightened self-worth.

> "Yes, sometimes he helps me when I'm overwhelmed with work in the house. Sometimes, he tells me to attend to some of my duties whilst he does the cooking." (AA, no age, married two years; Tolon)

Assisting with household chores was considered important for most married girls whose husbands provided such assistance. The patriarchal culture of most of their communities does not allow men to assist their wives with chores as household chores are considered to be the responsibility of the woman (Adinkra, 2012; Ampofo, 2001). Girls may find the willingness of their husbands to assist them with domestic chores a sign of love and caring since men are not expected to engage in such activities.

Aside from helping with house chores, some girls valued their husband supporting them by standing up to parents or relatives during altercations or misunderstanding between the married girl and her in-laws and comforting them when they were sad or distressed. Most girls found spousal support in the form of being defended, provision of comfort in stressful

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situations as very salient in their marital relationship which boosted their confidence and helped with their emotional well-being.

> "...any time if I get sad, or his parents just insulted me and I'll be crying, he will go and insult his parents that they should stop insulting me and he will come and say I should stop crying." (HD, 16 years, married one year; Tamale)

Accounts given by participants above indicate that receiving spousal support was beneficial to their psychological well-being since it helped them cope with stresses and other difficulties. This is in contrast to the experience of many participants that most husbands tend to support their families when there is an altercation between their wives and their families - (see Challenges: *relational conflicts and abuse*). This confirms reports (Julien & Markman, 1991) indicating that higher levels of spousal support account for marital satisfaction and happiness. Dehle, Larsen and Landers (2001) provide evidence that support from spouses have a positive psychological impact on the spouses especially when they are faced with stress and life difficulties. The provision of appropriate and adequate assistance, the show of understanding as well as nurturance by a spouse are essential in providing satisfying relationships, reducing stress and depressive symptoms among married couples (Addai et al., 2015; Dehle et al., 2001).

9.3.2. Psychological implications of positive experiences of marriage.

Satisfaction with life. Having a good experience of marriage led to reports of a satisfied life especially when participants found marriage as relief from previous mistreatment in the parental home. Some married girls revealed that they found their marital homes as less psychologically distressing which brought a feeling of safety and relief. ZB explains her reason for perceiving her matrimonial home as better than her parents.

> "Hmm…the reason I said it is better is that when you were in your house and you were going through pain and hearing some disheartening things…, but if you come

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> to stay in your matrimonial home, such unkind words and painful treatment, you won't hear them anymore. That is why I am saying it has been better." (ZB, 16 years, married one year; Tolon).

Reports such as the one illustrated above led to feelings of satisfaction with life, happiness and an increase in their quality of life. According to AA, "*…life is simply good for us (herself and her husband)*" (no age, married 2 years; Tolon) which depicts satisfaction with life thereby boosting her mental well-being. The experience of positive psychological well-being as married adolescent girls is novel in the literature on the psychological impact of child marriage. Most studies (Gage, 2013; Le Strat et al., 2011; John et al., 2019) have reported negative psychological implications of child marriage such as depression, anxiety and positive wellbeing. These implications although evident among some participants were not reported by some participants as depicted in the statements of ZB and AA. Their experience of a positive psychological wellbeing may be due to the availability of financial support and resources (see *Availability of financial support and resources*) in addition to having a supportive spouse.

The experiences of ZB and AA may provide a contextual explanation for some of the reasons (teen choices, peer pressure and search for better life and wealth) for the practice of early marriage in Ghana (MoGCSP, 2017; UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017). Having had positive experiences in their marriages, their peers who after seeing the positive outcomes of marriage in their lives, may likely choose to marry early in their search for a living standard which is better than their poor family economic backgrounds.

9.3.3. Challenges experienced in marriage.

Several participants reported having negative experiences as married girls when they were asked about their experiences. Although marriage has been linked to positive psychological well-being, it remains a major source of stress and unhappiness for some

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individuals (Addai et al., 2015). The negative experiences of participants have been grouped into the following themes: financial difficulties; restrictiveness, relational conflict and abuse and the performance of stressful chores.

Financial difficulties. The lack of financial resources and support was reported as a pervasive challenge experienced by most participants. It was a major source of stress and the underlying cause of other problems faced by most participants. For instance, some participants reported the neglect of financial responsibilities by their spouses as a major source of stress since they had to step in to provide or augment these financial needs. Some spouses of married girls were not willing to cater to their basic needs and that of their children. Although it is considered the duty of the man as the head of the household to cater for the financial and daily needs of his spouse and children in the Ghanaian culture (Ankomah, 1996), some husbands were derelict of these responsibilities and neglected them:

> "Even me, he hasn't even thought of giving me one cedi ($0.19) much less my parents." (JM 16 years, married 5 years; Mion)

The neglect of those financial responsibilities by spouses led to many participants feeling burdened since they had to cater for the family on their own. This, for some participants, was an abrupt shift from childhood into adulthood as they were expected to perform their duties as married women, cater for the home and children and act as the sole provider for the family which they considered stressful and difficult.

> "As I am in my marriage right now, it disturbs me a lot. Because I have nothing doing and have children now, there is a lot of suffering. Every day, if I do not go and fetch water to sell to someone or help someone with their work for them to give me something for me to prepare food for them [my children], I and them [my children] will starve. Their father, too, he won't give me because he is not doing anything." (JM, 16 years, married five years; Mion)

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The Ghanaian culture has clearly defined responsibilities for husbands and wives. While wives are expected to nurture the children and care for the home, men are expected to provide for the home and be the breadwinner of the family (Brown, 1995; Otu, Appiah, & Botchway, 2015). Within this ideology, married girls usually expect their husbands to cater for the family, however, some men, due to their lack of employment or their own volition, neglect this responsibility which then falls on the married girl. Being ill-equipped for marriage and motherhood, the assumption of responsibility as a provider for the household is likely to exacerbate the level of stress experienced by married girls which can be deleterious to their mental health (Raj, Gomez, & Silverman, 2014).

Restrictiveness. Marriage is accompanied by limitations and restrictions for several participants. For some of the girls, marriage brought limitations which were not present before they were not married. Some felt restricted in the kinds of social activities they could attend while others reported feeling isolated from friends and family. Their autonomy to decide on where to go and whom to interact with was usurped as they now needed the permission of their in-laws or husband to engage with others in the community and in social events.

> "… Now, if I want to go somewhere and tell my mother-in-law if she says I shouldn't go, I cannot go. Or, if I tell my husband and he says I can't go, then I won't go. But when I was in my own house, I went where ever I felt like going." (GD, 15 years, married one year; Mion)

Restrictions and isolation in child marriage are not uncommon as various studies (Birech, 2013; Gage, 2013; Khanna et al., 2013) have reported that victims of child marriage are usually socially isolated or restricted from engaging in social events due to expected domestic chores and responsibilities married girls are expected to perform (Le Strat et al., 2011). Restrictions, according to Hampton (2010), may render a married girl powerless and

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isolated since she may need to obtain permission from her husband and/or in-laws in to engage in and have access to social and health resources.

Another kind of restriction reported by married girls in this study was their inability to pursue their dreams and aspirations due to their marriage. Most girls shared their wish to either complete their education, learn a trade or craft that they believed would give them financial independence. These dreams were, however, not fulfilled due to their husbands' unwillingness to allow them to pursue their dreams. The conversation between EAS and HD (16 years, married one year; Tamale) below illustrates this assertion:

> HD: "Yes, the problem is I have not yet given birth. If I give birth early he would let me complete school."
> EAS: "Ah, if you had given birth he would have allowed you to complete school?"
> HD: "Allowed me to complete, yes…because he said if I don't give birth and I complete school I will leave him."

Aside from preventing her from pursuing her educational ambitions, HD's husband also employs the use of subterfuge to convince her not to pursue her educational dreams. Being a child herself, she is not able to recognise that the birth of a child will mean added responsibilities and stress which will rather increase her burden and prevent her from going back to school.

This finding lends support to the claim that child marriage hinders educational attainment of the married girls (Nguyen & Wodon, 2012; Psaki, 2014) although education has been reported to protect girls from early marriage. The reason for this could be due to the perception that educated women/girls are considered empowered and difficult to control (Alhassan, 2010). Hence to control women, their husbands may refuse to allow them to continue their education (Alhassan, 2013; MoGCSP, 2016) which ends their education aspiration. Tenkorang (2019) maintains that education gives women the opportunity to

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become economically independent and self-reliant, instils self-confidence, confers life skills relevant to economic and personal development which in the long run helps them deal with domestic issues such as conflict and home management.

Relational conflict and abuse. Another negative experience for married girls was the experience of relational conflicts and abuse. Participants reported encountering a lot of relational conflict with their in-laws in their matrimonial home since most of them had to live with their husband and his extended family. The main complaint girls cited was of their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law sometimes provoking them to fight or verbally and physically abusing them. These altercations resulted from girls' inability or refusal to perform chores, considered disrespectful and refusing to be submissive.

> "As for married life, even if you do not go to fetch water for the house they will insult you. So you must know that when you get there, the suffering is bound to happen until you too become very old." (NS, no age, married one year; Tolon)

The influence of the extended family in the conjugal unit has been indicated to be paramount especially in African marriages (Mbwirire, 2017; Takyi, 2001). This means that the wishes of the family always supersede that of the couple. From the accounts of most married girls, the influence of parents and in-laws in their marriage is very paramount. Refusing to obey the directives of the parents and in-laws is perceived as a form of disrespect. LF explains her husband's inability to support her due to his fear of being perceived as taking sides with LF when her mother-in-law asked her to move out of her marital home after an altercation.

> "So when I was there she [sister-in-law] and I quarrelled and she told her mother [my mother-in-law] to tell me to go back to my father's house and she did… He [my husband] said I shouldn't go home but his mother said I should leave. Since it was his mother that said it, it would be like he is taking sides with me so he said I should go" (LF, 17years, married four years; Tamale)

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The influence of family members in the marriage of their children has been reported to sometimes lead to marital conflicts and disputes between a spouse and her/his in-laws which may affect the stability of the marriage (Abane, 2003). The family may feel the need to correct or punish the wife when she is considered to have made mistakes such as not performing house chores, not bearing children for her husband, or not being submissive among others (Adjei, 2016). These conflicts may have some psychological implications (such as feeling rejected and depressed) for the married girls who are unable to face their in-laws alone or feel supported by her husband.

Stressful chores. Findings indicated that after moving into their matrimonial homes most married girls had to perform stressful household chores. Accounts given by participants indicate that when a woman is married into a family, she is expected to perform most of the chores in the household to prove her womanhood and herself as a good wife. Although she may be helped by other wives if there are, she is most likely to perform the most stressful ones alone.

> "When a man marries, the wife will have to do all the house chores. She washes the clothes of her parents-in-law, her husband's clothes, everything, the clothes of the very young siblings of the man she will wash it, every day your parents-in-law expects that you will wash the clothes of your husband's siblings. You are expected to do everything!" (MM, 16 years, married for 3 years; Tamale)

The above statement is one of many accounts about the stressful chores that most girls must undertake in their matrimonial homes. Due to patriarchal norms on the role of females in the matrimonial homes, girls are likely to be engaged in burdensome household chores even when they are not physically developed and capable to perform those tasks. Roy and Saker (2016) maintain that the married girl is expected to provide sexual servitude to her husband as well as physical and economic servitude to her husband and his family. Inability to perform chores may lead to abuse. Furthermore, powerlessness, lack of autonomy and

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independence do not afford married girls the opportunity to negotiate and manage the burdensome roles with other wives (Tenkorang, 2019). The performance of burdensome and towering daily chores may lead girls to be socially isolated, restricting access to opportunities and resources that may help them develop themselves, which may compound their servitude and vulnerability to poverty.

The negative experiences of early marriage are described as experiencing problems every day in one's life as AA (no age, married two years; Tolon) avers "When day breaks, it's just petty problems you encounter."

9.3.4. Psychological implications of challenges experienced.

The experience of challenges in marriage was accompanied by detrimental psychological effects since some married adolescent girls reported unhappiness and depression, regret, worry, lack of personal development, and hopelessness. These effects were influenced by married girls' expectations of marriage. Some of those expectations of marriage included the expectation of a better life due to the provision of basic needs by their spouses, the experience of love and companionship, and the ability to have children among others. Some married girls were expecting marriage to be difficult and full of misery and were somewhat not surprised when they experienced challenges in their marriages notwithstanding being psychologically affected by these experiences in their marriages. These effects are discussed with supporting quotes from participants below.

Regrets and disappointment. These were salient emotions that were inferred from participants' account of their experiences. Most participants reported regretting marrying early or were disappointed in their marriages. Girls who had considered marriage as an only means to come out of difficult family situations and poverty reported regretting the decision when those expectations were not realised. Others seemed to regret the decision to marry as it prevented them from completing their education or learning a trade. They believed that they

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would have had better prospects, been able to care for their children and themselves and support their husbands if they had completed school or learned a craft/trade before marrying.

> "I can just be thinking in mind that if I had waited and searched [for a job] before I married, maybe a lot of things wouldn't have been disturbing you. Even if they were to disturb you, it won't disturb you so much." (SH, no age, married four years; Mion)

One of the impacts of child marriage in the Ghanaian context has been the disruption of the education and chances of acquiring skills that may be necessary for the employment of the married girl (Tsekpo et al., 2016). The disruption of education and employment opportunities renders most married girls solely dependent on their husbands and his relatives and robs them of their economic independence (Tenkorang, 2019). SH, from her statement, appears to blame herself for her current situation which she finds disappointing and unfavourable due to her choice to marry early. She regrets not completing her education or acquiring employment which would have made her more economically independent. Zeelenberg, van Dijk, Manstead and vanr de Pligt (2000), on distinguishing between regret and disappointment, contend that the experience of regret involves the intense feeling of blaming oneself for taking a particular decision, having an "I should have known better feeling" brooding about making a mistake and the possible outcomes should one have taken another. Being disappointed brings in feelings of powerlessness and the tendency not to find other solutions to the problem.

Worry. Aside from regret, most girls reported worrying about the future and livelihood of themselves and their children. Evidence of this can be garnered from GD who shared that she sometimes finds herself lost in thoughts

> "Sometimes I can just be thinking a lot but I don't even understand what the thoughts are all about. I think a lot." (GD, 16 years, married five years; Mion)

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The toll of being married on married girls can be enormous. Studies (Nuor, 2009; Roy & Sarker, 2016) indicate that most married girls are usually not cognitively, physically and psychologically prepared to take on the role of being a wife and a mother. These roles can be very stressful since they lack the solution-oriented skills and knowledge they may need to manage their homes (Tenkorang, 2019) which then becomes a source of worry for them.

End of personal development. Furthermore, some girls found that being married brought an abrupt end to their dreams of completing their education and/or learning a trade or skill. The lack of economic independence and personal development was another source of worry for them since they felt that their inability to get employed and earn an income meant they are forced to be solely dependent on their husbands who sometimes are either not employed or are not willing to care for them.

> "Up till now, if I were not pregnant and married young at the moment it is possible that I would have been able to learn a trade or skill that would help me fend for myself and earn a living. So because of this, that I have not been able to develop myself and be a better person today." (LF, 17years, married four years; Tamale)

Child marriage has been reported to bring an abrupt end to the development of a child victim since it leads to the termination of the education (Alhassan, 2013; MoGCSP, 2016). Due to the cultural expectation of being a wife and mother, girls who marry early drop out of school to take up such roles (MoGCSP, 2016). The lack of opportunity for some girls results in the development of low self-worth, and the lack of self-confidence, and undermines the independence and autonomy they may need to navigate complex social and matrimonial roles (Tenkorang, 2019).

Unhappiness and anhedonia. When asked what they enjoyed about their marriage, most girls struggled to articulate an enjoyable moment in their marriage. Reports of unhappiness and lack of marital satisfaction were very common among married girls. "Me, I

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don't just enjoy anything! Aye! I don't like anything." (SH, no age, married four years; Mion). This finding is similar to findings in the UGCSPS and WVG (2017) report which indicated that married girls reported being unhappy and depressed in their marriages due to social restrictions, the performance of stressful chores among other issues.

Finding happiness despite challenges. Notwithstanding the negative psychological effects of child marriage, accounts of the experiences of some married girls revealed that some of them managed to find happiness in the little milestones and activities in their lives. Although some of these milestones was a source of challenge, they found joy in those particular challenges as well. EA shares her experience in the quote below.

> "(Giggles)….What do I enjoy most? (Laughs)….Whaaah! For something, I cannot tell you. Maybe it is just this thing (baby) that I am carrying. Otherwise, every human being, as you grow up that is what you hope and pray for. It is our source of joy and happiness and it is also our source of sorrow and sadness. That is what I love the most." (EA, 17 years, married one year; Mion)

The ability to find happiness in the face of challenges was quite evident in the accounts of some participants as seen in the EA's quote. Studies have reported that the ability to find a balance within one's self and the ability to make meaning of one's personal and social context helps enhance the experience of positive emotions despite adversity (Albrecht, & Devlieger 1999; Myers, Mackintosh, & Goin-Kochel, 2009). Evident in EA's quote is her ability to draw meaning from her relationship with and the joy of having a child. By adopting this perspective of life, most married girls recruited for this study are able to find happiness and the courage to fight the challenges they experience in life.

9.4. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to present the influence of the lived experiences of marriage on the psychological well-being of adolescent girls. The findings of this study indicate that

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early marriage had both positive (satisfaction with life and increased quality of life) and negative (worry, regret, disappointment, depression and disruption of personal development) implications for the psychological well-being of married girls recruited. Although some girls reported positive marital experiences, it is important to note that early marriage has dire psychological effects for the married adolescent girls since the majority experience psychologically distressing situations in their marriages. Of the twenty–one married girls interviewed, three reported feeling satisfied and happy with their marriage while nineteen were either unsure of their happiness in marriage, were disappointed, or expressed feelings of regret and depression. Baba (2018) reported similar findings in her study among married girls in the Northern region of Ghana.

For girls who encountered negative experiences in their marriage, recommendations for possible psychological interventions would go a long way to help them cope with the stress as well as other implications of being married girls. Programmes should be introduced in affected communities to provide married girls with resources and support groups where they can be able to discuss issues they face in their marriages and attain skills and ongoing education. These support groups may also empower girls and help them to develop possible solutions to some of the difficulties and problems they encounter in their daily lives. Additionally, the government and other non-governmental organisations can assist by providing resources, opportunities and programmes that help married girls acquire the necessary employable skills and craftsmanship they may need to financially support themselves. Upstream intervention is also needed to direct government policy at implementing the advocacy to discourage or curtail early or child marriages.

9.4.1. Limitations.

While the study focused on the psychological implications of child marriage for a small non-random sample of married adolescent girls, there appears to be a gap in statistical

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evidence for the impact of child marriage on the psychological health of the research population. A study that focuses on testing the various psychological implications with a large sample size of married girls will give a broader picture of the extent of this rampant phenomenon. Because of the qualitative design of the study and the use of purposive, non-random sampling, the findings of the present study cannot be generalised; the sample was small and non-random and was restricted to three districts in the Northern region of Ghana. A study with a broader population and quantitative design will be helpful in presenting the impact of child marriage at the national level.

The language barrier between the first author (EAS) and the research participants presents interesting considerations of how to mediate this challenge in cross-cultural research. This was managed by the use of language experts to assist with translating the interview guide, the transcribed interviews, daily debriefing of interviews, reviewing of data with the research assistant, the second and third authors and the NGO working with married girls in the research setting. This served the purpose of member checks and reference groups to enhance the confirmability of the findings in a context where it was not possible to re-access the participants for this purpose (Anney, 2014). Furthermore, the translation and retranslation of the interview data served as a means to ensure the accurate presentation of the participants' views and experiences. The findings confirm that for this sample early marriage appears to exert a major deleterious impact on the life and trajectory of young adolescent girls significantly influencing their psychological well-being and development.

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Chapter 10

Manuscript 5

Title: Early marriage in northern Ghana: Views from parents of married adolescent girls

Authors: Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo, Joana Salifu Yendork and Anthony Vernon Naidoo

Abstract: This study presents parents' (N=8) reasons for marrying off their daughters early, and their reactions to and perceptions of the implications of their daughter's marriage. Using a generic inductive qualitative method to analyse data collected, findings revealed parents' reasons for marrying off their daughters to be grounded on an interplay between cultural norms, parents' diminished authority over their daughters and early pregnancy. Influence of modernity and oppositional behaviour of their daughters in addition to economic, cultural and religious factors were also identified as the reason for the early marriage of daughters. The benefits and negative implications of early marriage for both parents and their daughters are also discussed. Findings provide insight into understanding parents' motivations and perceptions that impact the practice of child marriage in Ghana.

Keywords: parental involvement; mate selection; child marriage; northern Ghana

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10.1. Introduction

The role of parents in the life of their children is very important for the well-being and development of the child (Casas et al., 2008). Parents provide countless economic and emotional resources which help in the physical, cognitive and psychological development of the child (Ogg & Anthony, 2019). As children mature, it becomes the responsibility of parents to train and socialise them on the skills necessary for their adult life and their integration into the society (Barni, Ranieri, Scabini, & Rosnati, 2011). Literature indicates that parenting practices and the extent of parental involvement are defined by the socio-cultural norms and values of a society (Renzaho, Green, Mellor, & Swinburn, 2011; Nukunya, 2003).

In Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, there is the perception that it takes a community to raise a child and not only the parents. Parents along with extended family and community members help nurture a child into adulthood. Although the community helps in raising a child, parents are important in taking decisions on issues that promote the child's well-being and ensure the initiation of the child into the various rites of passage recognised by the community. Since marriage is perceived as one of those important rites of passage that every individual is expected to experience, parental involvement in the marital processes of their children is very important (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2006; Nukunya, 2003). Although the literature on African marriages indicates a decline in parental influence in the selection of a marriage partner due to modernity, there is an acknowledgement of parental influence on the marital process of their children in some cultures (Takyi, Miller, Kitson, & Oheneba-Sakyi, 2003). Parental influence, however, becomes more crucial in examining the phenomenon of child or early marriages.

Child marriage is the union of individuals in which one or both spouses are below 18 years (John, Edmeades, Murithi, & Barre, 2019). Due to the Universal Declaration of Human

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Rights ([UDHR], 1948), any marriage of an individual below age 18 is considered illegal globally. Despite its illegality, child marriage is practised in Ghana where the incidence rate is 27.2% which increases to 39.6% in northern parts of Ghana. The influence of parents (see Parental role in child marriage) in the practice of child marriage has been reported to be very prominent as without their approval the marriage of their child cannot take place (Tsekpo, Afram, Boateng, & Sefa-Nyarko, 2016; WiLDAF Ghana, 2014).

In attempting to understand the extent of parental involvement in the practice of early marriage, this study explored parents' reasons for marrying off their adolescent daughters early, their emotional reactions to their daughters' marriage and their perceptions of the possible implications of the marriage. Focusing on parental involvement in the practice of child marriage in Ghana helps identify the extent to which parents are involved in the marriage of their daughters as such information will help identify the mechanism and issues that influence the practice of early marriage in Ghana. This information will aid interventionists with the necessary knowledge and understanding in developing interventions that are tailored to engage with extant parental needs and motives that may reinforce them to marry off their daughters early.

10.1.1. Parental role in child marriage.

The role parents play in the early marriage of their children is affected by a confluence of social, cultural, religious and economic factors (African Union, 2015; Greene, Rao, & Perlson, 2015; UNICEF, 2001). In societies where norms on chastity, virginity, premarital sex and marriage are upheld, parents wish to safeguard their daughters from premarital sexual relations that may bring shame and dishonour to the family. In such contexts, parents may pre-emptively marry off their daughters early (Awusabo-Asare, Abane, & Kumi-Kyereme, 2004). In Ghana, for instance, sex is still bound by religious and cultural value systems that prohibit premarital sex while upholding chastity before marriage (Anarfi

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& Owusu, 2011). As premarital sex remains an increasing concern, most Ghanaian parents especially those from conservative religious communities would seek to protect the honour of their adolescent daughters and the family when they approach sexual maturity or are suspected to be sexually active (Osafo, Asampong, Langmagne, & Ahiedeke, 2014).

Poverty is considered to be a seminal factor compelling some parents to marry off their daughters early (Alhassan, 2013; Amoo, 2017). Studies indicate that lack of economic stability in the family and their own impoverished context forces parents to marry off their daughters early to avoid expenses related to education and to relieve parents of the financial burden of caring for a girl which is deemed expensive (Paul, 2019). Additionally, studies suggest that in communities where payment of bridewealth is practised, parents tend to see the opportunity of marrying off their daughters as a way of acquiring wealth (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection [MoGCSP], 2016; UG-CSPS &WVG, 2017). Hence, they encourage their daughters to marry early or pledge them to men for marriage (Alhassan, 2013).

The MoGCSP report (2016) attributes parents' inability to control the behaviours of their children as a cause of child marriage in Ghana. Due to the influence of modernity, changing family patterns and exposure through the media and other social activities, adolescents who may feel the need to explore activities being portrayed in the media may become difficult to manage (Kenny, Koshin, Sulaiman, & Cislaghi, 2019). The engagement of adolescent girls in romantic and sexual activities despite cautions from parents and increasing teenage pregnancy rates may compel some parents to marry off their daughters before they become pregnant. In cases where the daughter does become pregnant, the daughter is married off to the man responsible for the pregnancy (Tsekpo et al., 2016). This makes teenage pregnancy one of the main drivers of child marriage in most parts of Ghana (MoGCSP, 2016).

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Parents' religious beliefs are also reported as an important factor influencing the practice of child marriage. Alhassan's (2013) study conducted in the Northern region of Ghana reports that the religious affiliation and beliefs of parents affected the decision to marry off their daughters early. Muslims and African traditional religion adherents were more likely to marry off their daughters early compared to Christian parents. The reasons for the early marriage of their daughters were due to perceived religious teachings about formal education and chastity before marriage (Alhassan, 2013).

Cultural norms surrounding the benefits and importance of marriage and childbearing are purported to influence parents' and the extended family's decision to marry off their daughters early. In a country like Ghana where marriage and childbirth are believed to confer on the individual and her family respect and honour and associated with economic and social benefits (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2006; Takyi et al., 2003), marrying off a daughter becomes normative for parents and guardians.

Literature examining the views and experiences of parents on the early marriage of their daughters is scant in Ghana. Although several studies (Alhassan, 2013; de Groot et al., 2018; Tsekpo et al., 2016; UG-CSPS &WVG, 2017) exploring the causal factors and possible effects of early marriage on the child and the society have alluded to the influence of parents in the practice of child marriage, there is scant attention given to parental experiences on the causes and implications of child marriage in Ghana. Furthermore, the implications of the early marriage of adolescents on parents are scant since most parents are usually presented as perpetrators of the practice. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by answering questions such as 1) What were parents' reasons for the early marriage of their daughter(s)? 2) What was their reaction to the marriage of their daughter? 3) What is their opinion are some of the consequences or outcomes of the early marriage of their daughter(s)?

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10.2. Method

10.2.1. Research design.

In order to answer the questions raised above, a social constructionist paradigm proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1991) was adopted to understand parents' views on the early marriage of their adolescent daughter(s). The social constructionist paradigm was selected because it aims to explain and describe the processes by which individuals understand the world in which they live based on their own experiences of the world and their social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Using the social constructionist lens, therefore, helped the authors understand how parents experienced the early marriage of their daughters within their context. Specifically, an exploratory qualitative research design was chosen since it provides the researchers with the opportunity to examine the views and experiences of participants about the phenomenon that has not been studied in depth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

10.2.2. Research setting and participants.

The research setting was the Northern region of Ghana (Tamale metropolis, Mion and Tolon districts) where the rates of child marriage are reported to be highest in the country (Ghana Demographic Health Survey [GDHS], 2014). Using snowballing, purposeful and convenient sampling, eight parents whose daughter(s) have been married for at least one year and have lived in the research setting were selected to partake in the study. Demographic variables indicated that all participants had no formal education, were Dagomba and Muslim which is reflective of the dominant ethnic group (Dagomba) and religion in the region (Islam, Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2010). Participants were self-employed or engaged in farming as the main occupation. Half of the participants did not remember their age or were unsure of it. Of the eight participants, there was only one male due to fathers' unavailability

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during data collection in the day time. All participants had at least one daughter who had married early with the youngest daughter marrying at 11 years and the oldest marrying at 16 years.

10.2.3. Procedure and ethical considerations.

The research and ethics committee of Stellenbosch University granted ethical approval for this study (SU-HSD-004745). In addition, permission was obtained from the Department of Social Welfare in the Northern region of Ghana given their constitutional mandate to handle all affairs involving vulnerable children (married girls) in the region. After obtaining the necessary permissions and approval, a research assistant (HB) who is a native of the research setting and was a graduate student of psychology was recruited to assist the first author (EAS) with translation, data collection and transcription. Participant recruitment followed the aforementioned procedures.

Parents of married girls were selected with the help of married girls (who were interviewed for a broader study on the practice of child marriage in Ghana) and gatekeepers (individuals who facilitated our entry into the communities). Before recruiting parents, married girls were engaged in a discussion to ascertain the possible consequences they felt the recruitment of their parents could incur. Only married girls who felt recruiting their parents were inconsequential recruited their own parents for the study. Gatekeepers also assisted by, identifying parents in the communities who conformed to the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study, and introduced EAS and HB to the identified parents. Identified parents were approached and briefed on the nature and purpose of the study after which their verbal consent was sought. All interviews were audiotaped (average duration of 40 minutes) with participants' permission and conducted in their homes.

The main ethical issues of concern in this study were the maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity and this was ensured by removing all personal information that

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participants could be identified by and replacing them with pseudonyms. Participants were assured they could withdraw their participation at any stage in the research. A token amount of ₵20.00 (equivalent to $4.81) was given to participants to compensate for their time at the end of the interview.

10.2.4. Data analysis.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim into Dagbani and were back-translated into English by an independent linguist to ensure accurate and consistent presentations of the data. After data transcription, all the data were analysed using the ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software (v.8.3, Friese, 2018; Muhr, 1991, 1997). The steps for the Generic Inductive Qualitative Analysis (GIQA) approach proposed by Thomas (2006) were followed to analyse the data collected. The GIQA method allows the inductive extraction of categories and interpretations from the data from the perspectives of participants.

The first step of the analysis is the familiarisation with and preparation of the transcripts for analysis. This was achieved by reading the transcripts to determine the main views presented by participants. The second phase involved the line by line coding of the data which helped in the generation of codes that are close views presented by participant instead of the imposition of researchers' ideas on the data (Charmaz, 2006). Subsequently, the third step, which is the identification, connection and naming of similar codes and placing them into categories was pursued. The fourth step, which involves the recoding and regrouping of codes into themes was conducted. Axial coding techniques proposed by Charmaz (2006) were used at this point to aid in the analysis of the data. Axial coding was done by sorting and linking categories into subthemes and themes. The second and third authors checked themes and interpretations of the data developed by the first author for inconsistencies and accurate presentation of participants' narratives.

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After conducting the data analysis, five core themes were identified based on parents' reasons for the early marriage of their daughters and two themes for their perceptions of the impact of early marriage on the well-being of their daughters. Their emotional reactions to the early marriage of their daughters are also discussed.

10.3. Findings

Findings from parents' experiences with the early marriage of their daughters have been categorised into three main themes: reasons for early marriage, emotional response to marriage and perceived impact of early marriage on the well-being of their daughters. These themes are discussed in details below.

10.3.1. Reasons for early marriage.

Findings indicated that most parents appeared to blame their daughters for their early marriage. Parents' accounts of the reasons for the early marriage of their daughters have been differentiated under the following subthemes: daughter's choice, early pregnancy, the influence of modernity and oppositional behaviour of the youth, socio-cultural and religious factors, and economic limitations.

10.3.1.1. Daughter's choice-Who has the power/authority?

Analysis of findings revealed that some parents blamed their daughters for their early marriage mentioning that the children themselves wanted to get married. Their child's choice to marry early sometimes made parents feel powerless since a daughter who had made the choice to marry was likely to get pregnant to compel her parents to marry her off. Other reasons reflecting power dynamics and decision making between a mother and father regarding the child's future and welfare seemed to play an important role in the marriage of an adolescent girl. Abiba, whose daughter married at 12 years, said she could not prevent her daughter's marriage for two reasons. Firstly, she emphasised that she is a woman and

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culturally "*does not own a child*" and, therefore, left the decision for her daughter's marriage to her husband and her child. Her inability to exert her power as a parent on the decision/choice of her daughter was enabled by her perceptions of the cultural values on child ownership and inheritance practised among the patrilineal society she belongs. Secondly, she indicated that her daughter, though very young, refused her remonstrations and advice for her to complete her education and insisted on marrying the man she loved. She, therefore, felt compelled to allow her to marry which is evident in her conversation with HB.

> Abiba: "Yes. So I told her she was young but she refused and said she loved him so I allowed her to get married (laughs)."
> HB: "She refused?"
> Abiba: "She refused and I told her fine that is left onto her, and her father to make that decision because a woman doesn't own a child... Because it was school that I had rather wanted her to attend and she refused and wanted to get married, definitely I had to let her marry." (Abiba, female, trader)

Abiba's account demonstrates the lack of women's authority or power on decision making in the life of their children which may be a reflection of the cultural concept of the child belonging to, and in some cases being own by her/his father and his patriclan. Her daughter's refusal to adhere to her mother's advice and objections also present an issue on the authority of parents in the life of their children. Although children are viewed as individuals without power in the communities where the data for this study was collected, Abiba's account depicts the changing social position of the child in the family with the child asserting more in control of decisions regarding her future and well-being. In line with the changing power dynamics between the child and her parents, Abu echoes Abiba's lack of authority or power over his 11 year old daughter's decision to marry early when he reflects on how his daughter's marriage came about. According to him, his daughter wanted to marry and he could not object to her marriage.

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> "No. it is not like that. She was the one that wanted to be with the man so she brought him to ask for her hand in marriage. So there is no way we could have said no." (Abu, male, security guard)

10.3.1.2. Early pregnancy.

In relation to the above assertion, early pregnancy was presented as a powerful tool for adolescent girls to compel their parents to allow them to marry when they felt they were ready to enter marriage. More than half of parents interviewed in this study mentioned that they married off their daughter because they had gotten pregnant and perceived marriage as the only alternative solution to early pregnancy. This perception was grounded on several cultural and religious reasons which are explained below.

One reason for the early marriage of adolescent girls is the cultural and religious norms surrounding marriage, pregnancy and child ownership. Participant accounts revealed a social perception that when a man impregnates a woman she automatically becomes his wife even when the man has not performed the customary and religious rites that are culturally believed to signify the marriage contract. Mariama (female, Potter/Rice refiner) who after finding out that her daughter had been impregnated opted to send her daughter to the man responsible for the pregnancy. She explains that should a parent's daughter get pregnant "you tell her [daughter] to take the pregnancy to her husband's house. What else can you do?" Her question at the end of her statement indicates that for her, the only choice was to send the pregnancy (unborn child) to the man who impregnated her daughter.

Perceiving the man responsible for the pregnancy as the husband also portrays another dimension of power. As indicated in the preceding section, children were believed to belong to their fathers and their patriclan. A man who impregnates a girl is believed to own the unborn child since he fathered the child. Although parents may have authority over their pregnant daughter, they may not have the authority over her unborn child. As portrayed by

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Mariama, although parents may choose to send the pregnancy to the perceived owner, more often than not send the pregnant girl to the man responsible. The choice to send the pregnancy to the 'owner' (responsible for the pregnancy) is complicated by the fact that because the girl carries the pregnancy, she can't take 'the man's property/unborn child to him' without her going along with it.

> "Since it happens that she has identified the owner [man responsible for her pregnancy], I have nothing to do about it, so I told her to give the owner what belongs to him. In this case, I asked her to learn what will be useful to her life tomorrow and she refused. Now that she has refused, I have told her to take her thing [the pregnancy] home and give the man's thing to him. That was what I told her." (Jamila, female, shea butter processor)

For Jamila, deciding to send her daughter to the house of the man who impregnated her was borne out of frustrations with and lack of control over her daughter's pregnancy and unborn child. Her decision may also be fuelled by the perceived shame of an out of wedlock pregnancy, religious and economic challenges among other reasons which are discussed in the ensuing sections of this article.

Amina's experience also resonates with Jamila and Mariama's views. She indicates that, although they (Amina and her husband) had initially sent their daughter to the man responsible for her pregnancy for marriage, they could only go back for her to complete her education before marrying when the grandchild died after delivery. The death of their daughter's infant propelled them to go back for their daughter since her intended husband no longer had any claim over her infant:

> "When he asked her who impregnated her and she told him, they took her to his house… Aaye! She gave birth and the baby died... Her father told them [intended husband and his family] that his daughter is not ready for marriage and so they should give her back to him to see her through school. Yes. She has gone back to school." (Amina, female, unemployed)

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10.3.1.3. Influence of modernity and oppositional youth.

Teenage pregnancy and the daughter's choice to marry were reported to be a result of the children being difficult, oppositional, refusing to listen to advice from parents and their exposure to modern influence. Parents appear to blame the behaviour of the younger generation for early marriage. As indicated by Rashida (see quote below), the current adolescent generation does not 'fear men' and does not listen to advice from their parents and elderly in society.

> "…today's children do not fear men, we used to fear men a lot. But today, if you sit a child down to advise her concerning that, she will not listen because these things that are there today, they were not there during our time. You and her will just be sitting and her phone will ring and she will get up and leave without returning." (Rashida, female, trader)

This current generation's seeming refusal to listen to parental and elderly advice appeared to be linked to their non-compliance with existing social norms on premarital sex - their lack of 'fear of men' is believed to have led adolescent girls into livelihoods and activities that cause them to get pregnant and eventually get married early.

> "No. I put her in school, while she was in school I warned her with every bit of advice because I told her that honestly I don't have and your father too doesn't have... It was left with 2 years…no, that year that they were going to write in JHS and she got pregnant…Yes. She took the pregnancy to her husband's house and gave birth and brought the child back home." (Nafisa, female, farmer)

Nafisa (see quote above) shared her experience with her daughter and recounts that, despite her repeated advice and warning for her daughter to focus on her education, she became pregnant. When she realised that her daughter had gotten pregnant, she felt helpless and sent her daughter away to marry the man responsible for the pregnancy.

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10.3.1.4. Sociocultural and religious factors.

The influence of extended family members in the marriage of a girl is also reported to be one of the reasons influencing the early marriage of adolescent girls. Azara (see excerpt below) explains that, though she initially did not agree to the marriage of her adolescent daughter, she had to consent to her early marriage due to the advice she received from her extended family and her personal need of belonging (not being ostracised) to a family.

> "Yes. So because she was going to school, I said I won't agree and it caused some misunderstandings. Then my fathers [elders of the family] said now, I should remove myself from the matter and allow her to marry, that if that is her destined place to be, it will be a blessing to the family. So that I should be patient and also give my approval and be happy for her and that man. She got married to him and stayed with him... You know that everyone wants to feel belonged and part of a family, so because my people said that, I listened to them." (Azara, female, farmer)

Embedded in Azara's statement are beliefs in destiny and marriage being a blessing from God to the family. These beliefs seem to play an important role in the decision of the family to allow the early marriage of their adolescent daughter. Participants' perceived marriage brings benefit to the entire family of the married individual and maybe one of the enabling factors for the early marriage of some adolescent girls. Additionally, the process of getting pregnant by a particular man is explained as the expression of destiny by the family. When such a situation happens inhibiting the marriage may mean preventing the blessings of the adolescent girl. Preventing an adolescent girl from marrying the man who impregnated her was also believed to be a sin on the part of parents against God as recounted in Nafisa's account.

> "For someone, it is by the grace of God, she can be interested in a man but if she is not lucky with men, she will find it difficult to get a man. One can also be there and is very young and God will bless her with luck concerning men, and she will be very young but is able to get married." (Nafisa, female, farmer)

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Nafisa's statement may be a reflection of cultural and religious values and norms that place the man as the owner of an unborn child whose property when taken from him is perceived as a sin. Moreover, early marriage was perceived as a blessing from God since the ability of a child to find a man was perceived as luck on her part to find a suitable man for marriage early. Finding a suitable man at an early age meant suitability for marriage as expressed by Nafisa.

> "…So we left it (pregnancy) until it came out and I told her father and they took her to her husband's house. Because the young man is an orphan….his uncle is an Imam and he told us that...it (preventing the marriage) will be sinning against God. So we allowed her to go to her husband's house and gave birth…" (Nafisa, female, farmer)

Another reason given by parents for the early marriage of adolescent girls was idleness. There was the perception that when a girl is perceived to be matured enough to marry and not engaged in an activity (education or skills training) she is likely to engage in immoral acts. Marrying her off early is regarded as the best option for parents to prevent their children from engaging in immoral activities.

> "but she has no work doing and knows that now she is ready for marriage, and she doesn't marry, definitely she will be sitting like that and eventually end up in engaging in immoral acts." (Azara, female, farmer)

10.3.1.5. Economic limitations.

Economic difficulties were reported to be one of the prominent reasons that influenced some participants to marry off their daughters. Accounts indicated that when the parents are not able to provide for the basic needs of their children, marrying off their daughters at a young age becomes a viable option as it reduces the burden of catering for those daughters especially if they had been impregnated.

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> Nafisa: "Because she had a child and I didn't have, and when the fees came it was ₵700 ($130) which I couldn't afford so I made her stop [schooling] because I don't have and her father, too, doesn't have and we don't also have anyone to pay that amount for us. I then asked her to stop school because I cannot afford…"
> HB: "So because of that you allowed her to get married?"
> Nafisa: "Yes." (Nafisa, female, farmer)

When children, especially daughters, are perceived as burdens, parents appear to encourage them to marry early or find a job which then converts them into a means to support the livelihood of parents and the entire family. Findings further indicated that in encouraging their children into marriage parents are usually not sure of the outcome and only hope that the marriage will be beneficial to their daughters and them. Jamila explains this assertion when she says

> "…when you are still looking at the mother and father, it is a source of worry to them. But if you look for livelihood, it is a source of happiness to them. If you go there (matrimonial home) and it turns out to be where you belong, God will place a stone on your heart and you will remain there and give birth..." (Jamila, female, shea butter processor)

10.3.2. Parents' emotional response to marriage.

Parents' emotional reactions to the early marriage of their daughters were mixed and were dependent on the circumstances surrounding the marriage as well as parents' plans for the future of their daughters. Some parents reported feeling happy about the marriage of their child because their child had found love, a life partner and fulfilling her purpose in life.

> "Yes. We were happy because you cannot be unhappy. Why do I say this? You give birth to a child in order to also get married, isn't it? And both of them loved each other so when she was leaving, we were happy about it. There is no way we could say we are not happy about it." (Abu, male, security guard)

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Others reported having mixed feelings about the marriage of their daughters as explained in Abiba's case.

> "Okay, I was happy because even if I am not happy I have to be. Because it was school that I rather wanted her to attend and she refused and wanted to get married, definitely I had to let her marry. I then made up my mind to be happy and let her get married." (Abiba, female, trader)

Experiencing mixed feelings about a daughter's marriage appears to emanate from parents preferred life course choice for their daughters. When children chose to marry despite their parents' plans for them to complete their education, they decided to accept and be contented for their children since marriage was a life they had chosen. Some parents also expressed feeling hurt, sad, anxious and depressed by the pregnancy of their daughters which strongly influenced them to marry them off even though they had hoped for them to complete their education.

> "As for the child (my daughter), she has really hurt me badly. Your mother has never cried and cried till her tears stop. My child, as if you knew! It is the distress that has made me… the girl makes me anxious and depressed...I thought I was blessed till she got pregnant…. This alone troubles the mother…." (Rashida, female, trader)

Other parents reported feeling angry about their daughters' pregnancy and subsequent marriage. As a result, some parents beat up their daughters before sending them off to their matrimonial homes.

> "Yes. She wasn't getting married at that time, it was because of it (the pregnancy) and her father beat her up and took her to her husband's house." (Amina, female, unemployed)

Punishment was usually meted out to show their disapproval of their daughters' actions and in some cases their sense of helplessness.

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10.3.3. Perceived implications of early marriage.

Following the reasons given by parents for the marriage of their daughters, their views on the possible implications of their daughters' marriage were explored to determine whether they felt their daughter's marriage had any implications for their daughters and themselves. Findings reflected parents' perceived benefits and concerns of their daughters marrying at an early age.

10.3.3.1. Perceived benefits.

The benefits of early marriage were viewed as either socially or economically defined. The acquisition of children and respect are perceived to be benefits of early marriage and are linked to sociocultural expectations of society. Economic benefits are linked to relief from economic responsibilities and receiving financial support from married daughters.

Social benefits. Respect was a perceived benefit of early marriage based on the accounts of parents of the married girls. Marriage is perceived to elevate the status of the family, in addition, to conferring respect and honour on the married girl since marriage is an important and prestigious institution in society.

> "If you are ready for marriage but still in your father's house, your respect decreases…am I lying? Because every child who doesn't respect you, when you are married they tend to respect you." (Abiba, no age. Trader)

The birth of children was also reported to be a major benefit of the early marriage of adolescent girls. Being grandparents was a source of pride for most parents of adolescent girls who had married and given birth, according to Mariama. This is expressed in her statement

> "… now she too has married and has given birth, in that case, the benefit is coming from the children. Yes, and I also get grandchildren. Yes!" (Mariama, female, Potter/Rice refiner)

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In addition to being grandparents, their grandchildren were also a source of pride for their daughters since they (grandchildren) were perceived to be economically valuable and were expected to grow into adults and take care of their parents. Nafisa explains:

> "God will bless you with prosperous children and you can also look at him one day and be proud. And he too will look after you tomorrow and be pleased. That is the benefits of it." (Nafisa, female, farmer)

Economic benefits. This benefit reflected the economic reasons for marrying daughters in addition to the perceived benefits of children as offspring. There was confirmation that parents married off their daughters because they were perceived to be an economic burden on the family and were therefore sent off into early marriage or converted into a source of livelihood for the upkeep of parents and the family. Converting their daughters into a means of livelihood meant marrying them to a man who then assumes the responsibility of catering for her thereby relieving parents of their responsibilities. Nafisa explains this in the following statement:

> "She, too, when she gets married into a home and sits at one place, it is beneficial. If she has no work doing and is married, it has benefits. Now she has someone who owns her in addition to her parents owning her but if she is married, you are no longer responsible for her. It is now the man that will take responsibility for her. Those ones that you are also responsible for, when it comes then you can also take it. That is also beneficial and what she too will go and produce and it will also take care of her tomorrow." (Nafisa, female, farmer)

Other benefits highlighted by Nafisa in the statement above is the fact that marriage controls an adolescent girl's interaction with men and prevents engaging in amorous behaviours as "sitting at one place" signifies the inability of the adolescent girls to engage with other men. Parents benefitted from their daughters' marriage by receiving monies for their upkeep from their married adolescent daughters.

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> "Ooi! The benefits of marriage, I see them. It is very useful and important. Just recently, I was sitting when she called me and said, 'Mma, I am going to send you money for your upkeep' and I told her 'God will bless you with more of this' and I went to retrieve the money." (Rashida, 50 years, Trader)

10.3.3.2. Perceived disadvantages.

The disadvantages of the early marriage of the adolescent girls reported by their parents include a change in their relationship with their daughters, the impeding of education and skills acquisition of the married girls and negative psychological implications.

Change in relationship. Some parents reported that the marriage of their daughters has brought a change in their relationship due to either their daughters living far from them or have become busy due to marital responsibilities.

> "Now that she has two more children in addition to these ones, they have become many (laughs). The children have made her so busy that she doesn't get time to come and pay me visits anymore." (Abiba, female, trader)

Impeding of education and skills acquisition. Early marriage, according to some parents, halts the education and the possibility of their daughters acquiring skills that may have been beneficial for their future wellbeing. Reports indicate that they become solely dependent on their husband who may not be providing the help and basic needs of their daughters and grandchildren.

> "What I would say is that they should look after and monitor their children very well because early marriage cuts away their opportunity to find work and earn a living." (Abu, male, security guard)

Psychological implications. Although most parents did relate any form of distress due to the early marriage of their daughters, some parents' perspectives on the impact of early

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marriage indicated that their daughters were experiencing some form of psychological distress.

> "… if you are not ready for marriage and you go into it, it will be a problem for you. That is the problem she was facing because she isn't ready for marriage…eihin…and the boy, too, cannot take care of her." (Amina, female, unemployed)

Accounts of psychological distress were as a result of daughters' immaturity for marriage, expected responsibilities in marriage, catering for children, and daughters' unmet marriage expectations are reported by parents.

10.4. Discussion of findings

The main themes that emerged from the parents' views and experiences on the early marriage of their daughters focused on their reasons for marrying off their daughters early, their reactions to and perceived implications of the marriage of early marriage of their adolescent girls.

The literature on the reasons for the practice of child marriage in Ghana corresponds with parents' motives for the early marriage of their daughters in this study. One of the primary reasons presented by parents was displaced to the child (i.e., it was choice of the adolescent girl to marry, marriage due to early pregnancy, and oppositional behaviour of the new generation). A review of studies conducted on child marriage in Ghana revealed similar child-driven causes of early marriage (MoGCSP, 2016; Tsekpo et al., 2016; UG-CSPS &WVG, 2017). These child-driven causes were reported to depict parental neglect due to perceived parental inability to provide the basic needs of the children which then caused the children to enter into marriages to satisfy those basic needs (UG-CSPS &WVG, 2017). Parents were blamed for the early marriage of their daughters with most studies reporting that some children were forced into those marriages (African Union, 2015; Alhassan, 2013).

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Findings in this study, however, seem to present an interplay of power dynamics between parents, their children and the cultural norms in the communities where the study was conducted. Although children in communities where child marriage is practised have been portrayed as powerless in deciding who and whether or not to marry (Alhassan, 2013), findings reveal some parents' lack of control over their daughters' decision to marry. Some children were depicted as having more control over the decision to get married as they are reported to use pregnancy as a tool to force their parents into marrying them off. Cultural norms on patrilineal inheritance and the child belonging to the patriclan were reported to render mothers powerless when it comes to making important decisions pertaining to the well-being of their children. Those same cultural norms also forced parents to marry off their daughters to the men who impregnated them since the unborn child was perceived to belong to the man who impregnated the adolescent girl.

Other major reasons for early marriage mentioned by parents were grounded in the cultural and religious beliefs surrounding marriage and sexuality in their communities. Cultural and religious beliefs surrounding marriage have been reported to be a major cause for the practice of child marriage. Social rules on virginity, chastity and honour as well as perceptions on the importance of marriage and childbearing to the individual and their families are some causal factors for the practice of child marriage (African Union, 2015; Greene, Rao, & Perlson, 2015; UNICEF, 2001).

Perceived implications of early marriage reported by participants revealed that early marriage had benefits for the married girl and her parents. Benefits mentioned by parents were procreation, respect and the economic benefits the parents and the married adolescent girl attained. Literature on the perceived benefits that drive parents to marry off their adolescent girls has listed procreation and the continuity of the family, respect and economic

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gains among other perceived benefits (African Union, 2015; Alhassan, 2013; WiLDAF Ghana, 2014).

Although parents were able to report benefits of early marriage, some acknowledged that there were negative implications for the adolescent girl as well. Some negative implications of the practice included the truncation of the education of adolescent girls that prevents the acquisition of knowledge and skills needed for personal development, management of the home and the generation of income (Nguyen & Wodon, 2012; Psaki, 2014). Possible psychological effects on the adolescent girls identified by parents included sadness, depression and stress which were consistent with existing literature (Gage, 2013; John, Edmeades, & Murithi, 2019; Le Strat, Dubertret, & Le Foll, 2011). Most of the parents in this study also reported experiencing negative emotions such as sadness, hopelessness, frustrations, and feelings of hurt by the actions of their children among others. These negative emotions may likely have negative consequences for their psychological health. Consistent with previous research (Gyesaw & Ankomah, 2013) even though some parents did not accept their daughter's decision to marry early, they were compelled to accept the child's decision especially when pregnancy was involved. Accepting the marriage may be the parents' way to cope with hurt and disappointment of the early pregnancy and the consequent marriage of their daughters.

10.4.1. Recommendations and limitations.

Following the findings of the study, we suggest that interventions that focus on providing parents with the relevant skills within their cultural context that are needed to manage their adolescent children would be beneficial for parents and their children. Furthermore, government organisations and interventionists can organise skills training workshops especially for parents who are unemployed and are facing economic difficulties on how to utilise raw materials and resources within their immediate environment to generate

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income. By doing this, parents will be equipped with skills which may help them engage in some form of income-generating activity in order to cater to the needs of their children. In addition to the skills training workshops, parents can be trained in financial management and allocation of family income and resources in order to aid them with the management of the family's resources. This may help prevent the early marriage of their daughters since some parents seem compelled to marry their daughters off for economic gains. Educating parents on pursuing different avenues for dealing with early pregnancy should be implemented by the government and organisations working towards the eradication of early marriage.

Although religion is reported as a contributing influence on early marriage, it could also be harnessed as a means to eliminate the practice. Findings in this study indicated strong religious beliefs surrounding the practice. Religious leaders can be recruited by the government and organisations working to prevent early marriage to educate the population against the practice of early marriage. By encouraging discussions about early marriage in religious spaces, religious leaders can also educate parents on ways to mentor their children and encourage them to pursue education instead of marriage since all participants adhered to a religious faith and frequently attended religious functions. The reduction of poverty is also important for the prevention of child marriage. Government programmes such as Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme in poor communities can serve as a viable alternative to prevent parents from marrying off their daughters at an early age.

An inherent limitation of the study is the small sample size selected for the study with all participants being Dagomba and Muslims and seven out of eight being females. Limited time, resources and access issues did not allow for the recruitment of a more diverse and gender-balanced sample. A study that recruits parents from diverse backgrounds and either gender-specific or gender-balanced samples will likely present a much broader and nuanced

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picture of the perspectives and experience of child marriage from the perspective of the parents of married girls.

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Chapter 11

Manuscript 6

Title: Working with married girls: The experiences of professionals on the causes, impact and interventions of child marriage

Authors: Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo, Joana Salifu Yendork and Anthony Vernon Naidoo

Abstract: The prevalence of child marriage in Ghana has declined over the past decade. This may be due to the efforts of organisations working to curb the practice. This paper presents the perceptions of nine staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations in the Northern region of Ghana who work to prevent and reduce the impact of child marriage in practising communities. Participants were purposefully and conveniently sampled and engaged in a focused group discussion on their perceptions of child marriage and experiences in working with married girls. Analysis of data revealed that child marriage was perceived to be caused by lack of parental control, in addition to other child-driven and sociocultural factors. Findings also indicated that interventions were being implemented at the primary and secondary levels. The challenges that prevent the success of those interventions and recommendations for improving the intervention for the community and affected girls are discussed.

Keywords: child marriage, northern Ghana, professionals, interventions

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11.1. Introduction

Child marriage, defined as any union (formal or informal) where one or both partners are under 18 years, is increasingly being recognised as a serious problem by national and international communities (Lee-Rife, Malhotra, Warner, & Glinski, 2012). Globally, 650 million women alive today were married under 18 years (UNICEF, 2018) and about 250 million were married before turning 15 years (Prameswari & Agustin, 2018). Although reports indicate a decline in the prevalence of child marriage worldwide, the practice is still prevalent in North and sub-Saharan Africa where rates of child marriage approximate one in three women (UNICEF, 2018).

In Ghana, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey [MICS] conducted in 2018 reports a decline (7.9%) in the prevalence of child marriage between 2014 and 2018. Efforts to reduce the prevalence in Ghana are being spearheaded by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection which launched an Ending Child Marriage Campaign in 2014 (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection [MoGCSP], 2016). Furthermore, a ten-year national strategic plan to eliminate the practice of child marriage was developed by the MoGCSP in 2016. This strategic programme sought to collaborate with government, international and non-profit organisations working to end the practice in Ghana (MoGCSP, 2016). While the efforts of these government organisations and institutions have helped reduce the prevalence of child marriage in Ghana, the practice persists with wide ranging consequences for the female spouses. The experiences of individuals who work at grassroots levels to implement the policies and interventions can help explicate the phenomenon and inform initiatives to refocus those interventions already being implemented. This article forms part of the doctoral dissertation of the first author which focuses on understanding the practice of child marriage from the perspectives of key stakeholders (married adolescent girls, their parents, community

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elders and professionals working with married girls) on the socio-cultural and economic causes and possible implications of the practice on married adolescent girls.

11.1.1. Causes and impact of child marriage

Child marriage in Ghana is caused by a myriad of factors which include gender inequality, poverty, teenage pregnancy, cultural practices and norms, poor parenting and poor enforcement of the law among others. Poverty, which is one of the major causes of child marriage in Ghana (Alhassan, 2013), is reported to influence parents' decision to marry off their daughters early and adolescent girls' decision to marry early (Tsekpo, Afram, Boateng, & Sefa-Nyarko, 2016; UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017). Parents' decision to marry off their daughters may be a result of their inability to provide for their daughters' basic, financial and educational needs or help them acquire skills and knowledge to secure their future (UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017). Child-driven factors such as engagement in illicit sexual behaviours, succumbing to peer pressures, pursuing or aspiring for better living conditions have been reported to be antecedents to early pregnancy and marriage (MoGCSP, 2016; Tsekpo et al., 2016).

Other antecedents of child marriage reported include cultural practices and norms that support gender inequality, early marriage, high fertility, virginity before marriage among others (Sabbe et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2001). These cultural practices sometimes lead to disregard for laws prohibiting the practice of early marriage by parents, community elders and leaders (African Union, 2015) thereby perpetuating the practice. In other instances, the ignorance of the laws prohibiting the marriage of children has also been reported to influence the practice of child marriage.

Child marriage has been reported to have severe impact on its victims, their children and the society. Most studies (de Groot et al., 2018; Parsons et al., 2015; Raj, Gomez, & Silverman, 2014) report negative effects of child marriage that include the violation of the

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victims' rights, physical, mental health, economic and educational implications for the individual and the society. While having no education is reported to lead to the early marriage of some individuals, child marriage has also been reported to alter or end the educational trajectory of affected individuals (Paul, 2019; Steinhaus et al., 2016). Girls who are married off early are less likely to be sent back to school when they are pulled out and married off due to marital demands (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008).

Studies (Alhassan 2013; Parsons et al., 2015) have indicated that early marriage renders most married girls economically vulnerable due to their lack of access to work and livelihood opportunities which makes them solely dependent on their husbands and in-laws (Nguyen & Wodon, 2012). Additionally, child marriage has physical and mental health implications for married girls. Physically, Nour (2009) and Hampton (2010) have reported health implications such as sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy complications and higher child and maternal mortality rates. These implications may result from their underdeveloped reproductive systems, possible exposure to sexual and physical abuse and ignorance on the management of pregnancy and its related impact (Raj et al., 2010).

For their psychological health, studies (Gage, 2013; John, Edmeades & Murithi, 2019; Le Strat et al., 2011) have reported implications such as depression, suicidal ideation, social isolation and low self-esteem for girls who were married early. Victims are reported to be socially isolated from social support systems such as friends and family among others they may need for their emotional wellbeing (John et al., 2019).

11.1.2. Interventions

In view of the known implications of child marriage, several interventions are being implemented globally to end child marriage and reduce its impact on affected individuals. Most of these interventions and preventive measures implemented in low-income countries include programmes that empower girls with information and skills and provide support

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networks and systems for girls who were assessed to be at risk of child marriage (Amin, 2007; Shahnaz & Karim, 2008). Other interventions aimed to educate parents and community members on their role in the practice of child marriage and its implications for the well-being of affected individuals (Brady et al., 2007; Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009). These community education programmes also seek to change social norms and ideologies that influence the practice of child marriage.

With education being identified as strongly associated with the delay of early marriage (Steinhaus et al., 2016), programmes that enhance girls' access to education and keep them in school are also being implemented. These programmes focused on supporting enrolment and re-enrolment of girls into school and providing girls with items they need to stay in school (Lee-Rife et al., 2012). The provision of economic incentives and/or increasing parents' and girls' economic resources are other types of interventions being implemented to end the practice of child marriage (Baird, Chirwa, McIntosh, & Ozler, 2010). These programmes (see Baird, McIntosh, & Özler, 2011; Kalamar, Lee-Rife, & Hindin, 2016) target the economic causes of child marriage by providing parents and girls with alternative ways of generating income thereby preventing the likelihood of parents or adolescent girls from engaging in child marriage practices. Reports also reveal programmes that focus on strengthening and enforcing laws preventing child marriage by holding the government and other state institutions accountable (Lee-Rife et al., 2012).

Literature on the implementation of interventions to engage with child marriage in Ghana is scarce. A review of literature (Alhassan, 2013; de Groot et al., 2018; Tsekpo et al., 2016) has indicated a focus on the causes and effects of child marriage with few studies (UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017) reporting institutional responses to interventions being implemented to end child marriage in Ghana. In view of the scarcity of literature on interventions being implemented in Ghana in relation to child marriage, this study explored the views of

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professionals who work to reduce the practice of child marriage in Ghanaian communities. The perceptions and experiences of these professionals are needed to ascertain the antecedents contributing to and magnitude of the work being done in communities that practice child marriage. In working with married girls, their parents and other stakeholders in communities, these workers are engaging with the underbelly of child marriages and are able to identify the core issues that contribute and maintain the practice. Their observations and experiences are crucial to designing informed services and intervention that will mitigate the impact of early marriage practise on one hand, and help design upstream policies and interventions focused on preventing, reducing and eradicating the practice.

11.2. Method

11.2.1. Research design

In order to achieve the aims of this study, a social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) was adopted to provide the framework from which this phenomenon can be understood. Social constructionist perspective allows the researcher to explore and understand individuals' experiences of a particular phenomenon which is believed to influence their perceptions of the phenomenon. Based on this framework, an explorative qualitative research design was employed using focus group discussion as the means for data collection. Focus group discussion provided the researchers with an avenue to gather data from a number of individuals (nine) at the same time while it provided participants with the platform to discuss their experiences, feelings and perspectives in a socially stimulated atmosphere (Rabiee, 2004).

11.2.2. Research setting and participants

Nine participants were selected from three districts (Tolon, Mion and Tamale) in the Northern region of Ghana where they work with organisations focusing on issues related to

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child marriage. The Northern region was selected for this study based on reports of the Ghana Demographic Health Survey (2014) and the MICS (2018) of the region having one of the highest prevalence of child marriage in Ghana.

Participants were recruited using convenient and purposeful sampling techniques. The criteria for participant selection were that the participant should have worked with married girls in the Northern region for at least two years, and was willing to consent to participate in a focus group discussion at the time of data collection. Six of the nine participants recruited for the focus group discussion were staffs of NGOs, three were staffs of governmental organisations in the district. Three of the participants were females while six were males.

11.2.3. Data collection procedure and ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the research and ethics committee of Stellenbosch University (SU-HSD-004745). After obtaining necessary approvals, participants were recruited with the help of a gatekeeper in the Mion district. Having worked in the region for years, the gatekeeper identified individuals who work with married girls and were well informed on issues relating to the practice of child marriage in the districts. These individuals were then introduced to the first author (EAS) for a discussion on the purpose of the study, ascertain whether they conformed to the selection criteria and determine their willingness to participate in the study. Individuals who consented to take part in the study were given the designated time and place in the Mion district where the group discussion was to be conducted.

All participants were briefed at the beginning of the data collection on the study purpose and their rights as participants. Some of the issues they were briefed on pertained to their right to withdraw their participation from the study at any stage of the research, the protection of their identity through the removal of all information that may undermine their anonymity. In order to protect their anonymity, the first author (EAS) with the help of the

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gatekeeper secured a room within a district office complex prior to data collection where the focus group discussion was conducted. The room provided an atmosphere of privacy for participants and was free from distractions.

Data collection commenced once the participants indicated that they understood the purpose of the study, were reassured that their rights as participants were protected, provided their consent to participate in the study and for the discussion to be audio recorded. EAS then discussed the questions that had been prepared with the second and third authors with the participants. Some of the questions discussed explored participants' perception of child marriage, the various interventions being implemented by the organisations for married girls, the challenges they encountered in implementing interventions among others. The focus group discussion lasted two hours and two minutes. At the end of the data collection process, participants received an amount of ₵20.00 (equivalent to $4.81 at the time of the study) as compensation for their time and travel expenses.

11.2.4. Data analysis

The audio-taped discussions were transcribed verbatim by EAS and were uploaded into the ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software (v.8.3, Friese, 2018; Muhr, 1997) for analyses. Thomas' (2006) generic inductive analysis techniques were utilised to analyse the transcribed data. As part of the first step in the analysis, EAS read through the transcript to familiarise herself with ideas that were emerging from the data. In order to stay close to the data, the line-by-line and in-vivo coding techniques were utilised in the coding of the data for the second step in the analysis. For the third step, the codes were grouped into categories and labelled. Grouping of the codes was done by connecting, grouping and labelling codes that were similar and described the same issue into categories and themes. Important codes that did not fall under any category were also labelled. Charmaz's (2006) focused coding technique aided this process.

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After categorisation, the fourth step which involves the rereading, recoding and regrouping of overlapping codes into themes helped reduce redundancies among the themes. Here, axial coding techniques proposed by Charmaz (2006) were employed and aided in the sorting, regrouping and linking categories into themes and subthemes. All themes and subthemes were reviewed by the co-authors which helped in the meaningful presentation and validation of the findings. The themes and subthemes identified after analysis are discussed in the ensuing section.

11.3. Findings

Findings from the analysis of data have been categorised into three broad themes; perceived causes and impact of child marriage, interventions implemented and challenges. In this study, non-governmental organisations has been abbreviated to NGO while governmental organisations have been abbreviated to GO.

11.3.1. Perceived causes and impact of child marriage

11.3.1.1. Perceived causes of child marriage

Adolescent sex and pregnancy. Findings revealed that the practice of child marriage in practising communities is perceived to be caused by adolescents' engagement in unprotected sexual activities which lead to pregnancy and the early marriage of those pregnant girls. Hasan's account illustrates this perception:

> "…in these rural communities, once you get pregnant for a man, he becomes your husband, you are married like that." (Hasan, male, NGO staff)

Hasan's quote above is based on the premise that parents, upon realising that their daughters are pregnant or engaged in a sexual relationship with a male in the community, would arrange for her marriage in order to prevent the perceived disgrace their daughter's sexual behaviours may bring to the family.

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Peer influence. Another factor reported to contribute to the early marriage of adolescents is peer influence. Reports of adolescent girls being influenced by their peers to marry early due to the perceived benefits of being married were shared by the participants. Felicia explains that some girls are encouraged to marry early due to the perceptions that men are able to provide them with their basic and financial needs.

> "…these peer groups, they can influence each other with things, like mobile phones and other things, yes it can get the child into those things. 'Yes, I think this man can afford this, he can get you that so why not just go into it [marry him]'" (Felicia, female, NGO staff)

Cultural practices. Certain cultural practices were reported to perpetuate the practice of early marriage in most communities. For example, the practice of bride abduction was mentioned to be one of the practices that enabled the early marriage of girls in communities where the practice of child marriage is common.

> "We have what we call bride abduction, that is, they go search for the adolescent girl, carry her and run away with the girl, … they then send word to the girl's parents that their daughter has been abducted." (Yaw, male, NGO staff)

The practice of bride abduction and early marriage is believed to be caused by the scarcity of eligible girls for marriage in most practising communities. Hasan explains:

> "… as we go round [communities], we observe also that there is a belief that the female population in the rural areas are less than the male population so many young men in the rural communities are not married and they are looking for wives, so they compete. If there is a young girl at the age of ten years she is already earmarked [for marriage], somebody is already planning to marry her, sometimes one or two men, even more, which sometimes results in fighting among the men in the community so if you are not fast enough to abduct a girl at age of thirteen or fourteen somebody will come for her." (Hasan, male, NGO staff)

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Parental factors. Parental influence was reported to affect the practice of early marriage in some practising communities in Ghana. Parents were reported to sometimes force their daughters into early marriage even when the adolescent girl refuses to marry. Kwame shared his experience with forced marriage below:

> "There was girl, a young girl at the JHS level, she was forced to marry, the girl insisted yet still the girl was forced into the old man's house [by her parents] the girl was tied to a wood [in his compound] anytime the old man wanted, he will come and have sex with the child" (Kwame, male, GO staff,)

Parents were also reported to lack the ability to control their children, supervise and rear their children to become responsible individuals. There was a unanimous agreement among participants that parents' inability to control the behaviour of their adolescent children contributed to the early marriage of their daughters. Akua's account illustrates this assertion.

> "parents sometimes just refuse or do not let their children understand that they also need to be responsible. Because even the parental care is not there, nobody is sitting children down to tell them that you need to be responsible when you take any actions, you need to know their consequences." (Akua, female, NGO staff)

Social events. In participants' deliberations with community members to find solutions to end child marriages, it was revealed that frequent hosting of social events in the communities led to adolescents having the opportunity to engage in illicit behaviours which cause teenage pregnancy and lead to their early marriage. These events are believed to go deep into the night thereby providing an avenue for the adolescents in the community to engage in sexual behaviours. This view is explained by James and Kwame below.

> EAS: "but…the dance, why…how does it work with the child marriage…"
> Kwame: "that is where the children get each other and then they impregnate each other."
> James: "that is where they come together"
> Kwame: "they court"

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> James: "that is where they do 'jaw-jaw', that's where they do one corner (Felicia: yes, because…), one corner, they do one corner dance (All laughing) and the results are pregnancy. When it results in pregnancy at an early stage that will trigger the early marriage."

11.3.1.2. Perceived impact

Physical and mental health implications. The practise of child marriage was reported to have physical and mental health implications for married adolescent girls and their children. Participants recounted that girls who were married off early experienced pregnancy complications, had high risks of infections and had difficulty caring for their babies due to their lack of experience and knowledge on caring for a child.

> "for the mere fact that they are teenagers, they are not well developed to have the strength for pregnancy so right from the word go, they have some challenges. Most have underdeveloped pelvic muscles to push out their babies. They also have no knowledge of basic hygienic practices so they usually get infections. And thirdly when they have the babies, they don't know how to care for them... the baby and the mother are both children so that alone is a challenge…" (Hasan, male, NGO staff)

The mental health implications reported include the experience of stress, frustrations and depression due to ignorance on how to cater for their marital and childcare needs. The excerpts below explain this.

> Yaw: "…because some of them are married … and because they are underdeveloped, they are not matured enough for the challenges in the house or in the community, some of them develop mental illness…
> Kwame: "yes, like depression, aside from depression, frustration also sets in because at that tender age and when the girl is forced into marriage and they get pregnant and give birth like my colleague was expressing, she cannot take care of herself and the baby…" (Yaw, Male, NGO staff; Kwame, male, GO staff)

Economic implications. Findings also revealed perceptions of child marriage having severe economic implications for married girls. Participants explained that because most girls

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are married off early, they are unable to acquire the necessary skills they may need to either acquire employment or start-up an income-generating business which may help them cater for their well-being; this according to Felicia perpetuated the cycle of poverty.

> "… because she [married girl] didn't acquire any knowledge and she doesn't have the skills to engage with activities that can help her generate some income and other things, the poverty she experiences continues from generation to generation." (Felicia, female, NGO staff)

Due to the explained impact of child marriage on the well-being of adolescent girls, several interventions are being implemented in practising communities to end the practice. These interventions are discussed in the ensuing sections.

11.3.2. Interventions

Accounts from respondents reveal that interventions are being implemented by both national and international organisations to reduce the practice of child marriage in the various communities in Ghana. Most of the interventions targeted the perceived causes of child marriage which when resolved were believed to lead to the eradication of the practice. Other interventions were being implemented to reduce the impact of child marriage on victims of the practice. Accounts also indicated that some of these policies were developed as a result of community deliberations on the cases of child marriage. Interventions being implemented in communities have been categorised into primary and secondary and are discussed below.

11.3.2.1. Primary interventions

Primary interventions are those interventions that are being implemented to eliminate the practice of child marriage and include enactment of community bylaws, youth and economic empowerment, community education and enforcement of education policies.

Enactment of community bylaws. From the accounts of participants, certain bylaws believed to help prevent early marriage in some communities were developed, gazetted and

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disseminated in some communities. These bylaws were derived from community deliberations on the causes of early marriage. The enforcement of these bylaws was reported to have reduced the incidence of child marriages as explained by Hasan.

> "We had a forum where we invited some parents, school teachers and school children. Now our deliberations centred on teenage pregnancy and child marriage. [We asked them], what are the causes, what can we do to stop it? You will be surprised that when we allowed the school children to tell us what they know about it, it [what they said] was very amazing. And thereafter, certain bylaws were enacted within the community to prevent child marriage…" (Hasan, male, NGO staff)

Youth and economic empowerment. Another intervention being implemented according to respondents is geared towards the provision of economic relief for community members which they believed can help alleviate child marriage since poverty was identified as one of the main causes of child marriage in those practising communities. Here community groups and associations are educated on the management of their finances and saving for the education of their children and management of their homes. A community savings and loans structure was instituted by these organisations in communities to minimise financial difficulties experienced by individuals.

> "…we have a revolving loan. The money is not with us, it's even in the communities. … so what we do is that [when] they do repayment we give it to other people [in the community] who are interested ... So it's just within the community. It will be revolving around and people have monies to do things and all that" (Latifa, female, NGO staff)

Other ways of providing economic empowerment are the training of community members on skills from which they can earn some income for daily upkeep. Felicia shares the community interventions her organisation is implementing with respect to skills training.

> "…we give our women some technical support. …some are into rice processing, shea butter, soap processing and soya bean processing." (Felicia, female, NGO staff)

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Aside from economic empowerment, the youth in most communities were being organised into groups and clubs in some of the communities to educate them on the impact and prevention of harmful social practices and ideologies. These groups were safe spaces for adolescents and the youth to discuss issues that were pertinent to the prevention of child marriage. Latifa explains the purpose for the formation of one of those youth clubs in the community.

> "…for instance, the child marriage [club] we had included boys …because we need the boys to save their sisters. That is how we do it, like that is your sister, in the community whether you are from one mother or not that is your sister. Whatever happens in the community affects everybody and so just check on your sister. What can you do to support your sister? So these were the things that we built and we had to form the children against child marriage clubs and then we included the boys." (Latifa, female, NGO staff)

Community education. Another community intervention is the education of community members on the importance of the eradication of child marriage and its implication on the married adolescent girl. The rights of the child are also explained to parents since they are perceived to arrange marriages without the consent of their children. Hasan shares his experiences:

> "…Another thing is that we try, as much as possible, to include human rights issues in our education of all the community-based groups we are working with…we tell them that it is the right of the child to refuse to get married at a tender age. Usually, it is the parents who agree, even without the consent of the child, but when they get to know that they are abusing the children's human rights then we are hoping that there will be some changes and rightly so there are changes and we are getting great results out of them" (Hasan, male, NGO staff)

In other instances, community health nurses were contacted and sent to school to educate adolescents on implications of their sexual behaviours and the options and use of

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contraceptives for protection from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Some were put on contraceptives to help prevent early pregnancy.

> "…so we mobilised community health nurses, they went into the schools to sensitise the children and even those that need to be on family planning, so that to some extent, brought down the cases of teenage pregnancy" (Kwame, male, GO staff)

Sex education became important after organisations working to end child marriage in the communities identified the lack of information on sexual health and reproduction among adolescents although they were sexually active. Adolescents were reported to have suggested methods like jumping after sex as a way to prevent pregnancy. Kwame shares his experience when he says:

> "You will be surprised to hear a girl get up and say that 'stand and jump.' That means after having sex when the girl gets up she stands and she jumps then they feel the [semen] will come out and then they are okay…" (Kwame, male, GO staff)

This view and others shared by adolescents in communities where child marriage is common compelled these GOs and NGOs to educate them on sexual and reproductive health issues.

Enforcement of education policies. Government education policies were also being implemented in most of these communities. Although not specifically designed to end child marriage, respondents believed the implementation of educational policies such as School for Life (SFL) and the establishment of model girls' schools in communities were helping to considerably reduce the practice of child marriage. SFL, according to participants, has helped reduce the prevalence of child marriage. Hasan explains how it works in the quote below.

> "...for instance School for Life runs classes in the communities and the classes are not taught by teachers. They are taught by facilitators who are from the communities... what we do is that if there is a young girl who was put in that line [impregnated] and has finished her education but at a very tender age, we pick that

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> fellow once she can speak the local dialect… while she is handling the class in the community, we support the fellow to upgrade herself. If she comes with an admission letter to do a programme to enhance her academic credentials, we support the fellow by paying fees ...this helps prevent child marriage among the girls we recruit" (Hasan, male, NGO staff)

The establishment of model girls' junior school was another educational policy being implemented that participants believed would help reduce the prevalence of child marriages in Ghana. This model girls' school was explained to be a system which is aimed at promoting girl-child education while creating a safe environment for girls to learn. This system, according to participants, would encourage other girls to enrol and stay in school thereby helping to reduce the incidence of child marriages:

> "a conference was held in 2016 thereabout with regards to establishing a model girls' junior high school so that this junior high school would err be a role model for the girls in the district to see and then use as a conduit towards developing themselves for the future." (Kwame, male, GO staff)

11.3.2.2. Secondary interventions

Secondary interventions are being implemented to alleviate the impact of child marriage on married girls. These interventions include the reintegration of pregnant and at-risk girls into school, training of married girls on skills and handicrafts which is aimed at providing an income-generating venture for married and at-risk girls.

Skills development. From participants' accounts, the only intervention being implemented for married girls was the skills development interventions. The most prominent intervention that was being provided for married girls was skills training. Some married girls identified by the organisations were trained in specific skills that were believed to help them earn an income. Through this training, recruited married girls were encouraged to utilise and

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process raw materials and other resources in their environment into an income-generating business.

> "…as a district we also have what we call extension services. It one of our core mandate... what we do is that we basically identify young ladies or girls…who have been married and they have nothing doing, we involve them in that extension service by giving them training on whatever available material they have within themselves [communities] like, maybe they have cultivated rice, they have some cultivated maize and they have to turn it, turn it into something that can yield profit." (James, male, GO staff)

School reintegration. Another policy being implemented at the secondary level to mitigate child marriage was the reintegration of teen mothers, pregnant girls and other at-risk girls who had dropped out of school to return to school instead of marrying. Girls who felt embarrassed, stigmatised on returning to their schools were transferred to other schools where they are not known.

> "… So we accept them into our various junior high school we have some who have even completed senior high school…that alone has inspired some kind of confidence in [other girls]..., some of those who hitherto wouldn't have wanted to come back to the various schools... So to motivate other girls to want to come back …we normally swap [transfer them] to other schools to make sure that they continue with their education get their certificate such that if they are lucky, they get into the senior high school." (Kwame, male, GO staff)

11.3.3. Challenges

In the discussion, participants provided valuable information about the challenges they experienced in the course of implementing the interventions they described which are discussed below.

Lack of funds. There was a unanimous agreement among participants that their organisations lacked the needed funds to sustain the programmes being implemented in

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communities. Lack of funds also limited their ability to expand their interventions to all individuals affected by child marriage and monitor the impact of the interventions they are implementing in the communities affected by the practice. James shares his experience.

> " … sometimes [when] you encounter problems of child marriage you can only give advice, though you feel sad … you cannot support…because it [you] needs support like money, has to do with funding, it has to do with resources.… also a lot of the time you don't get funding, you don't get resources to do follow-ups and monitoring…because if you implement a project and you don't do follow-ups, you don't do intensive monitoring it ends up getting back to square zero." (James, male, GO staff)

Entrenched cultural practices and beliefs. Aside from the lack of funds, participants reported that cultural practices and beliefs seemed to stifle interventions being implemented in communities. For instance, according to Latifa, in some communities, a parent who had a daughter in school may withdraw her from school and replace her with another girl from his/her family. Those girls who are withdrawn from school are married off into families in which their brothers or male relative had married as a way of replacing the woman who had been married from that family. This is explained by Latifa below

> "…in areas where they practice exchange marriages… it still happens that they [parents] will send a younger girl to go and replace the sister in school and pick the girl in school to marry [her off]...they know we are saying girl child education is important so they leave the girl to go to school till class [primary/grade] six, then because they don't want to say that they have taken the girl out of school, they will bring a younger girl in the family who has not gone to school yet to say we are replacing her…" (Latifa, female, NGO staff)

Lack of attitudinal change. Another challenge presented by participants in implementing their interventions in communities was related to the lack of attitudinal change among individuals receiving those interventions. According to Latifa, most individuals in

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communities receiving interventions find it difficult to utilise and sometimes abandon the resources and opportunities they have been offered by the organisations.

> "…is just the sense of poverty around us. That people have glued their mind that we are poor and so they don't look at the opportunities around them... So once you glue your mind to a certain part [perception] it's really difficult to come out [of it]. So some of them you have to go hold their hands to train them after the training they abandon it." (Latifa, female, NGO staff)

Another attitudinal problem is the refusal of married girls to get trained by their colleagues who have been trained by organisations on skills that may help them acquire some form of livelihood.

> "We don't have the resources to train all the married girls so we train some of the married girls and we tell them that they should train five others... but the problem is that some of those girls refuse to allow their colleagues to empower them. They want us to bring fresh skills or …send them to masters, you understand. They refuse to allow their colleagues to empower them …" (Akua, female, NGO staff)

11.4. Discussion of findings

The aim of this paper was to present the experiences and perceptions of professionals working with married girls in communities on the causes, implications and interventions being implemented to alleviate the impact of child marriage on affected individuals and the community were gathered.

Findings on the antecedents of child marriage corroborate with existing literature (Alhassan, 2013; MoGCSP, 2016; Tsekpo et al., 2016; UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017) on the causes of the practice in Ghana. For instance, the engagement of adolescents in illicit sexual behaviours was reported to compel parents to marry them off with the aim of preventing, adolescent pregnancy, shame on the family and the contraction of sexually transmitted infections (UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017). Other causes such as the influence of peers, cultural

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practices on marriage, poverty, lack of parental control have all been reported in the literature on child marriage (African Union, 2015; MoGCSP, 2016; Tsekpo et al., 2016).

According to participants, child marriage had implications for the physical and mental health of married girls. The physical implications of child marriage were pregnancy complications and high risks of getting infected. The impact of child marriage on the health of married girls have been reported by Nour (2009) and Hampton (2010) who associate health implications such as malnutrition, sexually transmitted infection, cervical cancer, obstructed labour and high maternal mortality to the early marriage of adolescent girls. Studies have attributed the experience of the aforementioned health implications to the underdevelopment of adolescent girls' reproductive systems.

Findings revealed that there were various interventions being implemented in most communities targeted for the study. These interventions were being implemented at the primary and secondary levels to prevent and reduce the impact of the practice of child marriage. Most interventions were focused on changing community behaviour and perceptions about the practice of child marriage. Some other interventions sought to provide individuals with knowledge and skills for the development of small scale businesses with the aim of alleviating poverty. Another community intervention that was being implemented was the establishment of youth clubs which aimed to mobilise the youth and provide them with information on their sexual and reproductive health, the implications of child marriage and mechanisms for its prevention in addition to providing a safe space for the discussion of adolescent and youth-related issues. Studies (Amin, 2007; Lee-Rife et al., 2012) have indicated that these interventions in communities in developing countries have helped reduce the prevalence of child marriage. Naidoo and van Wyk (2003) emphasise the importance of involving the community in order for interventions to be effective. Community engagement

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provides interventionists with the needed resources and information as well as helping to establish relationships that will improve the effectiveness of an intervention.

Another intervention being executed in communities was the implementation of educational policies developed by the government of Ghana to enhance and increase the education of girls and disadvantaged children. Examples of these programmes were School For Life and Model Girls' Junior High School. Although the aim for the development of these policies was not to prevent child marriages, its implementation, according to participants, has helped reduce the prevalence of child marriage. Literature (Baird et al., 2010; Brady et al., 2007) on educational interventions to prevent the practice of child marriage increased the enrolment of girls in school thereby reducing the prevalence of child marriage.

The intervention targeted specifically at married adolescent girls was the provision of training in handicraft to married adolescent girls in the communities. Findings indicated that although this intervention was helpful to most married girls, it faced some setbacks due to the lack of financial resources to expand the training programme for most married girls. Other challenges that affect the broader interventions that were reported by participants pertained to the lack of funds, the practice of cultural beliefs and the lack of attitudinal change among community members. These challenges, according to participants, prevented the success of interventions in reducing child marriage in some of the communities.

11.4.1. Recommendations

The findings point to the implementation of several policies and interventions in the communities where participants, who are staff of NGO or GO, work. These interventions are geared towards the eradication of child marriage in those practising communities. Although most interventions were not specifically developed to eradicate child marriage, those interventions are indirectly reducing its prevalence. The absence of interventions that are

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tailored to the prevention of the impact and eradication of child marriage presents a gap in the policies being implemented. We, therefore, recommend the development of interventions that specifically seek to reduce the impact and prevent the practice of child marriage. Furthermore, there appeared to be very little being done to assist already married girls to reduce the impact of their early marriage on their well-being. We suggest that supportive interventions should be developed to mobilise and equip married girls with the knowledge, skills and support that may help them manage the impact of their marriage. Another category of intervention that can help alleviate or reduce the psychological impact of child marriage on married adolescent girls is the provision of psychological services for girls who have been abused and traumatised by the experience of marriage. Those services can also be employed in equipping married girls in the management of relationships in their marital home and the stress of domestic demands. Although findings reveal that community members were being educated on the impact of child marriage for adolescent girls, the practice was still persistent as seen in the withdrawal of adolescent girls from school for marriage.

With some child marriages are a form of exchange marriage with parents feeling indebted to the family their son or male relative had married from and therefore providing a woman for marriage into that family. In educating the community on child marriages, parents should be educated on other alternative ways of paying off marriage debt other than marrying off their daughters. Information on the importance of education should be provided to parents in addition to parents being encouraged to wait for their daughters to mature into adults before allowing them to marry.

11.4.2. Limitations

While this paper provided useful insights into the perceptions of child marriage from the perspective of professionals working with married girls, further research can benefit from a broader sampling of professionals working with married girls in other regions of the

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country as the views presented here are limited to a small sample (nine) of professionals recruited for the study in a particular location. The collection of data from professionals in other regions will present a broader national picture of child marriage in Ghana.

11.4.3. Conclusion

The findings presented above provide an overview of the antecedents, impact and interventions being implemented in the communities where child marriage is practised. It is evident that both governmental and non-governmental agencies are working to engage with the practice by employing various methods which they believe will help prevent the practice and its impact on the lives of individuals affected. These efforts by those agencies are being hampered by the behaviour of individuals in the community as implied by participants interviewed. This calls for radical methods where individuals and stakeholders in the community should be engaged in deliberations on how to prevent the practice. The needs of those individuals who are affected by the practice should also be sought in order to ensure the usefulness of the interventions before they are designed and implemented.

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Chapter 12

Summary and Conclusion

"*There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.*"

(*Margaret J. Wheatley*)

12.1. Introduction

Globally and in Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, the practice of child marriage remains a very common practice being fuelled by several cultural, socioeconomic and religious factors. Although some studies have examined and reported on the causes and implications of child marriage in the life of married girls, their offspring, the society and the nation, emphasis on the psychological implications of these practices for the married girls and other significant individuals especially in Ghana was conspicuously missing.

Given this gap in the literature on child marriage, especially in Ghana, I sought to gain a rich understanding of the positive and negative subjective experiences of marriage from the perspectives of married girls and the perspectives of their parents, community elders and professionals working with married girls in the communities on the factors contributing to the practice. The study also sought to present the various interventions being implemented in the research setting as well as examine recommendations for possible interventions from the perspectives of staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations working with married girls.

In the ensuing sections, I discuss and synthesise the study's findings based on the research objectives outlined. I also discuss the study's limitations and the impact of the findings on theory, interventions and research. I then present my final conclusions on the study as a whole.

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12.2. Adolescent girls' subjective experience of marriage

One of the aims of this study was to gain a rich understanding of the subjective experience of marriage by adolescent girls through their lived accounts of those experiences (see manuscript four). From their first-hand accounts, marriage was experienced by young married adolescent wives as both positive and negative and was dependent on their relationship with their partners, their in-laws and their own families and friends.

Positive subjective experiences of marriage were dependent on their own fulfilment of expectations of marriage and the economic and social freedom which came along with the status of being perceived as an adult in the community as a result of being married. Some married girls welcomed the availability of financial support and resources as a result of their marriage. This brought about an improvement in their material quality of life since most of them were living with poor parents who could not provide their basic needs. This finding explains some of the reasons why adolescent girls from poor socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to marry early (see Alhassan, 2013; Tsekpo et al., 2016). The experience of social recognition of being married, being able to bear a child, and the presence of spousal support also were positive experiential accounts reported by some of the married adolescent girls. The experience of social recognition that married girls associated with their marriage and childbirth is not surprising based on literature (Addai Opoku-Agyeman, & Amanfu, 2015; Danquah, 2008; Nukunya, 2003) on how marriage and childbirth are considered prestigious milestones in the Ghanaian community.

The negative experiences or challenges of marriage were also based on unfulfilled expectations of marriage. Although some reported having positive experiences of marriage, most married girls reported negative marital experiences which had implications for their psychological wellbeing. Some of the negative experiences of adolescent married girls were unexpected and related to financial difficulties, being restricted by the husband and his family

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members, conflicts or frequent altercations with their in-laws and stressful chores they were expected to undertake in their marital homes. These negative experiences recounted by adolescent married girls are consistent with literature (Gage, 2013; John, et al., 2019; Le Strat, et al., 2011) on the psychological implications of child marriage for married girls. It was evident that most of the married girls had not anticipated experiencing these difficulties in their marriage since they perceived marriage to be a way out of difficult life with their parents and guardians.

12.3. Factors contributing to the practice of child marriage

The study's findings reveal that the practice of child marriage appears to be enforced by various elements that exist at the different levels of the society in which an individual lives. For instance, findings indicated that the biographical information (sex, age) of an individual determines whether or not s/he is married off early. Parents of adolescent girls were more likely to marry her off because of her being a girl and being perceived as mature enough for marriage. Furthermore, the behaviour and choices of the child (child-driven factors) were salient reasons for the practice of child marriage as accounts from most of the participant groups (married girls, community elder, parents of married girls and staff of governmental and NGOs) appeared to indicate that the girl child herself played an important role in the decision to be married. Furthermore, the interactions between the adolescent girl and her family (parents) affected her early marriage. Parents who felt unable to control the behaviour and choices of their daughter usually consented to her early marriage as discussed in manuscript five. The economic status of the girl's parents also influenced their decision to marry off their daughters early (see manuscript five).

The early marriage of an adolescent girl appeared to be influenced by her interactions with her parents and peers. From the accounts (see manuscript three) of some married girls, the pressure they experienced from their peers, parents and guardians also influenced their

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decisions to marry early. Peer group comparison can also be regarded as one of the influencers for decisions to marry early with the adolescent girl comparing herself to her peers and evaluating their perceived enhanced quality of life.

Additionally, parents were influenced by society's constructions of marriage. As described in manuscript five, the interactions between the parents of the adolescent girl and other extended family members and community members also influenced the early marriage of their daughters. For instance, some parents consented to the marriage of their daughter due to the perceived potential loss of extended family support and ostracism.

From accounts of parents and professionals working in the community, the adolescent girls' exposure to media and modern technology and influences appeared to affect the behaviour of adolescent girls and led them to engage in activities that affected their parents' decision to marry them off early.

The influence of cultural and religious beliefs and ideologies of the married girl, her parents and the society in which she finds herself were also evident. Cultural constructions of marriage, adolescence and readiness for marriage discussed in manuscript two also play a significant role in the early marriage of adolescent girls. It was evident that how a community defines adolescence and adolesecents' readiness for marriage affected that age at which individuals in the community marry. In communities where the determination of maturity for females are based on markers such as physiological development and mastery of specific tasks, girls are more likely to be married off early. The perceived importance of marriage also played a significant role in the early marriage of individuals as parents and members of the community may likely encourage individuals to marry early.

12.4. Perceived implications of child marriage

From the experiences of marriage by married girls, it was evident that those married girls who reported positive subjective experiences appeared psychologically healthy

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compared to their counterparts who had experienced challenges in their marriage. Positive experiences of marriage were accompanied with satisfaction with life and increased the quality of life as some participants reported feeling relieved from the previous conditions in their parents' or guardians' home. Spousal support, availability of financial resources also reduced married girls' concern about the provision of their basic needs which then led to satisfaction with their lives.

From the perspective of parents, discussed in manuscript five on the positive implications of their daughters' marriage, findings revealed that child marriage was perceived to bring economic relief and elevated the social status of parents, adolescent girls and their families. With economic reasons being identified as one of the main causes (see Alhassan, Domfe & Oduro, 2018; 2013; Tsepko et al., 2016; UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017) of child marriage, it is not surprising that parents found the early marriage of their daughters as an economic relief. Children in most Ghanaian communities are expected to assist with duties in the household, perpetuate the family's lineage and are expected to cater for their parents and elders when they gain economic independence (Tabong & Adongo, 2013; Takyi et al. 2003). In view of the importance of children, they were perceived to be a major benefit of marriage since most parents felt the birth of their children were a blessing to their daughters and their families and a source of social status. These perceived positive implications were a source of joy and happiness for those parents who felt these achievements by their daughters were beneficial.

Notwithstanding these positive accounts, early marriage was associated with several negative psychological implications for most of the married adolescent girls (reported in manuscript four) especially when their expectations of marriage were not fulfilled. It appeared that most girls entered into marriage hoping for an improvement in their living conditions and for the provision of their basic needs. The negative outcomes of their

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marriages were usually unexpected and led to the experience of negative emotions (regret and disappointment, worry, unhappiness and anhedonia) which then impacted their psychological health. The reported impact (see Gage, 2013; Le Strat et al., 2011; John et al., 2019) of child marriage on the psychological health of married girls is experienced by married girls in the present study. Parents also recounted marriage having negative psychological implications for their daughters especially when they perceived their daughters to not have been mature enough for marriage.

Other implications of early marriage reported by married girls and their parents were the truncation of their education and other avenues for acquiring income-generating skills which may be needed for their economic independence. Child marriage as indicated in the literature has implications for the educational progress and acquisition of skills and crafts needed for employment or the generation of income (Glinski et al., 2015; Malé & Wodon, 2016; Paul, 2019; Steinhaus et al., 2016). The lack of skills means that married girls have to solely depend on their husbands for their and their children's upkeep. In instances where those husbands were not willing to provide for the household, their lack of income-generating skills presented a challenge for the married girls since they had to engage in menial activities which did not provide them with enough income to cater for the entire household. This, in turn, perpetuated the cycle of poverty in the life of the married girl.

Parents' account of their experiences of the marriage also revealed that when parents were not in favour of the early marriage of their daughters, they reported experiencing negative emotions which affected their own psychological well-being (see manuscript five).

12.5.Nature of interventions implemented in communities

From accounts of staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations, there is a range of interventions being implemented to prevent child marriage and alleviate its impact on married girls, their families and their communities. These interventions are implemented

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at the various levels of the adolescent girls' ecological system and have been grouped into two levels of interventions (mainly primary and secondary; Naidoo & van Wyk, 2003). Primary level interventions are those interventions that are geared towards the prevention, reduction and elimination of child marriage practices. Interventions being implemented at the primary level included advocacy of girl child education as seen in the model girls' schools being brought up in communities. Economic empowerment which is another form of primary intervention for example targets individuals who are not engaged in any form of economic activity and provides income-generating skills training that is expected to help married girls access work or income to cater for their needs and those of their families. Although these economic interventions sometimes include married girls, the main aim for its implementation is for upstream intervention to provide families and individuals with alternative income sources thereby reducing the impact of poverty which then averts the likelihood of marrying off a girl child early. Furthermore, as a primary intervention, certain social activities believed to provide an avenue for courting among the youth thereby promoting early marriage have been banned by the community leaders and enforced by community bylaws which were enacted through community deliberations.

In addition to the above, community education where parents, community members and individuals are educated on the implications of child marriage, as well as the rights of the child in refusing to marry, are other forms of primary interventions being implemented. The education of adolescents on the implications of engaging in premarital sexual activities and ways of practising safe sex is also being implemented by organisations in those communities.

At the secondary level of intervention, adolescent girls who are pregnant and are at risk of being married off early are encouraged to return to school after giving birth and are reintegrated into the schools. Accounts indicate that in order to reduce the stigma of teenage pregnancy and having a child out-of-wedlock, such adolescent girls are transferred to other

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schools. Another form of secondary intervention is the training of married girls in skills such as bead making, sewing, soap making among others which is a form income-generating venture that can enable them to gain income for them and their children's upkeep. Married girls are also organised into clubs where they discuss issues pertaining to their well-being, thereby empowering them. These clubs also provide support and help them manage the common issues they face as married girls. Naidoo and van Wyk (2003) argue for combining curative and preventive interventions in communities where there is a high prevalence.

Although most interventions are being implemented in the communities, there appeared to be challenges related to the enforcement of these interventions and policies. Among these challenges, staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations recognised the lack of funds, entrenched cultural practices and beliefs as well as individuals' inability to change their attitudes.

12.6. Linking theories and findings

12.6.1. Social constructionism and child marriage.

The social constructionist perspective purports that truth is created and not discovered therefore individual's experiences, interactions and encounters with their social reality shape the truth they form about their social world (Burr, 2003; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Following this assumption, one of the aims of the study was to understand child marriage from the perspectives of individuals (married girls, their parents, community elders and professionals working with married girls) in the society and to present those constructions of child marriage from the individuals that interact with it at different levels of the society.

Findings in this study suggest that the concept of child marriage appears to be constructed by different societal beliefs and structures. For instance, from the elder's perspective, the social construction of adolescence, maturity and readiness for marriage which shape the practice of marriage are influenced by social institutions and structures such

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as religion and long held cultural beliefs about adolescent development, gender roles, human sexuality and the institutions deemed appropriate for engaging in sexual activities. These beliefs are accepted as a social identity and norm and the accepted way of life (cultural practice) for every individual. Girls who in their interactions with their peers, parents and other individuals in the society comply with these constructions of marriage, maturity and readiness for marriage as their subjective identity thereby influencing their decisions to marry early. Parents on the other hand either encourage their daughters to marry early (due to these accepted social norms on marriage, sexuality and gender role)s and/or in other instances are unable to exert their control/power on the daughter's choice to marry.

Although these social norms have been accepted and appear to be instilled in the lives of participants as seen in their narratives, it is also evident from the findings that some participants (married girls and parents) exercise their own agency despite these cultural norms and beliefs. Some of the parents, although seemingly helpless in controlling the decisions of their daughters to marry as a result of patriarchal cultural values, had to allow their children to marry early (see manuscript five). Some married adolescent girls also appeared in hindsight not to agree with the accepted social norms on their roles and were hoping not to repeat these mistakes in the lives of their children (see manuscripts three and four).

12.6.2. Feminist standpoint perspective

Using feminist standpoint theory, child marriage was examined from the perspectives of married girls as they are perceived to be marginally disadvantaged and are considered to be in the position to experience child marriage since they are the individuals greatly affected by the practice of child marriage. Marriage, as viewed by the young adolescent participants, was experienced to be a social vehicle for the suppression and control of adolescent girls' sexuality and to instil their culturally expected gendered role as mothers, wives and

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homemakers. Based on their experiences, it was revealed that adolescent girls although socially oppressed by the cultural and religious norms, social institutions and structures, in one way or the other exert their own choices and agency in relation to their early marriage. Social norms on marriage, gender roles and sexuality which are engrained in adolescent girls through their social interactions with their environment become the accepted way of life thereby shaping their decisions on marriage. These same socio-cultural norms and constructions were also used by their parents, husbands and in-laws as tools for regulating married adolescent girls as most girls lose their agency and freedom as soon as they get married, contrary to their own expectations of marriage. As unmarried adolescent girls, some married girls also reported feeling compelled to marry due to parental pressure, cultural expectations of being a wife, mother and homemaker although some had accepted these as their expected roles in the society and a way to come out of poverty and their home conditions. Poverty and the lack of financial support from their parents were themselves forms of social oppression since most girls reported that their wanting to escape such poor conditions influenced their decisions to marry early (see manuscript one, Findings and discussions).

Another point from which child marriage was examined was from the perspectives of the parents. Although they had been reported to be one of the main perpetrators of the practice of child marriage, findings revealed that most parents especially mothers found the patriarchal cultural system as a form of suppression of their influence and control over their adolescent girls' decisions to marry early. Parents also reported that adolescent girls used tools such as early pregnancy and defiance to suppress their control over their daughters' decisions to marry early (see manuscript five, Reasons for early marriage). These social and individual mechanisms rendered parents helpless in controlling the behaviour of their

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adolescent girls although some parents utilised the marriage of their daughters for their own financial gains.

This study thus conforms with the tenets of the feminist standpoint theory seeking to provide an opportunity for the oppressed and marginalised individuals (married adolescent girls) to present their own narrations and experiences of their social reality in relation to the experience of child marriage. Having given them the opportunity, the study also examines their role as disadvantaged individuals in navigating their social realities and generating opportunities for their personal well-being. Findings have indicated that adolescent girls are able to utilise their own mechanisms in exerting their wishes in a patriarchal society. Some of these mechanisms can be employed in the development of interventions that can be useful in the navigation of their day-to day-activities in a patriarchal society.

12.6.3. Ecological systems theory.

The ecological systems theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) was utilised in examining the practice of child marriage in the Ghanaian community. Findings indicated that the likelihood of adolescent girls to be engaged in child marriage was influenced by the different social and environmental systems in which the adolescent girl is nested in. At the microsystems level (which involves the interactions between the individual and her immediate environment) findings revealed that the perceived maturity, gender of the adolescent girl and the economic status of the adolescent girls' family influenced her early marriage. Girls who are perceived to be mature for marriage were likely to be married off early due to parents' perceptions that those mature girls were likely to engage in sexual relationships and early pregnancy which was likely to bring shame and disgrace to the family. Most married girls also reported that their early marriage resulted from their parents' inability to provide for their basic and financial needs due to poverty. Girls'own personal reasons also fall within the microsystem as some of them reported marrying early

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due to their own personal ambitions and goals for their life as well as their love for their partners.

Findings at the mesosystem level which involves the interactions between the different microsystems revealed that parents' interactions with the religious leaders in the community, the extended family and adolescents girls interaction with their peers usually influenced their decisions to marry off their daughters early. As reported by parents (see manuscript five) their decisions to marry off their daughters early was also influenced by their interactions with extended family members and the religious leaders in the community. These extended family members and religious leaders were able to convince parents to marry off their daughters by highlighting the benefits and implications of the early marriage of their daughters. Married girls on the other hand related that they married early due to the parental and peer pressure they experienced (see manuscript three).

Interactions at the exosystems level that influence the early marriage of adolescent girls include those interactions in the environment in which the individual does not play any active role. In this study, it was revealed that interactions between the parents of the girl and the community and the religious system have a major influence on the early marriage of the adolescent girl since these interactions shape parents' views about marriage and the role of the daughter in the society (see manuscript three and five). The macrosystem involves the influence of the patriarchal, cultural and religious values of the community in which the person resides and their influence on the individual. Findings from this study reveal that the practice of child marriage is influenced by the society's constructions of marriage, adolescence, maturity, gender roles, sexuality and morality. These constructions which are held by the community influence the early marriage of the adolescent girl since they have become socially accepted and normative. For instance, in the communities where this study was conducted, early marriage was an accepted norm since marriage was perceived to be an

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important social institution that every individual was expected to engage in. Maturity for marriage was determined by the development of secondary sexual characteristics and the perception that the woman was expected to be a mother, wife and homemaker and to be obedient to the male figures in her household. These held cultural values thereby influence the early entry into marriage of most adolescent girls.

12.7. Implications of the findings

12.7.1. Theory.

Findings confirm the presence of hegemonic patriarchal systems that are reinforced by cultural, social, religious and economic institutions and keep the practice of early marriages in place. Although the research setting is a small cross-section of the Ghanaian community, findings may be reflective of other similar communities in Ghana where such systems influence the practice of child marriage. The need for a more critical feminist theorising that will engage with the constructions of marriage, maturity and place of the girl child and other relevant constructions that fuel these patriarchal norms may help in the understanding the nature of the practice and help the development of interventions to prevent the practice entirely. Research should also be geared towards the political potentials of empowering the marginalised and giving them the opportunity to voice out their opinions, insist on their agency, rights and wellbeing in a patriarchal society such as the ones in which this study was conducted.

12.7.2. Praxis (Interventions)

Based on the findings in this study, a recommendation for the implementation of various interventions at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels will be feasible in the Ghanaian context. At the primary level, I propose the implementation of interventions that affect four core domains of the adolescent girl's environment. The first domain is the

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empowerment and support of at-risk adolescent girls in communities. Here at-risk adolescent girls should be equipped with knowledge, skills and support systems that will increase their knowledge about themselves, assess the different options available to them and help them make informed decisions about their future. The empowerment of adolescent girls which has been reported (see Amin, 2007; Shahnaz & Karim, 2008) to help reduce child marriage would also give them the voice to express their own views and perceptions about the patriarchal cultural systems in which they find themselves. Girls' access to quality education, should be promoted through the implementation of policies such as the model girls' school being established in the communities in the research setting. These interventions have been proven to help reduce the practice of child marriage (MoGCSP, 2017; UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017).

Secondly, the provision of economic incentives for parents has been proven to help reduce the prevalence of child marriage in most communities. With the practice of child marriage being influenced by poverty, the provision of economic support for parents may help them abandon the early marriage of their daughters for economic gains (Alhassan, 2013; UG-CSPS & WVG, 2017).

The third domain is the education of parents, community leaders and members on the impact of child marriage on the adolescent girl. These are individuals who interact with adolescent girls in their daily lives and are likely to shape her perceptions about life. Community educational interventions should target the changing of harmful social norms and practices while promoting positive norms that enhance communalism and the promotion of individual development in the communities. Agencies should also include individuals in the community such as women, fathers, friends, brothers and community leaders in trying to change and break the practice of child marriage in the communities. The inclusion of all individuals in the society helps equip individuals with the knowledge on child marriage

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thereby helping to engage community members in curbing the practice (see Brady et al., 2007; Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009). Interventionist should utilise traditional, electronic and print media in educating the population on the effects of child marriage. Studies (Casey, Carlson, Two Bulls, & Yager, 2018; Peacock & Barker, 2014) have also indicated that the inclusion of boys and men in the prevention of gender-based violence, achieving gender equality and the promotion of sexual health to be effective in communities where such intervention measures are taken. The encouragement of men and boys in this regard will help reduce the practice of child marriage in most communities.

Although Ghana already has its legal age for marriage set at 18 years, the enforcement of this law is low in most communities as is evident in the prevalence of child marriages in the country. The enforcement of these laws and the enactment of new ones that also push for the abolishment of the practice of child marriage will be relevant in reducing the rates of child marriage in Ghana. As indicated by participants, the establishment of bylaws in communities where the practice is prevalent will help reduce the practice of child marriage since these laws are developed from community deliberations and are more likely to be followed since most community members may feel a sense of ownership of those bylaws due to their involvement in the development of those laws.

At the secondary intervention levels, the provision of economic support for already married girls should be promoted to help reduce the impact of child marriage on their economic independence. With literature (Abu-Ghaida & Klasen, 2004; Semba et al., 2008) indicating that most married girls are economically incapacitated due to the cessation of their education and other opportunities to acquire skills, they may need to generate some form of income for them and their children's upkeep. The implementation of interventions that focus on the training of married girls in crafts, skills and other income-generating ventures will help alleviate their economic challenges (Baird, Chirwa, McIntosh, & Ozler, 2010). Furthermore,

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married girls should be given access to loans, noncash incentives and subsidies to support them in starting up a business. Another intervention at this level is the encouragement of married adolescent girls to continue with their education. This can only be achieved when their husbands have been educated on the importance and benefits of the education of their wives to the family and the development of their children. Such programmes should be established after the solicitation of ideas and suggestions on their feasibility from married girls and their husbands.

At the tertiary level of intervention married adolescent girls who have been affected by the practice and who have been abused and psychologically traumatised should be identified and provided with the needed psychological services to reduce the impact of those experiences. Support programmes where affected girls are rescued and reintegrated into schools should also be instituted.

12.7.3. Future Research.

Suggestions for further research include the broader-based study of the practice as this study is limited in this regard. Studies on child marriage at the national level and in the West African sub-region will provide a broader understanding of the practice which will then help inform the implementation of interventions that are directed towards the eradication of the practice at the national and sub-regional levels.

Findings also indicate a strong influence of patriarchal norms and ideologies on the practices of child marriage. Feminist research that challenge these patriarchal norms and seek to adopt feminist theories and interventions (see Fine & Torre, 2019) will help broaden literature on the practice of child marriage. Due to the limited literature on the experience of young boys in early marriage, future studies should consider exploring and examining the experiences of married adolescent boys which may present a different perspective of the experience of child marriage. Another group of individuals who can be included in future

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studies are husbands of married adolescent girls, the experiences of those husbands may present a different and holistic perspective of the practice of child marriage. A longitudinal study or case study that explores the long-term effects of child marriage on individuals who married early will be beneficial in designing interventions and policies that are geared towards the reduction of the impact of child marriage and to eradicate the practice.

Furthermore, future studies should incorporate other methods of data collection. Participatory action methods such as photovoice and other visual methods would enrich the findings. The inclusion of these methods in the data collections process will present a different perspective of the practice of child marriage and add to the richness of the data collected.

12.8. Study limitations and challenges

Although this study highlights the causes and implication of early marriage from different perspectives of stakeholders in the community as well as the married girls, some limitations to this study were acknowledged. One such limitation is the research setting selected for the study. Even though the Northern region (specifically Tolon, Mion and Tamale) was selected for data collection based on practical reasons, the findings in this study may be limited to only those various selected research settings. Furthermore, most participants were of the Dagomba ethnic group and Muslims in the Northern region. Considering that Ghana has diverse ethnic and cultural groups, the factors surrounding the practice of child marriage may be different among different cultures and ethnics groups which makes the generalisation of these findings difficult.

Secondly, by employing a gatekeeper to aid in the selection of participants other potential participants who may have helped broaden views and perspectives on child marriage may have been overlooked. Although several gatekeepers, sampling techniques and the researcher's personal observations were employed in this study, those gatekeepers may

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have unduly influenced the selections of participants since some of them were friends of married girls and may have only contacted those friends for the study. The snowballing technique may have also exacerbated this since those participants will likely contact their friends or acquaintances. This limitation also makes the findings in this study not generalisable.

Another major limitation of this study is that the experience of marriage was sought from only married adolescent girls. Literature has indicated that the experience of child marriage is not limited to only females since some males are also married as children. The experiences of boys who had been married may have presented a nuanced additional perspective of child marriage which would have enriched the findings of this study, notwithstanding the particular focus of this study.

Due to the language barrier, a research assistant who was a native of the research setting was employed to assist with data collection and transcription. The use of a research assistant for interpretation and transcription of data could have affected the quality of data. This is because the relay of information between the researcher and the participant may be misrepresented which may lead to the loss of information that may be relevant for the study. Although measures (back translation of transcripts, journaling field experiences) were taken to minimise the effect of the language it may have affected the findings of the study.

One other challenge that was experienced was in relation to the recruitment of participants for the study. Although the study sought to recruit an equal number of males and females for the parents and staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations this was not realised. Most participants, seven out of eight for the parents' group were females while most participants six out of nine, for the focused group discussion were males. This gender imbalance in the sample selection resulted from limited access, time and resources.

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Despite these limitations, this study presents relevant rich information on the practice of child marriage in Ghana and adds to the growing literature on child marriage worldwide.

12.9. Overall reflections and conclusion

In this dissertation, I presented the experiences, views and perceptions of married girls, parents of married girls, elders and staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations on the causes, antecedents and implications of child marriage for the wellbeing of married girls and the possible interventions being implemented to alleviate the practice as well as enrich the lives of individuals who have been affected by the practice.

This study started out with me trying to understand the nature of child marriage in Ghana as I had perceived it to have detrimental effects on the married girl. After engaging with participants, I found that although child marriage may have debilitating effects on married girls, some of them experienced positive outcomes which translated into positive psychological wellbeing for such individuals.

The views of parents also presented a unique perspective of the practice of child marriage in Ghana. Parents have always been blamed for the early marriage of their children especially in the case of child marriage, however, findings in this study revealed that parents face a range of pressures in considering the early marriage of their daughter including their own financial situation, societal honour versus ostracisation, cultural notions of maturity and readiness and their daughter's own behaviour and choices Furthermore, cultural influences such as patriarchal child inheritance presented a different cultural dimension on parental involvement in the practice of early marriage. It was also apparent that the activities, perceptions and behaviours of adolescent girls within a cultural context influenced their early marriage.

As I ponder on these findings I begin to reflect and ask myself more questions and challenges. First, I think about how to disseminate the findings of this research. Although

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research papers have been written, the challenge is how to present the findings to the individuals in the various communities, schools, religious organisations such as churches and mosques in order to educate them on the practice. I plan to visit the communities in which the study was conducted and solicit the help of organisations working in those communities to aid me in the dissemination of the findings of this study. I will also visit the media houses in those communities to provide interviews on the findings within this study as well as educate the population on the practice of child marriage.

The findings of this study yielded significant insight into the underbelly of the practice of child marriage prevalent in the Northern Region of Ghana, despite efforts to reduce its occurrence and prevalence. The collaboration of governmental and non-governmental agencies, community leaders as well as individuals living in the community is needed to alleviate the practice in Ghana, supported by more radical theorising and praxis that engage with the patriarchal structures that keep the practice in place.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guides

Appendix A1 i: English version of the Interview Guide for Married Girls

Thank you for accepting to be a part of this study. As was explained to you when you were recruited for this study, I am going to ask you a series of questions related to your experience as a married girl. Please feel free to answer the questions I ask in any way that you want (there are no right or wrong answers; all that is important is for you to tell me what your experience has been). Remember that you are free to not answer questions that make you uncomfortable, and you can indicate to me anytime during the interview if you would like to stop altogether. You can also ask me any questions that you have in mind (either now – before we start, during the interview or at the end of the interview).

A. Demographic information: Could you tell me a little bit about your background?

1. Can you tell me about your own family?
2. How many siblings do you have?
3. What religion are you affiliated to?
4. How old are you?
5. What work do you do?
6. What is your level of education?
7. Where do you live?
8. Where do you come from?

B. About being a girl and *marriage*

9. What does it mean for you to be a girl?
10. Can you describe your experiences as a girl in your society?
11. What do you like about being a girl in your community?
12. What does society expect of you as a girl?

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13. In your opinion, what is marriage?

14. Can you describe your views about marriage? (Before and after getting married)

C. Marital

15. How long have you been married?

16. How did your marriage come about?

17. How did you feel when you found out that you were getting married?

18. Can you describe your marriage ceremony and how you felt about it?

D. Societal views

19. In your own words, explain how your tribe defines marriage?

20. What is the normal age to get married in your society?

21. What is the community's view of the right age to get married?

22. What happens to girls who do not get married at the community approved age?

E. Personal views, experiences and coping

23. What were your expectations before getting married?

24. How has your experience been as a married person?

25. Have your expectations been met? Changed?

26. How do you feel as a married woman?

27. Can you describe the nature of the relationship between you and your spouse?

    a. What do you think facilitates the kind of relationship you have just described?

28. What are some of the joyful moments in your marriage?

29. What are some of the challenges you face as a married girl?

30. Are you able to discuss your joys and challenges with your husband?

31. What helps you to cope with the challenges you face as a married girl?

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F. Social Relationship

32. Tell me about how your relationship is with your husband.

33. Can you describe how you relate to your husband's family?

34. How would you describe your relationship with your family since you got married?

35. How would you describe your relationship with your friends since you got married?

36. Whom do you discuss your marital challenges with other than your husband?

    a. Can you tell me a bit more about this person?

    b. Why do you feel comfortable speaking to this person?

G. Psychological impact

37. How would you describe the impact marriage has had on your life?

    a. Do you think your life has been different since you got married?

    b. Can you describe what you miss about your life before you were married?

H. General

1. What do you like about being married? What have been the benefits that you have enjoyed from being married?

2. What have you not liked about being married?

3. What advice would you give to other young girls about getting married at an early age?

We have come to the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to discuss that we haven't mentioned yet? Do you have any questions for me?

How have you found the interview?

Thank you very much for your time!

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Appendix A1 ii: Dagbani translation of Interview Guide for Married Girls

Bɔhisi sodolisi zaŋ ti bipuɣinga ŋun kuli doo

M puhiya pam a ni saɣi ni a pahi vihigu ŋɔ ni ŋɔ. Kamani di ni daa pun kahigi ti a shɛm di ni daa piigi a ni di niŋ vihigu ŋɔ, n yɛn bɔhi a la bɔhisi din kpini a milinsi kamani bipuɣinga ŋun nyɛ dooyililana. Dima suɣulo kahigima amaŋa n-labisi bɔhi shɛŋa n ni yɛn bɔhi a a ni bɔri li shɛm (labisibu din tuhi bee din bi tuhi kani; din kuli kpa talahi nyɛla a yɛli ma a milinsi ni nyɛ shɛli). Teemi ni a mali soli ni a bi labisi bɔhi shɛli din bi dɔni ti a, ka a ni tooi che ka m baŋ saha shɛli bɔhisi maa puuni di yi niŋ ka a bɔri ni a che. A ni tooi lahi bɔhi ma bɔhi shɛli kam a ni mali a tɛha puuni (saha ŋɔ puuni – pɔi ka ti naan yi pili, bɔhisi maa puuni bee bɔhisi maa naabu ni).

A. Niriba zoobu mini bɛ taɣibu lahibali: a ni tooi ti ma lahibali biɛla zaŋ chaŋ amaŋmaŋa polo?

1. A ni tooi yɛli ma zaŋ chaŋ a dɔɣiriba polo?
2. Tuzodabba mini tuzopaɣiba ala ka a mali?
3. Adiini dini puuni ka a lee be?
4. A yuma ala m-bɔŋɔ?
5. Tuun' bɔ ka a tumda?
6. Ya ka a karim zani shikuru ni?
7. Tiŋkani ka a be?
8. Tiŋkani ka lee yina?

B. Zaŋ chaŋ a yi nyɛ bipuɣinga mini *paɣakpuɣibo* polo

9. A yi nyɛ bipuɣimbila di gbunni lee nyɛ dini ti a?
10. A ni tooi buɣisi a milinsi ni nyɛ shɛli kamani nyini bipuɣinga a ʒilɛli puuni?
11. Bɔ ka a lee yuri pam zaŋ chaŋ a ni nyɛ bipuɣimbila zuɣu a ʒilɛli puuni?
12. Wula ka ʒilɛli lee yuuni bɔri a sani nyini bipuɣimbila?
13. A tɛha puuni, bɔ n-lee nyɛ paɣakpuɣibo?

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14. A ni tooi buɣisi a tɛha ni nyɛ shɛm zaŋ kpa paɣakpuɣibo polo? (pɔi mini doo kundi nyaaŋa).

C. Doo kundi

15. A ni kuli doo di yuma ala m-bala?

16. Wula ka a doo maa kundi daa lee kana?

17. Wula ka di daa lee be a ni daa baŋ ni a kunila doo?

18. A ni tooi buɣisi a daamiliya ni daa be shɛm ni di ni daa be a shɛm zaŋ chaŋ di polo?

D. Ʒilɛli puuni nima tɛha

19. Zaŋmi amaŋmaŋa bachinima, kahigima wuhi a zuli ni nya paɣakpuɣibo ka di nyɛ shɛli?

20. Yuma ala saha ka di lee simdi ni bipuɣimbila paai ka naan yi kuli doo a zuliya ni?

21. A ya nima maa tɛha lee nyɛla wula zaŋ chaŋ yuun' shɛli di ni simdi ni bipuɣimbila paai ka naan yi kuli doo polo?

22. Bɔ n-lee niŋdi bipuɣimbihi ban bi kuli dabba yuun' shɛli tiŋa maa nima ni zali maa ni?

E. Niri maŋmaŋa tɛha, milinsi mini o ni gbibi yɛla shɛm

23. Bɔnima ka a daa lee yuuni bɔri pɔi ka naan yi kuli doo?

24. Wula ka a milinsi daa lee be kamani dooyililana?

25. A ni daa yuuni bɔri shɛŋa niŋya? Taɣiya?

26. Wula ka di lee be a kamani dooyililana?

27. A ni tooi buɣisi biɛhigu shɛli din be a mini a yidana sunsuuni ni be shɛm?

    a. Bɔ ka a lee tɛhi ni dina n-sɔŋ che ka biɛhi' shɛli a ni yoli buɣisi ŋɔ beni?

28. Dinnima n-lee nyɛ nyaɣisim saha a dooyili kundi ni?

29. Yɛlimuɣisiri dinnima n-lee beni ti a kamani bipuɣinga ŋun kuli doo?

30. A tooi ʒini zaŋ a nyaɣisim saha mini a yɛlimuɣisira maa tɔɣisi a yidana?

31. Bɔ n-lee sɔŋdi a ka a tooi gbibi yɛlimuɣisiri shɛŋa din paari a maa kamani bipuɣinga ŋun kuli doo?

F. Biɛhigu zaŋ chaŋ sambani ni polo

32. Yɛlimi ma a biɛhigu ni be shɛm a mini a yidana sunsuuni?

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33. A ni tooi yɛli ma a ni be shɛm zaŋ chaŋ a yidana dɔɣiriba polo?

34. Wula ka a ni tooi buɣisi biɛhi' shɛli din be a mini a dɔɣiriba sunsuuni a ni kuli doo naai?

35. Wula ka a ni tooi buɣisi biɛhi' shɛli din be a mini a zonima sunsuuni a ni kuli doo naai?

36. Ɲuni ka a lee zaŋ a dooyili yɛlimuɣisira tɔɣisi ka o pa a yidana?

    a. A ni tooi ti ma lahibali biɛla zaŋ kpa lala niri maa polo?

    b. Bɔ n-che ka a tooi kahigi amaŋa tɔɣisi ti lala niri maa?

G. Tɛha puuni yɛlimuɣisira

37. Wula ka a lee yɛn buɣisi paɣakpuɣibo ninviɛla ni nyɛ shɛli zaŋ ti a biɛhigu?

a. A tɛhiya ni a biɛhigu nya taɣibu a doo kundi nyaaŋa?

b. A ni tooi buɣisi a ni pooi binshɛli zaŋ chaŋ a biɛhigu ni pɔi ka daa naan yi kuli doo?

H. Yɛllikam

1. Bɔ ka a lee bɔri zaŋ chaŋ doo kundi polo? Dini n-lee nyɛ nyɔ' shɛŋa a ni di doo kundi ni?

2. Bɔ ka a suhu lee bi gbaai zaŋ chaŋ doo kundi polo?

3. Saɣisigu bɔ ka a lee mali ni a ti paɣasari' pɔla zaŋ kpa doo daŋ kundi polo?

Ti kamina ti paai bɔhisi maa tariga. Binshɛli beni ka a bɔri ni ti tɔɣisi zaŋ kpa di polo ka ti pun bi yɛli di yɛla? A mali bɔhi' shɛli ni a bɔhi ma?

Wula ka a lee nya bɔhisi maa?

M puhiya pam a ni ti ma saha shɛli maa!

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Appendix A2 i: English version of the Interview Guide for the Parents of Married Girls

Thank you for accepting to be a part of this study. As was explained to you when you were recruited for this study, I am keen to understand how marriages are seen in your community, especially what is called young or child marriages and your experiences as a parent of a young married girl. I'm going to ask you a series of questions related to your experiences as a parent of a married girl. Please feel free to answer the questions I ask in any way that you want (there are no right or wrong answers; all that is important is for you to tell me what your views are). Remember that you are free to not answer questions that make you uncomfortable, and you can indicate to me anytime during the interview if you would like to stop altogether. You can also ask me any questions that you have in mind (either now – before we start, during the interview or at the end of the interview). Are you ready to start?

A. Demographic information: Could you tell me a little bit about your background?

1. Gender (interviewer to indicate the sex of participant and to note if the other parent is also present)
2. What religion are you affiliated to?
3. How old are you?
4. Are you married?
5. What work do you do?
6. What is your level of education?
7. Where do you live?
8. Where do you come from?

B. Marital history

9. If married, how long have you been married?
    a. At what age, did you get married?
    b. How old was your spouse?
10. If not married, why not?

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C. Cultural perspectives

11. Can you please explain how your society/tribe/community defines marriage?
    1. Can you explain the reasons for marriage in your society?
    2. Are there reasons why one should not marry?
12. What your thoughts about marriage?

D. Experiences

13. At what age did your daughter(s) marry?
14. What in your opinion, was the reason for the marriage?
15. How did you feel on the day your daughter(s) got married?
16. How has your relationship been with your daughter(s) since the marriage?
17. What do you think are some of the benefits of marriage in general?
    a. What are some benefits of early marriage for your daughter?
18. What advice would you give to parents whose daughters are going to get married?

We have come to the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to discuss that we haven't mentioned yet? Do you have any questions for me? (If not) Thank you very much for your time!

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Appendix A2 ii: Dagbani translation of Interview Guide for Parents of Married Girls

Bɔhisi sodolisi zaŋ ti laamba ban bipuɣinsi kuli dabba

M puhiya pam a ni saɣi ni a pahi vihigu ŋɔ ni maa. Kamani di ni daa pun kahigi ti a shɛm saha shɛli di ni piigi a ni di niŋ vihigu ŋɔ, n suhu kuli yɛmi ni m baŋ a ya nima ni nya paɣakpuɣibonima ni nyɛ shɛli, di bahi bamdi bɛ ni boli shɛli bipɔlli bee bipuɣimbila dokulibonima mini a milinsi ni nyɛ shɛli kamani bipuɣimbil' pɔlli ŋun kuli doo lana. N yɛn bɔhi a la bɔhisi doli taba zaŋ chaŋ a milinsi polo kamani bipuɣinga ŋun kuli doo lana. Dim suɣulo kahigimi amaŋa n-labisi bɔhi' shɛŋa n ni yɛn bɔhi a a ni bɔri li shɛm (labisibu din tuhi bee din bi tuhi kani; din kuli kpa talahi nyɛla a yɛli ma a tɛha ni nyɛ shɛŋa). Teemi ni a mali soli ni a bi labisi bɔhi' shɛli din bi dɔni ti a, ka a ni tooi yɛli ma saha shɛli bɔhisi maa ni a yi bɔri ni a che bɔhisi maa labisibu. A ni tooi lahi bɔhi ma bɔhi' shɛli kam a ni mali a tɛha ni (saha ŋɔ ni – pɔi ka ti naan yi pili, bɔhisi maa puuni bee bɔhisi maa nyaaŋa). A niŋ shili ni a pili?

A. Niriba zoobu mini bɛ tɛha lahibali: a ni tooi ti ma lahibali biɛla zaŋ kpa amaŋmaŋa polo?

1. Paɣa bee doo (bɔhi' bɔhira tu ni o wuhi ŋun labisiri ni nyɛ shɛli ka lihi nya lana ŋun pahi beni)
2. Adiini dini puuni ka a lee be?
3. A yuma ala m-bɔŋɔ?
4. A pun kuli doo?
5. Tuun' bɔ ka a tumda?
6. Ya ka a karim shikuru zani?
7. Tiŋkani ka a be?
8. Tiŋkani ka a yina?

B. Doo kundi taarihi

9. A yi kuli doo, di saha wɔɣilim wula n-lee bɔŋɔ?

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a. Yuma ala saha, ka a daa lee kuli doo?

b. A yidana maa daa nyɛla yuma ala?

10. A yi bi kuli doo, bɔ zuɣu?

C. Kaya ni taada ni nya li shɛm

11. A ni tooi di suɣulo kahigi wuhi a ʒilɛli/zuliya/ya ni nya paɣakpuɣibo ka di nyɛ shɛli?

1. A ni tooi kahigi wuhi daliri shɛŋa din che ka paɣakpuɣibo be a ʒilɛli puuni?

2. Daliri shɛŋa beni din ni che ka niri bi kpuɣi paɣa bee n-kuli doo?

12. A tɛha nyɛ dini zaŋ kpa paɣakpuɣibo polo?

D. Milinsinima

13. Yuma ala ka a bipuɣinga bee bipuɣinsi daa lee paai ka naan yi kuli dabba?

14. A tɛha puuni daliri bɔ n-daa lee tahi doo maa kundi na?

15. Wula ka di daa lee be a dahinshɛli a bipuɣinga bee bipuɣinsi ni daa kuli dabba?

16. Biɛhigu wula n-lee be a mini a bipuɣinga bee bipuɣinsi sunsuuni bɛ dabba kundi maa nyaaŋa?

17. Bɔ ka a lee tɛhi ni di nyɛ anfaaninima n-ti paɣakpuɣibo zaa.

    a. Doo daŋ kundi daanfaaninima lee nyɛ dinnima n-ti a bipuɣinga?

18. Saɣisigu bɔ ka a lee mali tiri laamba ban bihi yɛn kuli dabba?

Ti kamina ti paai ti bɔhisi maa tariga. Binshɛli beni ka a bɔri ni ti tɔɣisi zaŋ kpa di polo ka ti pun bi yɛli di yɛla? A mali bɔhi' shɛli ni a bɔhi ma? (Shɛli yi kani) M puhiya pam a ni ti ma saha shɛli maa!

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Appendix A3 i: English version of Interview Guide for the Elders

Thank you for accepting to be a part of this study. As was explained to you when you were recruited for this study, I am keen to understand how marriages are seen in your community, especially what is called young or child marriages. I'm going to ask you a series of questions related to these young marriages. Please feel free to answer the questions I ask in any way that you want (there are no right or wrong answers; all that is important is for you to tell me what your views are). Remember that you are free to not answer questions that make you uncomfortable, and you can indicate to me anytime during the interview if you would like to stop altogether. You can also ask me any questions that you have in mind (either now – before we start, during the interview or at the end of the interview).

A. Demographic information: Could you tell me a little bit about your background?

1. Gender (interviewer to indicate the sex of participant)
2. What religion are you affiliated to?
3. How old are you?
4. Are you married?
5. What work do you do?
6. What is your level of education?
7. Where do you live?
8. Where do you come from?
9. What role do you play in the community?

B. Marital history

10. If married, how long have you been married?
    a. At what age, did you get married?
    b. How old was your spouse?

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11. If not married, why not?

C. Cultural perspectives

12. Can you please explain how your society/tribe/community defines marriage?
    a. Can you explain the reasons for marriage in your society?
    b. Are there reasons why one should not marry?
13. What your thoughts about marriage?
14. At what age is a female ready to marry and what determines one's readiness?
15. In your own view, what is the normal or right age for a girl to get married?
16. What is society's approved age which people should get married?
17. How are girls perceived in your community who do not get married at the community approved age?
18. Can you explain the reasons for marriage regarding the tradition of the land?
19. Can you please explain to me the cultural activities of the marriage process?
20. Can you explain to me the reasons why one should not marry?

We have come to the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to discuss that we haven't mentioned yet? Do you have any questions for me? (If not) Thank you very much for your time!

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Appendix A3 ii: Dagbani translation of Interview Guide for the Elders

Bɔhisi sodolisi zaŋ ti tiŋkpamba

M puhiya pam a ni saɣi ni a pahi vihigu ŋɔ ni maa. Kamani di ni daa pun kahigi ti a shɛm saha shɛli di ni piigi a ni di niŋ vihigu ŋɔ, n suhu kuli yɛmi ni m baŋ a ya nima ni nya paɣakpuɣibonima ni nyɛ shɛli, di bahi bamdi bɛ ni boli shɛli bipɔlli bee bipuɣimbila dokulibonima mini a milinsi ni nyɛ shɛli kamani bipuɣimbil' pɔlli ŋun kuli doo lana. N yɛn bɔhi a la bɔhisi doli taba zaŋ chaŋ a milinsi polo kamani bipuɣinga ŋun kuli doo lana. Dim suɣulo kahigimi amaŋa n-labisi bɔhi' shɛŋa n ni yɛn bɔhi a a ni bɔri li shɛm (labisibu din tuhi bee din bi tuhi kani; din kuli kpa talahi nyɛla a yɛli ma a tɛha ni nyɛ shɛŋa). Teemi ni a mali soli ni a bi labisi bɔhi' shɛli din bi dɔni ti a, ka a ni tooi yɛli ma saha shɛli bɔhisi maa ni a yi bɔri ni a che bɔhisi maa labisibu. A ni tooi lahi bɔhi ma bɔhi' shɛli kam a ni mali a tɛha ni (saha ŋɔ ni – pɔi ka ti naan yi pili, bɔhisi maa puuni bee bɔhisi maa nyaaŋa).

A. Niriba zoobu mini bɛ tɛha lahibali: a ni tooi ti ma lahibali biɛla zaŋ kpa amaŋmaŋa polo?

1. Paɣa bee doo (bɔhi' bɔhira tu ni o wuhi ŋun labisiri ni nyɛ shɛli)
2. Adiini dini puuni ka a lee be?
3. A yuma ala m-bɔŋɔ?
4. A pun kpiɣi paɣa?
5. Tuun' bɔ ka a tumda?
6. Ya ka a karim shikuru zani?
7. Tiŋkani ka a bɛ?
8. Tiŋkani ka a yina?
9. A tuma lee nyɛ dini tiŋa maa ni?

B. Paɣa kpiɣibu taarihi

10. A yi kpiɣi paɣa, di saha wɔɣilim wula n-lee bɔŋɔ?

a. Yuma ala saha, ka a daa lee kpiɣi paɣa?

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c. A paɣa maa daa nyɛla yuma ala?

11. A yi bi kpiɣi paɣa, bɔ zuɣu?

C. Kaya ni taada ni nya li shɛm

12. A ni tooi di suɣulo kahigi wuhi a ʒilɛli/zuliya/ya ni nya paɣakpuɣibo ka di nyɛ shɛli?

a. A ni tooi kahigi wuhi daliri shɛŋa din che ka paɣakpuɣibo be a ʒilɛli puuni?

b. Daliri shɛŋa beni din ni che ka niri bi kpuɣi paɣa bee n-kuli doo?

13. A tɛha nyɛ dini zaŋ kpa paɣakpuɣibo polo?

14. Yuma ala ka paɣa lee yɛn paai ka kuli doo ka bɔ n-wuhiri ni o saɣi doo kundi?

15. Nyini maŋmaŋa tɛha ni, yuma ala dɛde n-simdi bee n-tu ni bipuɣinga kuli doo?

16. ʒilɛli maa ni laɣim gbaai yuun' shɛli niri ni yɛn paai ka kpiɣi paɣa bee n-kuli doo lee nyɛ dini?

17. Wula ka bɛ lee lihi nya bipuɣimbihi ban bi kuli dabba a ya nima maa ni zali yuun' shɛli di ni simdi ni bipuɣinga paai ka kuli doo a ya tiŋgbani ni?

18. A ni tooi kahigi daliri shɛŋa din che ka paɣakpuɣibo simdi a ya tiŋgbani kali soli zuɣu?

19. A ni tooi kahigi ti ma kaya ni taada binshɛŋa din niŋdi paɣakpuɣibo soli maa zuɣu?

20. A ni tooi kahigi ti ma daliri shɛŋa zuɣu niri ni ku kpiɣi paɣa bee n-kuli doo?

Ti kamina ti paai ti bɔhisi maa tariga. Binshɛli beni ka a bɔri ni ti tɔɣisi zaŋ kpa di polo ka ti pun bi yɛli di yɛla? A mali bɔhi' shɛli ni a bɔhi ma? (Shɛli yi kani) M puhiya pam a ni ti ma saha shɛli maa!

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Appendix A4: Questions for Focus Group Session with Professionals

Thank you for consenting to be a part of this study. As was explained to you when you were recruited for this study, I am going to discuss with you a series of questions related to your experience in working with married girls, your organisations' policies on child marriage and their usefulness related to the practice of child marriage to the married girls and the communities you work in and also to discuss the potential physical and psychological challenges of early marriage on young girls. Please feel free to answer the questions I ask in any way that you want (there are no right or wrong answers but rather differing views; all that is important is for you to tell me what your experience has been). Remember that you are free to not answer questions that make you uncomfortable, and you can indicate to me anytime during the discussion if you would like to stop altogether. You can also ask me any questions that you have in mind (either now – before we start, during or at the end of the interview).

A. Could each one of you briefly tell me a little bit about your background for me to get to know you?

B. Please, can each of you briefly tell me about your work at your organisation?

1. How long have you worked with married girls?

    a. Can you tell me what your role is in this organisation?

2. What made you decide to work with married girls?

C. Focus Group Discussion Questions: I now want to pose a few general questions to you as a group about child marriages and your experience in working with young married girls. Anyone can answer and add to the discussion or raise a different view.

3. Please explain the concept of child marriage in your own words? (Probe to ascertain at what age do most of the girls get married?

4. Please explain the views about marriage in the communities you work in?

5. What do you think are some of the reasons for early marriage?

6. Can you explain the reasons for child marriage?

7. What are some of the challenges that married girls experience?

    - Can you share with me some experiences you have had working with married girls?

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8. In your experience, what are the benefits associated with early marriages?
9. What have been the psychological and other implications of early marriage for the married girl?
10. Do you think child marriage should be prevented?
    a. If yes why?
    b. If no why not?
11. What is your organisation's policy on child marriage?
12. Do you find these policies useful in your experience in working with child brides?
13. How are your organisations' policies affecting the communities you are working with in relation to the practice of child marriage?
14. How are you personally coping with these differing perspectives about marriage?
15. In your opinion, what are some important recommendations to deal with the challenges of child marriage?

We have come to the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to discuss that we haven't mentioned yet? Do you have any questions for me? (If not) Thank you very much for your time!

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Appendix B: Information Sheets

Appendix B1: Information leaflet and assent form-Married girls

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND ASSENT FORM

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT: Exploration of lived experiences of child brides in Ghana.

RESEARCHER'S NAME(S): Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo

ADDRESS: Department of Psychology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

CONTACT NUMBER: +233 207 087 380

What is RESEARCH?

Research is something we do to find **NEW KNOWLEDGE** about the way things (and people) work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about children and teenagers and the things that affect their lives, their schools, their families and their health. We do this to try and make the world a better place! This study will also help with my own training as a doctoral student.

What is this research project all about?

This research is intended to find out about child marriage and what the girls who are married experience. I also want to understand what your experience is as a married girl in your community.

Why have you been invited to take part in this research project?

You have been invited to take part in this research because you are a married girl and you are between 12 years and 15years of age.

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Who is doing the research?

My name is Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo. I am from Accra and I'm a student at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. I am doing this research because I want to understand child marriage. I have read a lot about child marriage but I want to know how you feel as a married girl. Because not much is known about child marriages, I want you to help me understand what it is and how it feels like to be married as a young girl.

What will happen to me in this study?

You will be asked some questions about your age, your school, your family, your husband, your friends and any other person you want to talk about. After this, I will ask you about how you feel about child marriage and what you experience as a married girl. The answers you give me will be recorded on a tape recorder. I will record what you say because I want to be able to remember everything you said and write about exactly how you feel. Whatever you tell me will not be shared with anyone unless you give me permission or the laws of Ghana requires that I do so. It will therefore not be put on the radio, TV or played to anyone who can identify you because I am required to protect your identity. If I break this promise, then I can be reported to the police or to my school so they can punish me. I will therefore not ask you to tell me your name when I am recording because I do not want anyone to be able to know it was you I was talking to. Should your name or any other person's name be mentioned during the interview, I will do all I can to protect you and the individual from being identified. You can also tell me when you want me to stop asking questions and if you do not want to answer my questions. You can tell me to stop the interview at any time.

Can anything bad happen to me?

The information you give will not be shared with anyone that knows you including your husband or your parents. You may also feel sad and scary about some of the things that you tell me. This is understandable as young girls may have different experiences. If you feel anxious then please let me know. Please let me know if you feel that talking to me will put you in any form of danger or may cause your husband to be angry with you. I will stop the interview immediately. After the interview, I can let you go and talk to the Clinical Psychologist or Social Worker at the NGO or you can talk to me about it if you want to.

Can anything good happen to me?

After you have finished talking to me, you may experience a sense of relief in talking about your experience. Your answers will certainly contribute to a better understanding of child

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marriages and may help the government and NGOs provide better support to young married girls. I will give you ₵20.00 (the equivalent of US$4.81) for your time participating in the study. You will not be given this money if you decide to withdraw or are not able to complete your interview session.

Will anyone know I am in the study?

No one apart from myself, my supervisors, my assistant and the people for the NGO who are helping me will know you took part in the study. I will not mention your name anywhere in the study. As I have said earlier, whatever you tell me will not be played to anyone except the person who will type out what you said, my supervisors and myself.

Who can I talk to about the study? If you have any question about the study you can talk to:

Principal investigator: Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo
Department of Psychology
Stellenbosch University
Tel: +233 207 087 380 or +27 628 762 946
Email: 21485194@sun.ac.za or abenanokyewaasarfo@gmail.com

Principal Supervisor: Prof Tony Naidoo
Department of Psychology
Stellenbosch University
Tel: +27 829 942 449
Email: avnaidoo@sun.ac.za

Co-supervisor: Dr Joana Salifu Yendork
Department of Psychology
University of Ghana
Tel: +233 207 700 935 or +233 570 372 437
Email: salifujoana@gmail.com or JYendork@ug.edu.gh

Research Assistant: Hajara Baba
Department of Psychology
University of Ghana
Tel: +233 243 110 900
Hbaba001@st.ug.edu.gh or babahajara38@yahoo.com

What if I do not want to do this?

Remember that you can always decide not to take part in this research at any point, even when you have already answered all my questions you can still decide not to take part in the

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research. Even if your parents or husband have agreed to your participation, you can still decide on your own to participate or not. So you can stop being in the study at any time without getting in trouble.

Do you understand this research study and are you willing to take part in it?

YES	NO

Has the researcher answered all your questions?

YES	NO

Do you understand that you can STOP being in the study at any time?

YES	NO

_____ _____

Signature of participant Date

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Appendix B2: Consent form-Parents of married girls

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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Exploration of the lived experiences of the female spouse in child marriages in Ghana: views of parents of married girls.

You are respectfully invited to participate in a research study conducted by **Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo**, (BA. Psychology and Music, MPhil Clinical Psychology) from the Department of Psychology at Stellenbosch University. The results gathered from this research will contribute to research papers and her overall PhD dissertation. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a parent of a married girl and will be able to provide the researcher with information on your perception of child marriage and experiences as a parent of married girl(s).

1. What is RESEARCH?

Research is something we do to find **NEW KNOWLEDGE** about the way things (and people) work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about individuals, communities, institutions and organisations and the things that affect their lives, their health, and their wellbeing. We do this to try and make the world a better place! This study will also help with my own training as a doctoral student.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study is designed to explore the lived experiences of child brides as well as the sociocultural factors contributing to the practice of child marriage in the Northern region of Ghana.

3. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

You will be asked to provide your demographic information such as your age, place of residence, educational level, marital status among others. You will then be interviewed on your experiences with child marriage as well as the cultural factors surrounding its practice.

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The interview process will last about 60 to 90 minutes. You will receive compensation for participating in the study.

4. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no anticipated potential risks to participating in this research. All information that you provide will be treated with confidentiality and your identity will be protected. In the course of the interview, should you feel anxious or scared we can stop the interview. If you feel the need to talk to a psychologist about the interview, you can contact Emmanuel Dziwornu on 0276090802 at the Tamale Teaching Hospital.

5. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

There will be no direct benefits of this research to you, however, the information gathered for this research will potentially be able to inform support programmes and policy development and implementation in relation to child marriage in Ghana.

6. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will be given ₵20.00 (equivalent to $4.81) for the time spent. This money will be given to you at the end of the interview. Please note that you will not be entitled to this amount in the case of an incomplete interview.

7. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained about this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Names will be changed to protect the identities of any participant in the study. The information gathered will be kept on a password-protected memory stick which the researcher has sole access to. Aside from the researcher, the data will only be accessible to her supervisors, the research assistant and individuals from NGOs assisting the researcher for transcription, validation of transcribed data and analysis purposes. The data will be kept for 3 years after the completion of the research and then destroyed. Please note that you have the right to review and edit audiotapes during the validation process that will be organised by the researcher. Results from the data collected will be published in academic journals and will not contain any information on your identity.

8. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time. Please note that you will lose the compensation money should you

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withdraw from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

9. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact any of the following persons

Principal investigator: Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo
Department of Psychology
Stellenbosch University
Tel: +233 207 087 380 or +27 628 762 946
Email: 21485194@sun.ac.za or abenanokyewaasarfo@gmail.com

Principal Supervisor: Prof Tony Naidoo
Department of Psychology
Stellenbosch University
Tel: +27 829 942 449
Email: avnaidoo@sun.ac.za

Co-supervisor: Dr Joana Salifu Yendork
Department of Psychology
University of Ghana
Tel: +233 207 700 935 or +233 570 372 437
Email: salifujoana@gmail.com or JYendork@ug.edu.gh

Research Assistant: Hajara Baba
Department of Psychology
University of Ghana
Tel: +233 243 110 900
Hbaba001@st.ug.edu.gh or babahajara38@yahoo.com

10. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

Stellenbosch University https://scholar.sun.ac.za

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT

The information above was described to [*me/the subject/the participant]* by _____in [*Dagbani/English/Twi]* and [*I am/the subject is/the participant is]* in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to [*me/her*]. [*I/the participant/the subject]* was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to *[my/his/her]* satisfaction.

[I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study.] I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Subject/Participant

_____ _____

Signature of Subject/Participant **Date**

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [*name of the subject/participant]* and/or [his/her] representative _____ [*name of the representative]*. *[H*e/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in [*Dagbani/English/Twi*] and [*no translator was used/this conversation was translated into* _____ by _____].

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator **Date**

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Appendix B3: Consent form-Community Elders

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jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Exploration of the lived experiences of the female spouse in child marriages in Ghana: views of community elders.

You are respectfully asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo**, (BA. Psychology and Music, MPhil Clinical Psychology) from the Department of Psychology at Stellenbosch University. The results gathered for this research will contribute to research papers and her overall PhD dissertation. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an elder in the community who has important knowledge on the traditional factors that affect the practice of child marriage in the Northern region of Ghana.

1. What is RESEARCH?

Research is something we do to find **NEW KNOWLEDGE** about the way things (and people) work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about individuals, communities, institutions and organisations and the things that affect their lives, their health, and their wellbeing. We do this to try and make the world a better place! This study will also help with my own training as a doctoral student.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study is designed to explore the lived experiences of child brides as well as the sociocultural factors contributing to the practice of child marriage in the Northern region of Ghana.

3. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
You will be asked to provide your demographic information such as your age, place of residence, educational level, marital status among others. You will then be interviewed about

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your experiences with child marriage as well as the cultural factors surrounding its practice. The interview process will last about 60mins to 90mins. You will receive compensation for participating in the study.

4. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no anticipated potential risks to participating in this research. All information that you provide will be treated with confidentiality and your identity will be protected. In the course of the interview, should you feel anxious or scared we can stop the interview. If you feel the need to talk to a psychologist about the interview, you can contact Emmanuel Dziwornu on 0276090802 at the Tamale Teaching Hospital.

5. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

There will be no direct benefits of this research to you, however, the information gathered for this research will potentially be able to inform support programmes and policy development and implementation in relation to child marriage in Ghana.

6. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will be given ₵20.00 (equivalent to $4.81) for the time spent. This money will be given to you at the end of the interview. Please note that you will not be entitled to this amount in the case of an incomplete interview.

7. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained about this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Names will be changed to protect the identities of any participant in the study. The information gathered will be kept on a password-protected memory stick which the researcher has sole access to. Aside from the researcher, the data will only be accessible to her supervisors, the research assistant and individuals from NGOs assisting the researcher for transcription, validation of transcribed data and analysis purposes. The data will be kept for 3 years after the completion of the research and then destroyed. Please note that you have the right to review and edit audiotapes during the validation process that will be organised by the researcher. Results from the data collected will be published in academic journals and will not contain any information on your identity.

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8. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time. Please note that you will lose the compensation money should you withdraw from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

9. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact any of the following persons

Principal Investigator: Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo
Department of Psychology
Stellenbosch University
Tel: +233 207 087 380 or +27 628 762 946
Email: 21485194@sun.ac.za or abenanokyewaasarfo@gmail.com

Principal Supervisor: Prof Tony Naidoo
Department of Psychology
Stellenbosch University
Tel: +27 829 942 449
Email: avnaidoo@sun.ac.za

Co-supervisor: Dr Joana Salifu Yendork
Department of Psychology
University of Ghana
Tel: +233 207 700 935 or +233 570 372 437
Email: salifujoana@gmail.com or JYendork@ug.edu.gh

Research Assistant: Hajara Baba
Department of Psychology
University of Ghana
Tel: +233 243 110 900
Hbaba001@st.ug.edu.gh or babahajara38@yahoo.com

10. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

Stellenbosch University https://scholar.sun.ac.za

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT

The information above was described to [*me/the subject/the participant]* by _____in [*Dagbani/English/Twi]* and [*I am/the subject is/the participant is]* in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to [*me/her*]. [*I/the participant/the subject]* was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to *[my/his/her]* satisfaction.

[I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study.] I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Subject/Participant

_____ _____

Signature of Subject/Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [*name of the subject/participant]* and/or [his/her] representative _____ [*name of the representative]*. *[H*e/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in [*Dagbani/English/Twi*] and [*no translator was used/this conversation was translated into* _____ by _____].

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator Date

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Appendix B4: Consent form-Staff of organisations

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jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Exploration of the lived experiences of the female spouse in child marriages in Ghana: views of staffs of organisations.

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by **Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo**, (BA. Psychology and Music, MPhil Clinical Psychology) from the Department of Psychology at Stellenbosch University. The results gathered for this research will contribute to research papers and her overall PhD dissertation. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a staff of a non-governmental organisation and will be able to provide important information on your experiences in working with married girls.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study is designed to explore the lived experiences of child brides as well as the sociocultural factors contributing to the practice of child marriage in the Northern region of Ghana.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be one of nine staffs of governmental and non-governmental organisations who will be included in a focused group discussion to discuss your experiences in working with married girls which will enable me to gain information on issues that pertain to the practice of child marriages. In addition, you will be asked to discuss your organisations' policies on child marriage and their usefulness regarding the practice of child marriage to the communities you work in. Your views on the possible physical and psychological impact of child marriage on the child brides will also be solicited and discussed. The focused group discussion will last about 60mins to 90mins. You will receive compensation for participating in the study.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no anticipated potential risks to participating in this research. All information that you provide will be treated with confidentiality and your identity will be protected. In the

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course of the interview, should you feel anxious or scared we can stop the interview. If you feel the need to talk to a psychologist about the interview, you can contact Emmanuel Dziwornu on 0276090802 at the Tamale Teaching Hospital.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

There will be no direct benefits of this research to you, however, the information gathered for this research will potentially be able to inform support programmes and policy development and implementation in relation to child marriage in Ghana.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will be given ₵20.00 (equivalent to $4.81) for the time spent. This money will be given to you at the end of the interview. Please note that you will not be entitled to this amount in the case of an incomplete interview.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained about this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Names will be changed to protect the identities of any participant in the study. The information gathered will be kept on a password-protected memory stick which the researcher has sole access to. Aside from the researcher, the data will only be accessible to her supervisors, the research assistant and individuals from NGOs assisting the researcher for transcription, validation of transcribed data and analysis purposes. The data will be kept for 3 years after the completion of the research and then destroyed. Please note that you have the right to review and edit audiotapes during the validation process that will be organised by the researcher. Results from the data collected will be published in academic journals and will not contain any information on your identity.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time. Please note that you will lose the compensation money should you withdraw from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

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8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact any of the following persons

Principal investigator: Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo
Department of Psychology
Stellenbosch University
Tel: +233 207 087 380 or +27 628 762 946
Email: 21485194@sun.ac.za or abenanokyewaasarfo@gmail.com

Principal Supervisor: Prof Tony Naidoo
Department of Psychology
Stellenbosch University
Tel: +27 829 942 449
Email: avnaidoo@sun.ac.za

Co-supervisor: Dr Joana Salifu Yendork
Department of Psychology
University of Ghana
Tel: +233 207 700 935 or +233 570 372 437
Email: salifujoana@gmail.com or JYendork@ug.edu.gh

Research Assistant: Hajara Baba
Department of Psychology
University of Ghana
Tel: +233 243 110 900
Hbaba001@st.ug.edu.gh or babahajara38@yahoo.com

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT

The information above was described to [*me/the subject/the participant]* by _____in [*Dagbani/English/Twi]* and [*I am/the subject is/the participant is]* in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to [*me/her*]. [*I/the participant/the subject]* was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to *[my/his/her]* satisfaction.

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[I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study.] I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Subject/Participant

_____ _____

Signature of Subject/Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [*name of the subject/participant]* and/or [his/her] representative _____ [*name of the representative]*. *[H*e/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in [*Dagbani/English/Twi*] and [*no translator was used/this conversation was translated into* _____ by _____].

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator Date

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Appendix C: Ethical Approval Letter

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UNIVERSITY

APPROVAL NOTICE
New Application

03 August 2017

Project number: SU-HSD-004745

Project title: Exploration of lived experiences of child brides in Ghana

Dear Elizabeth Sarfo

Your response to modifications received on 26 July 2017 was reviewed by the REC: Humanities and has been approved.

Ethics approval period: 03 August 2017 – 02 August 2018

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: Humanities, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (SU-HSD-004745) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

FOR CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary)

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at cgraham@sun.ac.za.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.
The Research Ethics Committee: Humanities complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2nd Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

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Investigator Responsibilities
Protection of Human Research Participants

Some of the general responsibilities investigators have when conducting research involving human participants are listed below:

1.Conducting the Research. You are responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC approved research protocol. You are also responsible for the actions of all your co-investigators and research staff involved with this research. You must also ensure that the research is conducted within the standards of your field of research.

2.Participant Enrolment. You may not recruit or enrol participants prior to the REC approval date or after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials for any form of media must be approved by the REC prior to their use.

3.Informed Consent. You are responsible for obtaining and documenting effective informed consent using **only** the REC approved consent documents/process, and for ensuring that no human participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their informed consent. Please give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents. Keep the originals in your secured research files for at least five (5) years.

4.Continuing Review. The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is **no grace period.** Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, **it is your responsibility to submit the progress report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur.** If REC approval of your research lapses, you must stop new participant enrolment, and contact the REC office immediately.

5.Amendments and Changes. If you wish to amend or change any aspect of your research (such as research design, interventions or procedures, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material), you must submit the amendment to the REC for review using the current Amendment Form. You **may not initiate** any amendments or changes to your research without first obtaining written REC review and approval. The **only exception** is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.

6.Adverse or Unanticipated Events. Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to Malene Fouche within **five (5) days** of discovery of the incident. You must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the RECs requirements for protecting human research participants. The only exception to this policy is that the death of a research participant must be reported in accordance with the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee Standard Operating Procedures. All reportable events should be submitted to the REC using the Serious Adverse Event Report Form.

7.Research Record Keeping. You must keep the following research related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence from the REC

8.Provision of Counselling or emergency support. When a dedicated counsellor or psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised a research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.

9.Final reports. When you have completed (no further participant enrolment, interactions or interventions) or stopped work on your research, you must submit a Final Report to the REC.

10.On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits. If you are notified that your research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, you must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.
The Research Ethics Committee: Humanities complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2nd Ed.) 2015. *Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.*

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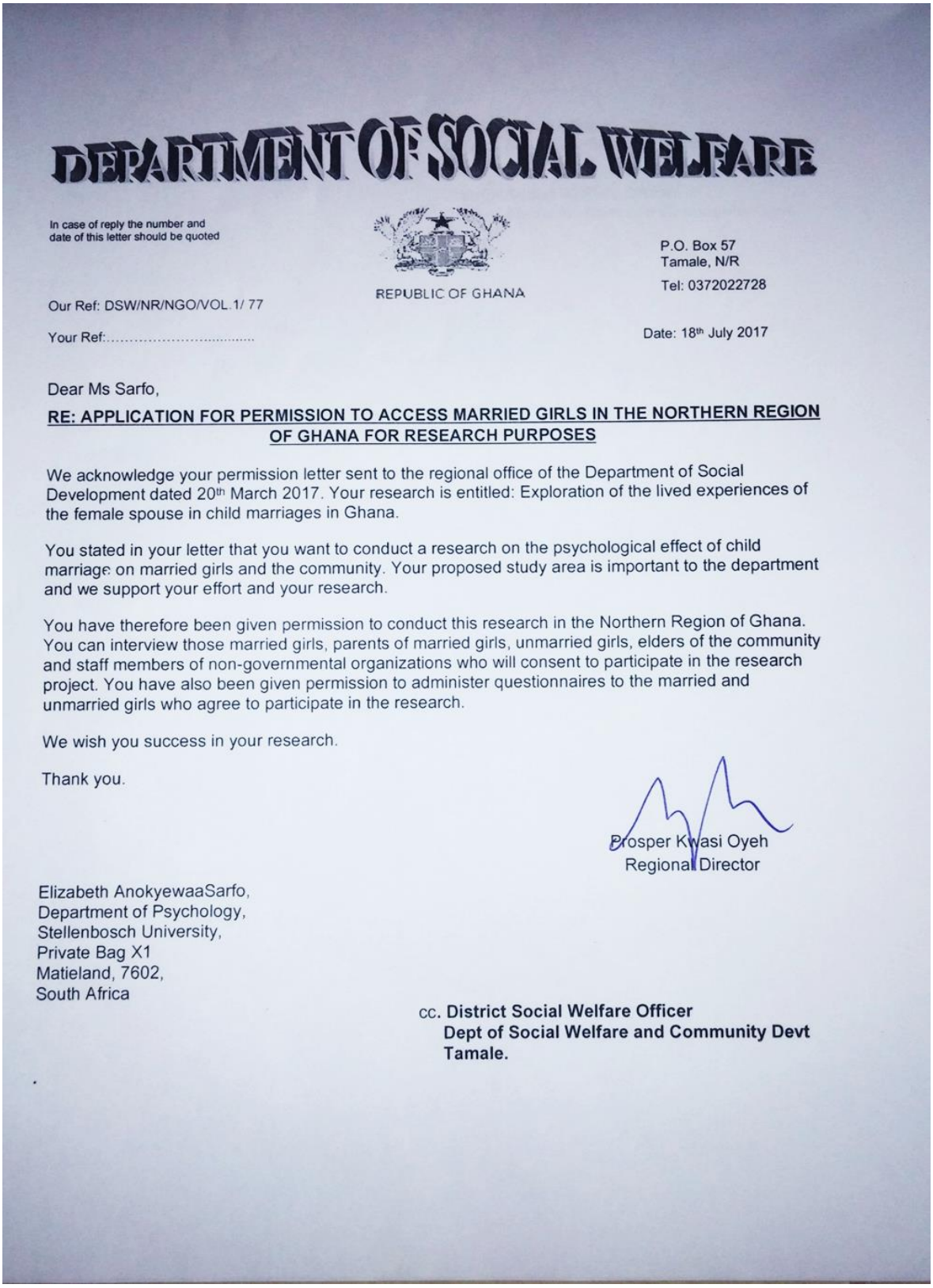
Appendix D: Other letters

Appendix D1: Permission letter from the regional Department of Social Welfare



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE

In case of reply the number and date of this letter should be quoted

REPUBLIC OF GHANA

P.O. Box 57
Tamale, N/R
Tel: 0372022728

Our Ref: DSW/NR/NGO/VOL.1/ 77

Your Ref:.....

Date: 18th July 2017

Dear Ms Sarfo,

RE: APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO ACCESS MARRIED GIRLS IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF GHANA FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES

We acknowledge your permission letter sent to the regional office of the Department of Social Development dated 20th March 2017. Your research is entitled: Exploration of the lived experiences of the female spouse in child marriages in Ghana.

You stated in your letter that you want to conduct a research on the psychological effect of child marriage on married girls and the community. Your proposed study area is important to the department and we support your effort and your research.

You have therefore been given permission to conduct this research in the Northern Region of Ghana. You can interview those married girls, parents of married girls, unmarried girls, elders of the community and staff members of non-governmental organizations who will consent to participate in the research project. You have also been given permission to administer questionnaires to the married and unmarried girls who agree to participate in the research.

We wish you success in your research.

Thank you.

Prosper Kwasi Oyeh
Regional Director

Elizabeth AnokyewaaSarfo,
Department of Psychology,
Stellenbosch University,
Private Bag X1
Matieland, 7602,
South Africa

cc. **District Social Welfare Officer**
Dept of Social Welfare and Community Devt
Tamale.

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Appendix D2: Letter from a psychologist for the provision of psychological services

In case of reply the number and date of this letter should be quoted

My Ref No: TTH/SAA01
Your Ref. No:

Tamale Teaching Hospital
P.O. Box 16
Tamale
Office No: 0372022454/8

20th April, 2017

Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo
Department of Psychology
Private Mail Bag X1
Matieland, 7602
South Africa

Dear Miss Sarfo,

PROVIDING PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES TO RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Further to our discussions on the above matter, I will be happy to provide psychological services to any of your research participants who may require it.

Your research on the lived experiences of child brides in the Northern Region of Ghana is intriguing and would likely shed light on the psychological implications of this practice, if any. I would be glad to work with you and any girls that are identified as needing psychological support during your fieldwork.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me if you require any further assistance.

I wish you well in your research endeavours.

Yours faithfully,

Emmanuel Dziwornu
(Clinical Psychologist)
0276090802

EMMANUEL DZIWORNU
PRIN. CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST
TAMALE TEACHING HOSP.

Stellenbosch University https://scholar.sun.ac.za

Appendix D3: Permission letter from Norssac

P. O. Box TL 2425, Tamale
Tel: +233 (0) 372 027 029/
050 1303003
e-mail: info@norsaac.org
norsaac@yahoo.com

10th March, 2017

Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo
PHD Candidate
Department of Psychology
Stellenbosch University – South Africa

Dear Madam,

PEMISSION GRANTED: ACCESS TO NORSAAC FOR RESEARCH ON PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF CHILD MARRIAGE

We are delighted at your interest to understudy a grey area in the Ghanaian and Northern Society: psychological impact of child marriage. As an empowerment for change organization that place girls, women and young people at the center of our work, a research of this nature will aid the understanding of the psychology of child marriage from the victims and those who uphold the practice.

Following the series of email exchanged between NORSAAC and yourself, we are convinced you shall follow due processes and respect the confidentially and anonymity of respondents. We are equality confidence that due acknowledgement shall be given the organization for the support that will be given.

Our staffs shall be given room for you to engage them in the process of identifying interviewees, interviewers, translators including gathering their experience on child marriage.

We look forward to successful research process with you. Ensure timely communications on processes and support that you might require as your research journey unveils.

We can be reached at; info@norsaac.org for any further discussions.
Thank you

Yours faithfully

Alhassan Mohammed Awal
(Executive Director)

Location: Shishegu Residential Area, Nyankpala Road. Sagnerigu District Assembly Junction.
Website: www.norsaac.org Facebook Page: norsaac